**Thurrock**

**Local Education Authority**

**Inspection Report**

**Date of Inspection: January 2005**

**Reporting Inspector: Garry Jones HMI**

# Contents

## Basic information

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| Name of LEA: | Thurrock Local Education Authority |
| LEA number: | 883 |
| Address of LEA: | Civic Offices<br>New Road<br>Grays<br>RM17 6SL |
| Reporting Inspector: | Garry Jones HMI |
| Date of Inspection: | January 2005 |

# Summary

## Introduction

Thurrock is a diverse borough located on the river Thames to the east of London. The borough is a major part of the Thames Gateway area a corridor identified by the government as an area for extensive urban development. This is producing a significant rise in the population and increasingly diverse ethnicity. Levels of unemployment are slightly below the national average but there is considerable under-employment with part time working becoming common place. There are pockets of intense deprivation within the borough with high levels of crime, anti social behaviour and poor health.

Attainment in the local education authority (LEA) varies between phases, with pupils making greater progress in secondary schools than primary schools. On entry to school, attainment is well below the national average. It is well below the national average and below that of similar LEAs[1] at the end of Key Stage 2. It rises in Key Stage 3 and although below the national average in English, is in line for mathematics. At Key Stage 4 the attainment of pupils was in line with national averages and above that of statistical neighbours in 2003. There was, however, a significant decline in the percentage of pupils gaining 5+A*-C grades at GCSE in 2004. Whilst rates of improvement vary for each key stage, they are at least in line with the national rate and often above, particularly in the secondary sector.

Since the previous inspection the council has embarked on a significant change to the organisation of the education and children's social services departments. After extensive consultation the council decided to establish a children, education and families directorate and the former director of education was appointed corporate director in spring 2004. Consultation on the organisation of the new directorate is continuing and plans are being formulated to bring the new service into full operation in April 2005. In April 2005 the council enters into a strategic services partnership with a private company for the delivery of its central and customer services. In the June 2004 election, the conservative party took control of the council from the labour party.

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[1] Thurrock LEA's statistical neighbours are Barnsley, Doncaster, Halton, Medway, North East Lincolnshire, North Lincolnshire, Redcar and Cleveland, Rotherham, Tameside and Wakefield.

**Main findings**

**Summary:** Thurrock LEA has made satisfactory progress since the previous inspection and it is now effective. The strong vision and leadership of senior officers have been crucial to this process. Corporate planning has improved and resources are now clearly targeted to priorities. A strong partnership has been established with schools and work with other partners is increasingly effective. Raising attainment in secondary schools has been a particular achievement, but attainment in primary schools, although improving, remains too low. There is a well-defined school improvement strategy that has reduced the number of school causing serious concern. A good strategy for addressing special educational needs has been implemented effectively and provision is highly satisfactory. However, progress in implementing the recently published strategy for social inclusion has been inconsistent and in some areas too slow. Senior officers recognise the weaknesses in the service and are planning effectively to eradicate them. The contribution of newly-elected members is developing and they are strongly committed to improving provision by developing a new children, education and families directorate. However, they are not yet promoting their vision for education sufficiently or challenging performance adequately. The LEA has satisfactory capacity to continue to improve, though there are considerable challenges ahead, not least in the limited size of the senior team at a time of significant change.

| Areas of strength | Areas of weakness/for development |
|---|---|
| **Corporate leadership of education** | |
| • The vision and leadership of senior officers <br> • Effective working partnerships with schools <br> • Corporate planning <br> • Early years provision | • The leadership of elected members and their effectiveness in scrutiny <br> • Service planning and consistency of team plans <br> • Budget surpluses in primary schools <br> • 14-19 strategy |
| **Strategy for education and its implementation** | |
| • Clear school improvement strategy <br> • Definition of monitoring, challenge and intervention <br> • Intervention in schools causing concern | • Asset management planning <br> • Differentiation in monitoring and support to schools <br> • Consistency of challenge to schools to improve |
| **Support to improve education in schools** | |
| • Support for Key Stage 3 <br> • Support for governors <br> • Financial services | • Property services <br> • Support for ICT in the curriculum |
| **Support for special educational needs** | |
| • Strategy for special educational needs <br> • Financial planning and monitoring | |
| **Support for social inclusion** | |
| • Support for child protection | • Provision for pupils educated other than at school <br> • Support for behaviour <br> • Support for looked after children |

## Recommendations

### Key recommendations

**Management capacity**: Ensure that the management structure for the children, education and families directorate has a sufficient number of senior officers to effectively deliver its objectives.

**Leadership of elected members**

- Ensure that the commitment of elected members to current education policies and to the children, education and families' directorate is more effectively communicated to stakeholders.

- Further support the development of elected members to ensure that they all have the necessary skills and knowledge to monitor the performance of the directorate effectively and to provide appropriate challenge.

### Other recommendations

#### Corporate leadership of education

**Planning:** Review the process of service planning to improve the consistency of team plans.

**Targeting of resources:** Ensure that all schools with budget surpluses of over 5% are challenged consistently and can demonstrate that resources are being used for the benefit of pupils.

**14-19 education:** Ensure that the strategy for 14-19 education is pursued with vigour to raise the aspirations of young people and to increase post-16 participation in education and training.

#### Strategy for education and its implementation

**Monitoring, challenge and Intervention:**  Improve differentiation in the monitoring of schools and place greater emphasis on self evaluation and on rigorous and consistent challenge.

Ensure that notes of visit are of consistent quality.

**Asset Management Planning:** Work with schools to establish priorities for building maintenance work and improve their understanding of asset management planning.

#### Support to improve education in schools

**Support for ICT:** Ensure that all key stakeholders are involved in producing an ICT strategy that includes systems for regular monitoring and evaluation; and that there is clear strategic leadership of support for ICT.

**Services to support school management:** Put in place systematic quality assurance systems and report regularly on performance to purchasers, chief officers and elected members; and provide guidance to schools on best practice in procurement.

**Services to support school improvement:** Ensure that the school improvement officer team has the appropriate skills to fulfil the breadth of its role.

#### Support for social inclusion

**Provision for EOTAS:**  Improve the co-ordination and management of educational provision for pupils educated other than at school.

**Support for behaviour:** Resolve management and staffing issues to improve the implementation of the behaviour support policies; and gain schools' support for the behaviour support service and its strategy.

**Support for looked after children:** Put in place clear targets with milestones for attendance and exclusions of looked after children, monitor progress and provide regular reports to elected members.

## Section 1: Corporate leadership of education

### Summary table of judgements
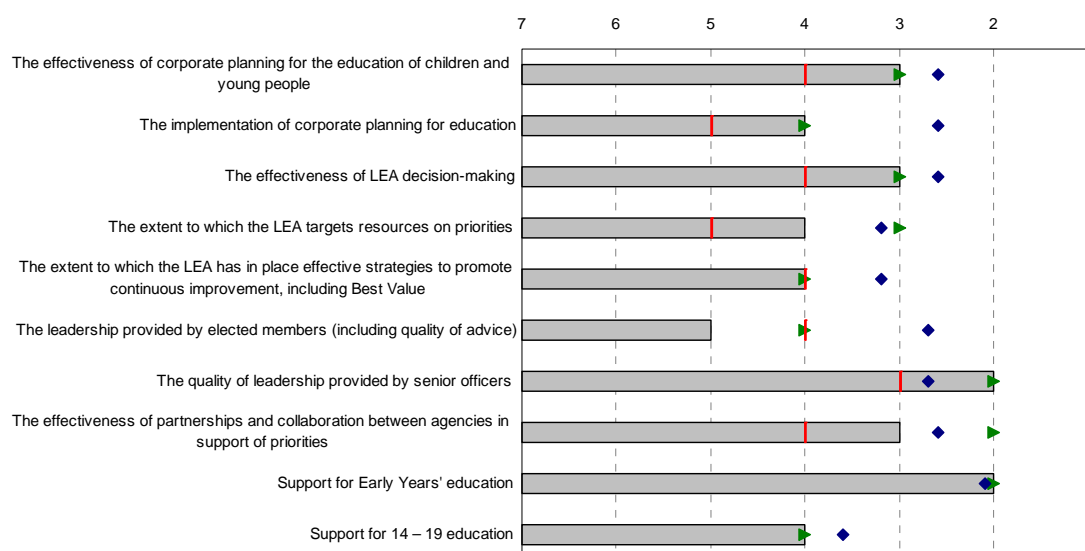
| | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| The effectiveness of corporate planning for the education of children and young people | | | | | | | |
| The implementation of corporate planning for education | | | | | | | |
| The effectiveness of LEA decision-making | | | | | | | |
| The extent to which the LEA targets resources on priorities | | | | | | | |
| The extent to which the LEA has in place effective strategies to promote continuous improvement, including Best Value | | | | | | | |
| The leadership provided by elected members (including quality of advice) | | | | | | | |
| The quality of leadership provided by senior officers | | | | | | | |
| The effectiveness of partnerships and collaboration between agencies in support of priorities | | | | | | | |
| Support for Early Years' education | | | | | | | |
| Support for 14 – 19 education | | | | | | | |

The bar represents the grade awarded to the LEA, the triangle represents the LEA's self-evaluation grade, the vertical line represents the LEA's previous grade and the diamond represents the average grade of all LEAs inspected in the last year.  1 = Very Good, 2 = Good, 3 = Highly Satisfactory, 4 = Satisfactory, 5 = Unsatisfactory, 6 = Poor, 7 = Very Poor.

### Corporate planning for education and its implementation

1.      The key function of corporate planning was satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection, but the implementation of corporate plans was unsatisfactory. Strategic planning has improved and is now highly satisfactory.  There is a clear corporate plan with well defined priorities for education that link closely to those in the community strategy. This, and the ten-year strategy for education, provides a clear vision for future developments. They provide a focus for the work of the authority and are beginning to ensure improvements in educational provision.  The implementation of plans has improved and is now satisfactory; however, monitoring by members lacks rigour.

2.      Education is a high priority for the council.  It contributes to each of the three key council priorities: to raise aspirations; promote regeneration; and develop a more inclusive society.  There are clear aims to raise attainment, to narrow the gaps in school's performance, to develop greater support for the most vulnerable groups and to make schools a focal point for community services. Some of the targets, for example for all schools to be in the upper quartile for attainment by 2010, are extremely challenging.  There is a medium term financial strategy in place which confirms the high priority of education and effectively targets resources to support these developments.

3.      There are clear systems to co-ordinate planning within the council and these are to be reinforced in the current corporate restructuring.  The close working

relationships within the corporate management team support the co-ordination of planning and its implementation.  Priorities are translated into realistic activities in the Education Development Plan (EDP), other statutory plans and service plans.  However, planning below the level of the EDP is too bureaucratic and the quality of team plans is inconsistent.  Decision making processes were not subject to fieldwork during the inspection but evidence presented confirms that decision making is highly satisfactory.

4.      The incorporation of the department into an integrated children, education and families directorate has begun. Initial consultations on principles and objectives have been positive.  At present there is no organisational structure for the new directorate but the director is now planning the new structure carefully.  However, the small senior team in education and its current heavy work load limits the capacity of senior officers to take on additional responsibilities for strategic management.

5.      The capacity of the directorate to continue to improve is satisfactory, but the role of members in promoting their vision and challenging performance is underdeveloped.  This is a significant weakness.

*Recommendations*

> - Ensure that the management structure for the children, education and families directorate has a sufficient number of senior officers to effectively deliver its objectives.
>
> - Review the process of service planning to improve the consistency of team plans.

## Targeting of resources

6.      This function has improved and is now satisfactory.  A medium term financial strategy has been put in place, confirming education as a top corporate priority.  Accordingly, the education budget for 2004-2005 has been set at 2.3% above the formula spending share (FSS).  Within this total, higher priority has been given to funding schools than to central LEA services in order to promote self management by schools.  Thurrock schools receive some 7% more funding than their counterparts in similar authorities.   In contrast, Thurrock's spending on strategic management is only half the national average.  This limits capacity so that, for example, officer support to schools bidding for external grants is not provided consistently.  Whenever growth money is available, it is used effectively to fund the LEA's priorities, for example, an additional £800,000 was used mainly to establish a multi-disciplinary project in the Tilbury area.  The LEA has consulted widely on its funding formula and has taken good account of stakeholders' views, especially through its highly effective schools forum.  The education budget is well controlled and was balanced at the end of 2003-2004.

7.      Several, mainly secondary, schools have budget deficits of more than 2.5%. Recovery plans have been agreed and are being monitored robustly.  In contrast, more than half of all primary schools have budget surpluses of over 5%.  Although overall surpluses have been reduced from £6m to £3.8m over the last three years, the LEA has been inconsistent in the level of challenge it has applied to certain schools.  Its knowledge of why these budgets remain unspent is incomplete.

*Recommendation*

- Ensure that all schools with budget surpluses of over 5% are challenged consistently and can demonstrate that resources are being used for the benefit of pupils.

## Strategies to promote continuous improvement, including Best Value

8.      The LEA remains satisfactory in this area.  A council-wide performance management system has been introduced and is starting to become embedded within the education directorate.  Service and team plans are in place, although the quality of team plans is variable.  Targets are generally clear.  Members and chief officers receive appropriately detailed progress reports which allow action to be taken on underperformance.  Some 95% of education employees now receive regular appraisals, although a recent audit has indicated that some personal development plans are not yet of an acceptable quality.

9.      Issues are well selected for Best Value review and improvement has been achieved as a result.  For example, the recent wide ranging '*Children in School*' review contributed to major changes in the way traded services are offered to schools.  The LEA has used best value principles to inform its funding decisions in areas such as provision of human resources advice and curriculum support to schools.

10.     Although the LEA's self-evaluation for this inspection was broadly accurate, the supporting evidence was not always clear, precise or relevant.

## Leadership by elected members and advice given to them

11.     Leadership by elected members is unsatisfactory.  Following the election in June 2004, the new leadership of the council sensibly adopted the existing priorities, policies and plans for education in Thurrock.  This wisely ensured continuity and stability in the work of the directorate.  Members express genuine enthusiasm for and commitment to the development of the children, education and families directorate and to improving educational provision within the borough.  However, this has not yet been communicated to all head teachers and other stakeholders with sufficient rigour leading to some uncertainty on the future direction.

12.     There are clear structures in place for monitoring the work of the directorate and for the scrutiny of policies.  Good quality advice and detailed information are provided to members to inform their decisions.  The portfolio holder meets regularly

with the corporate director to receive briefings and reports. However, the inexperience of some leading members and their lack of detailed knowledge of the operation of the directorate are currently limiting their effectiveness in monitoring its work. This results in insufficiently rigorous challenge. The work of the scrutiny committee has yet to provide sufficiently robust challenge, especially on standards of attainment in the borough. In addition some members, on occasions, are involving themselves inappropriately in operational issues. There is, however, a sound programme of training and support in place to further develop the expertise of elected members.

*Recommendations*

- Ensure that the commitment of elected members to current education policies and to the children, education and families directorate is more effectively communicated to stakeholders.

- Further support the development of elected members to ensure that they all have the necessary skills and knowledge to monitor the performance of the directorate effectively and to provide appropriate challenge.

## Leadership by senior officers

13.     Leadership by senior officers has improved and is now good. A small senior leadership team, ably led by the corporate director, has succeeded in gaining the confidence of head teachers. A clear and shared vision for improving educational provision has been developed, it is implemented enthusiastically and emphasises the promotion of social inclusion. This has correctly given priority to the development of self-managing schools.

14.     The senior leadership team makes effective use of performance and management data to monitor the performance of schools and set ambitious targets for improvement. When necessary, the director has been willing to recommend decisive action to address weaknesses, for example, in the closure or amalgamation of underperforming schools. A similar robust approach has been taken in challenging council services to schools to ensure they improve, for example, in the support for behaviour management provided to schools. The leadership team are innovative and think creatively to make the most effective use of the resources available to them, for example, in planning to award contracts to schools for the delivery of some support services.

15.     There are effective strategies for communication and consultation with schools through a termly director's briefing and regular meetings with head teachers and governors. The director has successfully established close working relationships with head teachers and draws extensively on their expertise to review services and to strengthen provision. Effective use is also made of external consultancy to support the central team when required.

**Strategic partnerships**

16.      Support for partnership work and collaboration between agencies is highly satisfactory.  There is an established history and culture of partnership working in Thurrock and the existing arrangements successfully promote educational priorities. However, strategic direction and internal links are not always fully understood by stakeholders.  The Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership (EYDCP), for example, is not sufficiently pivotal to the implementation of the early years strategy and not all partners are confident about its current process of evaluation.  There is nevertheless a renewed drive for clear and efficient partnership working at a strategic level and this has begun with the restructuring of the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership (CYPSP).  The focus on specific age groups within the CYPSP now more easily targets need and achievable outcomes.

17.      The improving partnership framework is further exemplified in the community strategy which is thorough, cross-cutting and aspirational.  It is also evident in the Thurrock learning partnership that is playing an effective role in developing strategies to meet Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets.  A good range of local partnership arrangements exist and have led to beneficial outcomes for children and young people, ranging from the innovative community mothers' project and trade school, to the broader involvement of agencies in relation to the children's centre.

**Support for Early Years**

18.      Support for early years is good and is integral to corporate strategic planning in Thurrock.  The Early Years and Childcare Development Plan has a clear focus on positive outcomes for young children and has strong links to the EDP and the Thurrock Preventative Strategy.  The focus on raising educational aspiration, expectation and achievement is well understood by stakeholders, although the strategic direction has not fully embraced the non-maintained sector.

19.      Sure Start and LEA targets for increasing and maintaining the quantity, range and quality of early years' provision have been met.  There is universal nursery education provision for three and four-year-olds, although not all parents have an option of five sessions per week because of difficulties involving capacity and choice.

20.      There are good examples of specific links and partnership work between schools and other early years' providers, particularly in areas of disadvantage.  The development of children's centres, for example, involves schools and private providers while also specifically encompassing the Primary Care Trust, faith and community groups and social services.  The LEA offers comprehensive opportunities for training and support across all the sectors.  Support for special educational needs is particularly good and very well received.  The use of the Foundation Stage Profile is also well advanced and increasingly informs targeted support and training.

**Support for 14-19 education**

21.     The support for 14-19 education is satisfactory.  There is an emerging vision for 14-19 education in the borough which has been developed after an extensive, if prolonged, programme of consultation with all stakeholders, including young people. There are clear links to the priorities within the community strategy, corporate plan and the EDP.  It also helpfully links to the annual plan of the Essex local Learning and Skills Council (LLSC).  A high level steering group is now working effectively to co-ordinate 14-19 developments across the LLSC area, supported by a newly appointed 14-19 co-ordinator.  This and the recent appointment of a further 14-19 co-ordinator for Thurrock reflect the high priority being given to the development of this sector.

22.     The post-16 participation rate remains low but is improving slowly and is in line with that in adjacent areas of Essex.  The LEA is working closely with partners, through the Thurrock learning partnership, to widen the opportunities for training within the borough, but progress has been slow.  However, a number of imaginative initiatives, including a local trade school, are beginning to impact on the aspirations of young people.

23.     Standards at the end of Key Stage 4 have been improving at a faster rate than nationally; until the current year.  Initiatives to improve the curriculum through the increased flexibility programme and extensive collaboration between local schools and the college have resulted in fewer young people than nationally leaving school without a recognised qualification.  This broadening of the curriculum, which now incorporates work related learning, is being further developed with additional funding from the LLSC, reflecting the improving partnerships in this phase of education.

*Recommendation*

> *   Ensure that the strategy for 14-19 education is pursued with vigour to raise the aspirations of young people and to increase post-16 participation in education and training.

## Section 2: Strategy for education and its implementation

### Summary table of judgements
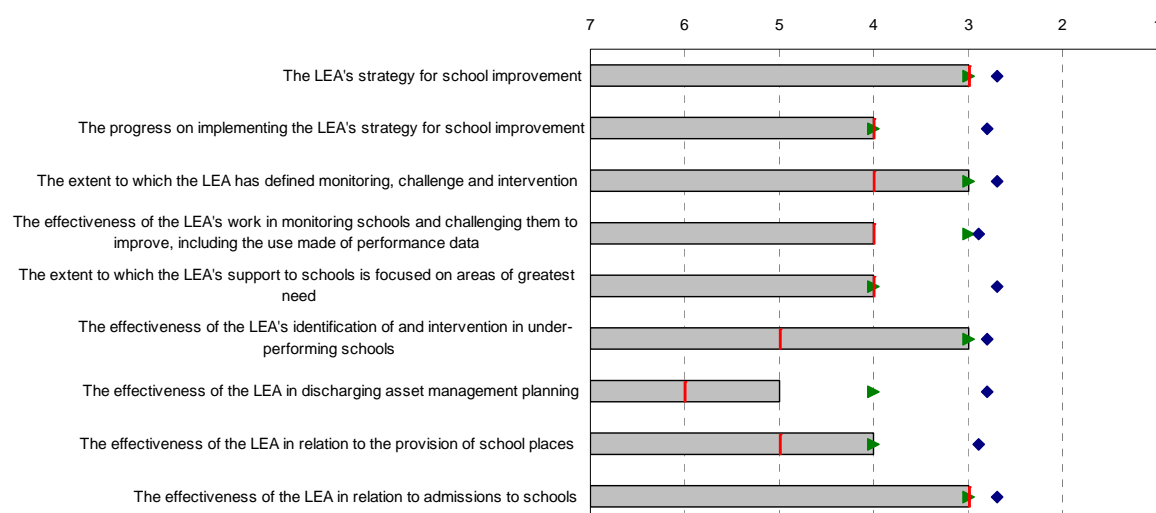
| | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

The LEA's strategy for school improvement

The progress on implementing the LEA's strategy for school improvement

The extent to which the LEA has defined monitoring, challenge and intervention

The effectiveness of the LEA's work in monitoring schools and challenging them to improve, including the use made of performance data

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

The effectiveness of the LEA's identification of and intervention in under-performing schools

The effectiveness of the LEA in discharging asset management planning

The effectiveness of the LEA in relation to the provision of school places

The effectiveness of the LEA in relation to admissions to schools

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### The strategy for school improvement and its implementation

24.     The strategy for education continues to be highly satisfactory and is managed through strong leadership by well informed senior officers.  Its implementation is satisfactory.  Plans for school improvement, including the revised EDP, set out priorities clearly and have been drawn up in effective consultation with schools.  Recent revisions have strengthened the success criteria providing a much stronger emphasis on outcomes.  There are sound mechanisms to monitor progress and review actions.  Plans are well integrated with those at a corporate level, such as 'Performance Counts' and also with the more detailed education plans, such as those for the National Primary Strategy.  Priorities within plans are reviewed regularly with schools and the Schools Forum has developed into an important means of targeting resources to priorities.  Although there is scope for further development, there are already some effective links with social inclusion, such as the work of the psychology service in relation to pupils with special educational needs and the Excellence Cluster's plans for the Behaviour Improvement Partnership.  Progress is reported regularly to elected members, but this opportunity for real challenge is not yet used effectively.

25.     Senior managers successfully exercise educational leadership whilst encouraging school autonomy.  Progress since the time of the previous inspection has benefited from officers' strong commitment to working more closely with schools to raise achievement.  This has resulted in more positive engagement of schools and

greatly increased confidence in the LEA's strategy for improvement, particularly at secondary level.

26.      Strategies set a clear direction but actually bringing about major improvement in educational standards continues to be a difficult task.   In most respects the LEA is addressing school improvement effectively, supported by increasingly accurate and effective data which enables underachievement to be identified and targeted.    There are also sound improvement plans to close the attainment gap between schools, but their implementation has not yet consistently raised standards.    The LEA's targets are ambitious and significantly exceed aggregated school targets, especially at primary level, as the LEA has chosen not to renegotiate its targets with the Department for Education and Skills (DfES).

27.      Planning for support and intervention in schools is sound; the LEA's own detailed code of practice provides appropriate advice on respective roles and is consistent with national policy.    Support to schools in intervention categories is highly satisfactory, being both well targeted and differentiated.    The number of schools in formal categories has fallen, and the LEA gives both effective support to individual schools and also implements organisational change where that has the potential for improvement.    However, in the most successful schools, routine monitoring is insufficiently differentiated.    The pivotal role of the school improvement officer (SIO) has become too broad, making consistently effective challenge difficult.

**The extent to which the LEA has defined monitoring, challenge and intervention**

28.      This area of work has improved and is now highly satisfactory.   The LEA's procedures are clearly defined in its code of practice which is a valuable, if lengthy, handbook that also defines the statutory and regulatory basis of the relationship between the LEA and schools.   Schools were fully consulted both in its development and recent revision.

29.      The LEA has recently improved the system of triggers for intervention including a more extensive range of performance indicators.   The new system was used for the first time with schools this academic year and provides a strong basis for the LEA's monitoring.   Consultation on these issues has been very thorough and most schools understand fully both the principles and processes behind the LEA's role in monitoring, challenge and intervention.   However, despite work to promote school autonomy, there is evidence that some schools have not yet accepted fully the principle of sharp differentiation of provision according to need.

**Effectiveness of the LEA's monitoring, challenge and intervention in schools and the targeting of support**

30.      The LEA's work in monitoring schools and challenging them to improve remains satisfactory.    There is a well-planned programme of monitoring.    The improving quality of data provides a good basis for monitoring progress, both at

school and individual pupil level.  This information is shared electronically with all schools; with plans to further refine the grouping of data in order to make it more useful to schools and officers.  The LEA is increasingly effective in identifying schools in need of support and challenge, as evidenced by the reduction in schools in formal categories of intervention.  Its capacity to intervene effectively has been greatly strengthened by a much improved relationship with schools.  Headteachers now understand the LEA's role far more clearly and have become increasingly supportive of its style and commitment to support and champion change.

31.      The five school improvement officers (SIOs) are the main point of contact with schools and make three visits to all schools each year.   Visits are well prepared and based on performance data and other management information.  Target setting is based on shared data and a sound knowledge by SIOs of individual schools.  Although visits are partly tailored to the individual needs of schools the relatively generous allocation of time to all schools lacks sufficient differentiation for the most successful schools.  There is a satisfactory focus on areas of greatest need that can be further improved by sharper differentiation.  In addition, notes of visit indicate a tendency to use some termly visits, in part, for a stocktaking review rather than an opportunity to concentrate on improvement strategies through professional challenge.  There is inconsistent rigour in the challenge provided by the SIOs.  The previous inspection's recommendation to ensure that governors receive copies of visit notes has been met; however, the quality of notes of visit is inconsistent.

### Recommendations

- Improve the differentiation of monitoring and place greater emphasis on self evaluation and rigorous and consistent challenge.

- Ensure that notes of visit are of consistent quality.

## Effectiveness of the LEA's identification of, and intervention in, underperforming schools

32.      The effectiveness of the LEA in identifying and intervening in underperforming schools has improved and is now highly satisfactory.  At the time of the inspection there were no schools in special measures and only one with serious weaknesses; an improvement partly achieved through school restructuring, including the amalgamation of primary schools and the creation of a fresh start secondary school.  The school effectiveness and pupil services (SEPS) review process provides a robust framework for systematic monitoring of school performance.  It accurately identifies schools causing concern at an early stage and ensures that resources are deployed to provide them with both monitoring and support.   Weaknesses in schools are tackled promptly and extra powers are used if required.  Reporting to governing bodies has improved since the time of the previous inspection and progress is now routinely shared with them.  A variety of strategies are used to support schools, including the use of successful schools to support weaker schools and, most recently, the development of the Excellence Cluster programme.  The LEA

now has the means of knowing the performance of its schools better and is well positioned to detect underachievement.

## Asset management planning

33.     This area was poor at the time of the previous inspection.    Although performance has improved the function is unsatisfactory.    The key factor in improvement has been a recent increase in staffing.  However, the full benefit will not be felt until April 2005 when the final appointee takes up post.  Considerable efforts have also been made to improve the timeliness and quality of information, especially school condition data, which was rated unsatisfactory by the DfES in 2004. This work is still underway.

34.     Although progress has been made, a number of weaknesses remain. Neither the LEA nor the schools have sufficient resources to meet all needs identified in the condition survey.  The cost of work in the top two priority categories has been estimated at some £20m but only £3.7m is available from central and devolved funds.  Detailed priorities have not yet been set.

35.     Consultation with schools about asset management planning priorities has not been systematic.  The LEA has recently developed a new system for consulting schools, which sensibly involves the Schools Forum, but this has not yet been implemented.  Insufficient work has been done with some schools to develop their understanding of the asset management process and to encourage them to contribute actively to decision making.  These schools have a poor understanding of how asset management planning works and its relationship with their own priorities. The LEA has incomplete knowledge of how schools use their devolved formula capital resources.  This is unlikely to improve until the additional staff take up post and begin to build relationships with schools.

*Recommendation*

- Work with schools to establish priorities for building maintenance work and improve their understanding of asset management planning.

## Providing school places

36.     The LEA has improved its performance on school place planning and it is now satisfactory.  The previous, inaccurate system of forecasting has been replaced by an approach that takes better account of planning information, health data and other local factors. However, this is too recent for its accuracy to have been demonstrated.

37.     Surplus places have been removed from a number of primary schools and the overall percentage of unfilled places, at 12%, is now satisfactory.  Within this total there are still localised clusters of unfilled places which have not been tackled. The LEA is understandably reluctant to take further action to remove places before the Urban Development Corporation publishes its already delayed plan for the

development of this part of the Thames Gateway. Several options have been suggested for creating major housing developments in parts of Thurrock, but it is not clear which will be pursued. The LEA has taken action to create extra capacity in oversubscribed secondary schools. Although some of these schools are full, none has a roll greater than 10% above net capacity. The LEA works effectively with the School Organisation Committee (SOC) which is demonstrably independent and contributes usefully to the debate about school places. Links between school organisation planning and asset management planning are developing, but are still at a relatively early stage.

# Section 3: Support to improve education in schools

## Summary table of judgements

| | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

Support to school leadership and management, including schools' approaches to continuous improvement

Support for national initiatives to raise standards in literacy and numeracy at KS 1 and 2

Support for information and communication technology

Support for the national initiative to raise standards at KS3

Support for raising the achievement of minority ethnic pupils, including Gypsy/ Traveller children

Support to schools for gifted and talented pupils

Support to school governors

The extent to which the LEA is successful in assuring the supply and quality of teachers

The planning and provision of services to support school management

The planning and provision of financial services in supporting school management

The planning and provision of HR services in supporting school management

The planning and provision of property services in supporting school management

The planning and provision of information management services in supporting school management

The effectiveness and value for money of services supporting school management

The planning and provision of services supporting school improvement, particularly inspection and advisory and/or school effectiveness services

The effectiveness and value for money of services supporting school improvement, particularly inspection and advisory and/or school effectiveness services

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## Support for school leadership, management and continuous improvement

38.      Support for leadership, management and continuous improvement in schools remains satisfactory.  A recommendation from the previous inspection to publish a strategy for developing leadership and management, including support for middle managers, has been addressed.  However, this good quality strategy is a relatively recent document and not all schools are yet familiar with its content.

39.      The LEA's senior officers, small team of school improvement officers and consultants provide satisfactory support for leadership and management in schools. However, there is wide variation in the quality of support provided by individual services, for example, support for national primary and Key Stage 3 strategies and for governors are good but support for ICT and the provision of property services are unsatisfactory.  The LEA has promoted a small number of models for school self-

evaluation and provided some related training and support for headteachers and governors, but this is underdeveloped.

40.     The LEA is successful in identifying and supporting those schools where leadership and management are weak or a cause for concern.  In these schools, headteachers and governors receive highly satisfactory support and regular monitoring reports effectively record progress and points for action.  Reporting to members on the quality of leadership and management in schools is satisfactorily covered through the annual performance review report and reports to the Education Forum.  Evidence from Ofsted inspections of schools indicates that leadership and management have improved since the previous inspection.

41.     The LEA is encouraging schools to become self-managing institutions. Schools are provided with adequate advice on the procurement of services and the application of best value principles.  They receive good quality financial performance data along with the good data on pupil attainment.  There has been a shift on the part of most primary schools from a dependency culture to one of autonomy. Schools have increasing confidence in the LEA's senior managers and in their ability to deliver the school improvement agenda.  Nevertheless, there remain areas where schools have less confidence and require further support, for example, on behaviour management and support for middle managers. There is, however, highly satisfactory capacity for further improvement.

42.     The challenge and rigour provided by SIOs is inconsistent, especially for schools requiring no intervention.   This is clearly evident through the variable quality of notes of visit (NOVs) which schools receive following a visit by LEA officers.  Consequently, the extent to which headteachers and governors are able to use these to inform school development planning is variable.

43.     Collaboration between schools and the sharing of good practice continues to develop through, for example, the termly headteacher briefings, strategy networks, the Excellence Cluster, the Leadership Incentive Grant collaborative and specialist schools.   However,  the  use  of  the  council  website  for  this  purpose  is underdeveloped.

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

44.     Support for curriculum ICT has deteriorated and is unsatisfactory.  Strategic vision and leadership are weaknesses.  The LEA's strategic plan expired in 2003 and has not been replaced.  There is no formal monitoring and evaluation of the impact of this plan.  The previous officer responsible for ICT left the LEA and has not been replaced which, inappropriately, has left the current Key Stage 3 ICT co-ordinator to take most of the leadership responsibility for the subject.  Apart from representation on the ICT user group, corporate ICT does not have clear working partnerships with the curriculum ICT team.

45.     At an operational level, the position is more positive, with some pockets of highly satisfactory practice.  The Key Stage 3 consultant provides a good standard

and range of training and support for teachers which schools value highly.  The LEA is developing work on assessment and recording in ICT at Key Stage 3.  Key Stage 3 attainment for 2004 is in line with national averages.   However, there is still further work to be done on assessment in primary schools.  The LEA is providing some effective support to seven primary schools who are piloting an interactive whiteboard project.

46.      Dissemination and sharing of good practice is effective through an annual ICT conference and the publication of support materials on the LEA website.  While network groups are effective for supporting secondary school teachers, they are less effective in the primary sector.  The LEA meets its statutory duties for funding allocations, for example, on e-learning credits and has met the targets for broadband connections and computer to pupil ratios.

*Recommendation*

> - Ensure that all key stakeholders are involved in producing an ICT strategy that includes systems for regular monitoring and evaluation; and that there is clear strategic leadership of support for ICT.

## Support for the national initiative at Key Stage 3

47.      Support has improved significantly and is now good.   There is a clear strategy, within the EDP, for raising attainment at Key Stage 3.  This is based on a thorough audit of the strengths and weaknesses of schools.  The analysis of data to identify progress and to target underachievement is well developed and informs the work of an effective team of consultants.

48.      The consultants provide focused training and support for schools which are greatly valued.  There are clear plans which guide the work of consultants and include success criteria for evaluating their impact.  There is effective collaboration between the consultants, ensuring that support to schools is appropriately co-ordinated.  Increasingly effective work with other support teams including the primary strategy team, the behaviour improvement consultant and staff supporting pupils with statements of special educational need, ensures coherence to the strategy for school improvement.  Links with the school improvement officers have also been established to ensure that support to schools causing concern is appropriately targeted.  Strategies for the identification and dissemination of good practice are well developed, with productive use being made of leading professionals and the network of strategy managers.

49.      Recent inspection reports reflect the impact of the team on the quality of teaching within schools. Standards are rising in line with the national rate in mathematics and above national rates in English and science.  Work is underway on extending the systematic evaluation of the impact of the team which will further improve the targeting of their work.

**Support for raising the achievement of minority ethnic pupils, including Gypsy and Traveller children**

50.       Support for minority ethnic pupils has improved and is now highly satisfactory.  There has been a significant rise in the minority ethnic population and the LEA is responding accordingly to address their needs.  Schools are provided with a highly satisfactory analysis of attainment data on minority ethnic pupils and this is used effectively to identify underachievement.  The analysis of attendance, admission and exclusion data is underdeveloped and needs to improve, particularly in relation to Gypsy and Traveller pupils.  Although the number of asylum seekers and refugees is low, the LEA holds data on the location and origin of all children in this category.  Support for the minority ethnic, Traveller and Gypsy pupils is targeted through an EDP priority and the LEA has provided a wide range of effective training to support schools in raising achievement.

51.       The LEA has recently updated the guidance to schools on meeting the needs of minority ethnic pupils and those with English as an additional language.  Training on this is planned for staff and governors.  However, it is too recent for the LEA to have monitored the value or impact of this guidance.  The overall attainment of minority ethnic pupils is in line with LEA averages.  However, the attainment of Traveller pupils is low.  Within the minority ethnic groups, the LEA and schools have identified underperformance on the part of some Asian pupils in Key Stage 2 and Black African and some other Black pupils in Key Stage 4.

52.       Funding to support minority ethnic pupils is devolved to schools and spending is monitored.  The vulnerable children grant is used, in the main, to support initiatives to raise Travellers' attainment through the funding of learning consultants and a specialist education welfare officer.  There are some highly satisfactory links developing between different agencies to support pupils and parents. Social services, education, health and police are working closely on Traveller sites to build good partnerships.

**Support for gifted and talented pupils**

53.       Support in this area has now improved and is satisfactory.  The identification and sharing of good practice is improving.  The LEA has created a gifted and talented forum for this purpose.  A spotlight event successfully provided an opportunity for Excellence Cluster schools to share good practice.  Nevertheless, expansion of much of this work beyond the Excellence Cluster to all schools has been too slow.  The LEA has met the recommendation from the previous report by producing a gifted and talented strategy which has been disseminated to all schools.  This effectively provides guidance on how to identify and support gifted and talented pupils. Support to schools on the welfare and guidance of gifted and talented pupils has not yet been fully developed by the LEA.

54.     The LEA provides schools with a good set of data on gifted pupils and supports them well in the setting of challenging targets.  It carried out an audit of schools to identify the strengths and weaknesses in their support for these pupils; this provided useful data and a position statement.  However, this exercise is nearly two years old and the present position across all schools is unclear.  For example, the LEA does not know how many schools presently have a co-ordinator for gifted and talented pupils.

55.     The LEA has successfully made links with several external organisations and agencies to promote this work across the LEA including the National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth, Oxford Brookes University and the Globe Theatre.  In addition, there have been two summer schools which effectively utilised the expertise in sports and performing arts within two of the LEA's specialist colleges.  These events were considered very successful, although the subsequent evaluation reports varied in their value and rigour.

## The supply and quality of teachers

56.     Support for schools in securing the supply and quality of teachers is satisfactory.  There are significant barriers to be overcome in recruiting teachers to schools in Thurrock due to its proximity to Greater London.  These have not been helped by recent difficulties in appointing a new recruitment strategy manager.  However, although vacancies remain high, there has been significant progress in reducing them since the time of the previous inspection; partly due to the creative work of the previous recruitment strategy manager.  The LEA collaborates with Essex and Southend to co-ordinate the recruitment of newly-qualified teachers (NQTs), promoting the LEA through attendance at recruitment fairs and by maintaining an informative website.  In addition the LEA, in collaboration with a recruitment agency, has been active in recruiting overseas trained teachers.  Schools are able to access corporate incentives, such as subsidised housing, to attract teachers to the borough, but regard these schemes as expensive.

57.     There is clear strategy for professional development with the LEA providing training for national initiatives and signposting alternative providers for all other areas of need.  Schools manage the support for NQTs effectively and the LEA monitors the assessment process thoroughly.  Recently, additional funding has been obtained through the General Teaching Council to extend the training for NQTs into their second year of teaching.  There is a clear induction process for newly appointed head teachers and there are established links with the eastern centre of the National College for School Leadership.

## Planning, provision, effectiveness and value for money of services to support school management

58.     Support for services to school management was unsatisfactory; it has improved and is now satisfactory.  The value for money is also satisfactory.  In 2002-2003, the LEA correctly undertook a major review of the way it provided services to schools.  This has resulted in schools having much greater access to

external providers, as well as being able to purchase services from the LEA in a more flexible way. Thurrock council is now consulting schools about their requirements from the partnership with a private company, which takes effect on 1 April 2005.

59.     Since the time of the previous inspection, the LEA's offer of services to schools has undergone fundamental revision, supported by benchmarking against other providers in terms of cost of provision, scope and price to the customer. The LEA now encourages schools to use alternative providers if they wish to do so, and lists a number of these in its '*Services to Schools*' pack. Most of the LEA's own services are now available in flexible packages so that schools can choose the elements they want. Enough information is provided for schools to make informed choices. The standard contract length has been reduced from three years to one year, with a notice period of six months if a school opts to terminate the agreement early. A single, integrated invoice is issued for all services bought from the LEA. These new arrangements work more effectively and reflect schools' expressed wishes.

60.     However, although service standards are specified in 'Services *to Schools*', the quality and usefulness of these varies between services. The LEA does not have a systematic approach to monitoring adherence to these service standards or for seeking customer feedback. Some services, notably finance, do this reasonably well, but most others do so in an ad hoc or piecemeal manner. Furthermore, the LEA is not systematic in collecting performance information on its in-house services and reporting this routinely to purchasers, chief officers or elected members.

61.     The majority of schools have developed the skills to become discerning purchasers. However, the LEA provides only limited training, telephone advice or written guidance on good procurement practice to those schools seeking additional support.

62.     Financial services - Assessed as highly satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection, these functions have continued to improve and are now very good. Schools hold them in very high regard and report that they respond flexibly and quickly. In particular, many of the staff have previously worked in schools and understand their needs well. The LEA's financial systems are compatible with those of schools and reconciliations are dealt with promptly, as are most payroll errors. Schools are provided with a very good range of support on budget setting including software, accessible telephone advice and visits. High quality training and advice are readily available on budget management. Finance staff routinely collect customer feedback and act on it.

63.     Human resource services remain satisfactory. The LEA has responded to schools' dissatisfaction with the in-house provider of casework advice by replacing this with a choice of external providers. However, some schools remain dissatisfied with the service and with some of the other functions remaining in-house, such as occupational health. The LEA's arrangements for monitoring performance are ad hoc rather than systematic, although action is taken promptly on complaints. The relative responsibilities of the LEA and the schools are clear. Work on workforce reform is well underway and on target for timely completion.

64.     Property services remain unsatisfactory, confirming the LEA's own self evaluation.  The service is still poorly regarded by schools.  There are particular concerns about response times and the amount of attention paid to schools' needs as clients.  More than 10% of recent projects were delivered late and/or over budget.  More positively, schools with major building projects have been actively involved in design discussions.  Property services are included in the forthcoming partnership with a private company and will be reviewed as part of the preparation for this.  Schools are appropriately involved in consultation about this development.

65.     Fieldwork was not undertaken on information management services but evidence provided confirms that this function remains highly satisfactory

*Recommendation*

- Put in place systematic quality assurance systems and report regularly on performance to purchasers, chief officers and elected members; and provide guidance to schools on best practice in procurement.

## Planning, provision, effectiveness and value for money of services to support school improvement

66.     The planning and provision of services supporting school improvement have made satisfactory progress and are now highly satisfactory.  The effectiveness and value for money of these services are satisfactory.

67.     Through a system of regular meetings and audits, senior officers have a good grasp of the main strengths and weaknesses across their service areas.  These are addressed through service plans which are shared with schools and link well into corporate objectives.  Clear targets are identified which are often ambitious, but not always realistic, for example, those for attainment at Key Stage 2.  Procedures for monitoring and evaluating plans and the quality of services are highly satisfactory.  The performance indicators and comparative costs of services supporting school improvement are in line with those of statistical neighbours.

68.     There is a satisfactory performance management system in place which the LEA uses to measure current performance against service targets.  The performance review of officers is developing well.  Individuals have clear targets that are linked to service plans and individual areas for staff development are clearly identified.  The school improvement officers (SIOs) are generally well deployed across a wide range of activities.  However, there are some areas where their confidence and expertise is stretched, for example, in relation to school finances or SEN.  Although satisfactory overall, there are inconsistencies in the amount and rigour of challenge SIOs provide to school leadership.  There are significant variations in the quality of SIO notes provided to schools following visits.  The quality assurance of these notes of visit is underdeveloped.

69.     Some highly satisfactory use is made of the skills of headteachers, partly to extend the range of expertise available to schools and also to conduct effective

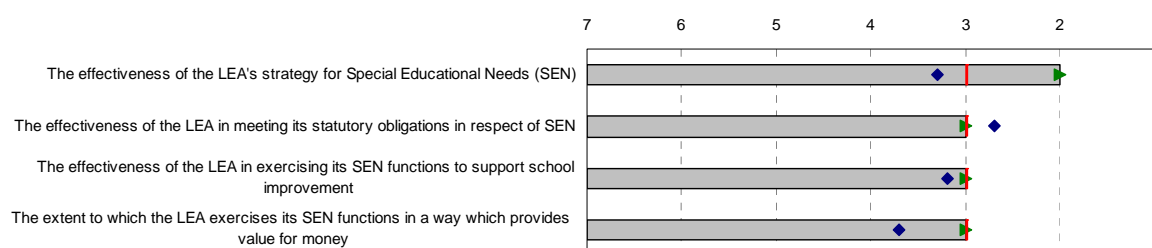surveys into areas of concern.  Schools are provided with a comprehensive directory of services which effectively points them to a range of alternative providers.  Schools have confidence in most services but not all, for example, behaviour support and property services.

*Recommendation*

> • Ensure that the school improvement officer team has the appropriate skills to fulfil the breadth of its role.

# Section 4: Support for special educational needs (SEN)

## Summary table of judgements

| | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

The effectiveness of the LEA's strategy for Special Educational Needs (SEN)

The effectiveness of the LEA in meeting its statutory obligations in respect of SEN

The effectiveness of the LEA in exercising its SEN functions to support school improvement

The extent to which the LEA exercises its SEN functions in a way which provides value for money

The bar represents the grade awarded to the LEA, the triangle represents the LEA's self-evaluation grade, the vertical line represents the LEA's previous grade and the diamond represents the average grade of all LEAs inspected in the last year.  1 = Very Good, 2 = Good, 3 = Highly Satisfactory, 4 = Satisfactory, 5 = Unsatisfactory, 6 = Poor, 7 = Very Poor.

## The strategy for SEN

70.     The LEA's strategy for special educational needs (SEN) has improved and is now good.  It provides a clear statement of objectives, reflecting both national and local priorities and is linked appropriately to the EDP.  Intentions identified in the previous inspection report have largely been carried out and comply with statutory requirements.  Schools and other stakeholders have been fully involved in policy development and understand it in the wider context of inclusion.  Their positive views are reflected in improved satisfaction levels in the school survey.  Continued development of the SEN and inclusion policy has the support of the new political administration.

71.     There is effective joint work with other agencies in developing the strategy, although resource plans largely rely on coordination of funding streams rather than the pooling of resources.  Improved partnership working is evident through such initiatives as the establishment of a multi-agency base.  Parent partnership support is highly satisfactory.

72.     The inclusion policy has led to greater inclusion of pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools.  The strategy for special schools has been followed through very effectively, supported by a capital programme which has enabled a new special school to be opened.  The roles of special schools are developing to support greater inclusion, through outreach work in mainstream schools.  Schools are very clear about SEN funding arrangements and generally understand their responsibility for the funding of statements.  The LEA is committed to increasing delegation and consultation is currently taking place about its further development.  The LEA manages its SEN resources effectively, with good monitoring to ensure a close match to need.

73.     Early intervention to support children with SEN has been improved and is now good.  For example, the Early Years 'I CAN' centre now provides pre-school provision for children with speech and language difficulties.  The portage service,

developed through the Sure Start initiative, is being extended and based at a special school providing a good example of inter-agency working.

74.    There is now good data about the performance of schools in respect of SEN and on the progress of individual pupils.  The first audit of this data took place in 2004.  There are effective plans to develop its use at school level, through the work of SIOs and educational psychologists, who work well together to support raising attainment.    Monitoring of schools by the LEA includes support for special educational needs, although the extent of challenge to each school is variable.

## Statutory obligations

75.    Performance remains highly satisfactory.  There are increasingly effective measures in place to ensure early identification of need, including two educational psychologists with a specific brief for early years.  A recently created statement support team provides skilled advice.  Procedures for assessing requests for formal statements are good; a multi-professional initiation panel reviews each request in detail.  Statements are prepared very efficiently within specified time limits.  A case review panel then meets to discuss and agree an appropriate level of support.  Short term difficulties in paediatric services in early 2004 reduced the rate of completion of statements to 63.7% in that year.  Since then the monthly rate has shown a very significant increase.  The annual school survey shows that schools rate this service highly.

76.    Statements are high quality and the process is enhanced by the use of an external agency to produce the first draft.  The provision required to support statements is clearly expressed and outcomes are specific.  There is a good procedure for monitoring annual reviews, with appropriate attendance by LEA officers at key meetings, such as transition reviews.  Links with other agencies are in place, although those with health are not always secure.

77.    Information for parents meets requirements and is generally of good quality, although sometimes lengthy and rather complex.  Information on the council's web site is highly satisfactory and has just been made available to inform parents and others of SEN services.  There is a well-established parent partnership service, supported by independent parental supporters and with a contract in place to provide conciliation services if required.

## SEN functions to support school improvement

78.    This function is highly satisfactory and there has been continuing development of greater coherence between special educational needs support and the broader school improvement agenda.  The monitoring framework, including the system for identifying schools causing concern, has strong input from SEN professionals.  The work of the educational psychology service (EPS) is particularly well integrated into the work on raising standards.  Working within the school effectiveness division of the directorate, the EPS are able both to contribute to strategic decisions and ensure the coherence of work with schools in supporting

individual children and in the effective use of individual education plans. Routine school monitoring by SIOs includes discussion of SEN issues, although notes of meetings show that some discussions lack rigour and challenge.

79.    The LEA monitors the lowest attaining 20% of pupils effectively. The process is based on good individual pupil and school performance data. The implications of the SEN audit were discussed with head teachers and special educational needs co-ordinators for the first time in 2004, but the process is not at a stage where it informs improvement planning consistently. LEA monitoring is made more complex because schools rely on a variety of approaches to evaluate performance. Recent developments in the role of special schools are involving them more strongly in supporting mainstream provision for SEN and social inclusion. They are very clear about their role and already undertake specialist outreach work, with further proposals in hand.
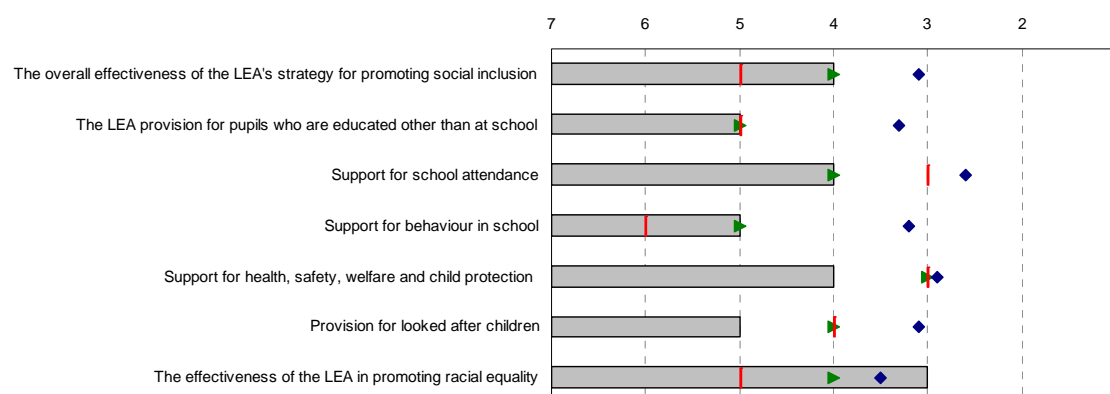
## Value for money

80.    The LEA continues to provide highly satisfactory value for money in exercising its SEN functions. The processes of identification and support for children with special educational needs are very well developed and have the support of schools. The LEA has undertaken a strategic review of improving access to the curriculum, the physical environment and communications. That has ensured an effective programme to improve facilities through the Access Funding Initiative, with further proposals to update priorities in the near future. Information about the impact of funding on pupil progress is limited at present, but the recent SEN audit places the LEA in a strong position to improve this.

81.    Funding criteria are clear and well understood by schools. There is a current review which aims to increase delegation to schools to support both the principle of self-management and the SEN policy. Currently there is little pooled funding although agencies work together to meet the costs of some initiatives. There is good use of the SEN resources by the LEA. Central management and control has been good for some years and makes effective use of comparative data from other LEAs and regionally to compare costs and performance. Recently there has been some effective work to redirect resources previously used on out-borough placements towards local improvements. Costs are in line with those of similar authorities or lower.

# Section 5: Support for social inclusion

## Summary table of judgements

| | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| The overall effectiveness of the LEA's strategy for promoting social inclusion | | | | | | | |
| The LEA provision for pupils who are educated other than at school | | | | | | | |
| Support for school attendance | | | | | | | |
| Support for behaviour in school | | | | | | | |
| Support for health, safety, welfare and child protection | | | | | | | |
| Provision for looked after children | | | | | | | |
| The effectiveness of the LEA in promoting racial equality | | | | | | | |

The bar represents the grade awarded to the LEA, the triangle represents the LEA's self-evaluation grade, the vertical line represents the LEA's previous grade and the diamond represents the average grade of all LEAs inspected in the last year.  1 = Very Good, 2 = Good, 3 = Highly Satisfactory, 4 = Satisfactory, 5 = Unsatisfactory, 6 = Poor, 7 = Very Poor.

## The strategy for social inclusion

82.     The strategy for supporting social inclusion has improved and is now satisfactory.  A recommendation from the previous inspection required the council to produce a coherent social inclusion strategy and supporting action plan.  This has been successfully completed and senior officers are now more clearly focused on addressing this key council priority.  The council has ensured that the formation of a children, schools and families directorate is fully reflected in its recently published social inclusion strategy and the five key outcomes within the Children's Act are fully embedded.  The underpinning policies, procedures and guidance to support the social inclusion agenda are all well linked and reflect the corporate vision. The strategy has not yet had time to impact significantly, and there continue to be some weaknesses in aspects of provision, particularly for excluded pupils, behaviour support and looked after children.  These have been recognised and improvements are in hand, though progress has been hampered by the impact of necessary restructuring and changes in the management of services.  Overall, however, there are clear, and sufficient, signs that developments in structures and procedures are established and have the potential to bring about further improvement.

83.     Since the previous inspection, the authority has effectively conducted three audits among a wide section of the community including parents, children and school staff.  These have been successful in identifying strengths and weaknesses in provision and have informed planning.  Schools are positive about the priority now being given to social inclusion and are committed to the council's vision.  They are gaining a renewed confidence in the provision of most support services.  However, there are still concerns over particular areas of support; for example, support for behaviour is underdeveloped.

84.	The overall systems for monitoring and evaluating the quality and impact of services supporting children at risk are satisfactory.  Underperformance in groups such as minority ethnic pupils, Travellers and children educated other than at school is monitored.  Members receive an annual report on the achievement of pupils at risk, but reporting on the progress of looked after children is not yet fully developed.  Senior officers are aware of weaknesses in provision and are working actively to overcome these.

85.	There are some examples of co-ordinated partnership working to develop preventative services, for example, the pyramid scheme that aims to raise the self esteem of primary age pupils.  The Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership is a major force in moving the inclusion agenda forward across the whole borough.  The executive group effectively monitors progress against the PSA targets.

86.	There is an improving coherence between the main council services that support the provision for social inclusion.  For example, key members of the school effectiveness, SEN, and access and inclusion teams meet fortnightly and social inclusion is a major agenda item.  Resources are well targeted at social inclusion priorities through the EDP.  There are a small number of cases where budgets are being effectively pooled from a number of services to provide central support, for example, the funding of primary mental health care workers.

## Provision for pupils educated other than at school

87.	Provision for pupils educated other than at school remains unsatisfactory, as identified in the LEA's self-evaluation.  Despite a sound overall strategy, its implementation has been too slow and the impact on attainment insufficient.  The LEA has met the recommendations of the previous report to provide full time provision, but is not secure about take-up, principally because of current inadequate arrangements for monitoring on-line provision.

88.	Positive strategic developments include steps to improve the quality of pupil level data and the development of a base for support services.  The recent introduction of a multi-professional referral panel provides a single point of access for support and has been received very positively by those who have used it.  There is also effective monitoring of home-educated pupils and their attainment. However, weaknesses exist in the coordinated implementation of provision.  Procedures for pupil reintegration which have been agreed with schools but have not been developed fully.  Progress in developing some useful alternative curriculum provision at Key Stage 4 is limited by too few links with further education.  The LEA provision lacks the coherence that is essential to achieve the changes necessary to reach the outcomes indicated in its plans.

*Recommendation*

- Improve the co-ordination and management of educational provision for pupils educated other than at school.

## Support for attendance

89.      This function is now satisfactory, having been highly satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection. A number of significant weaknesses were rightly identified by the new principal education welfare officer following his appointment in March 2004. These included poor management information, unsafe procedures, unbalanced workloads and inconsistent referral patterns.  Each of these is now being addressed systematically, but it will be some time before the impact can be fully demonstrated.

90.      Although attendance rates in secondary schools have improved at a slightly higher rate than the national average, primary attendance remains below the national average. The LEA's action plan identifies an appropriate focus on the primary sector.   Some improvements have already been achieved.  In particular, the work of the education welfare service has been refocused towards those schools with the greatest need.   The LEA is prepared to undertake further changes to allocations of time if this proves necessary.  The quality of management information is improving, allowing appropriate decisions to be made and resources allocated in a more informed and transparent way.   A number of well-targeted initiatives have been developed to further improve attendance including the appointment of a PSA-funded attendance officer to work with primary and nursery schools, a fast track to court procedure, and the creation of a borough attendance panel.  However, it is too early to assess the impact of these strategies.

## Support for behaviour

91.      Although there has been improvement since the time of the previous inspection, support for behaviour remains unsatisfactory, as identified in the LEA's own self-evaluation.  The recommendation of the previous inspection has been met with the revision of the Behaviour Support Plan, in consultation with schools and other stakeholders.  The revised plan is sound, although the level of detail within it is not consistent.  It has been implemented, but there has been significant slippage, largely due to the restructuring of the pupil support service and staffing difficulties. Although there is clear evidence of consultation with schools, change has not been sufficiently fast to keep schools engaged and they continue to have concerns about behaviour support.

92.      Nonetheless some important steps have been taken.  The new pupil support service has the potential to improve coherence between school improvement and pupil support services.  Within the structure, there is now a statement support team which has been well received by schools and aims to prevent statemented pupils from being excluded.   The pupil support service now works jointly with primary mental health care workers.  There is a new and effective multi-disciplinary referral panel to coordinate work with schools, which has made some impact in the few months since its introduction.  The establishment of a new pupil referral unit is also an important development that enables a clearer focus on each key stage. However, many of the changes are very new and there are recruitment difficulties to the service.

93.    Significant behaviour projects have been undertaken with external funding to improve support.  They include the behaviour and attendance projects at Key Stages 2 and 3 and, most recently, funding in 2004-05 for the Behaviour Improvement Programme.  There has also been a very appropriate focus on staff training to improve behaviour, such as the use of the "*Team Teach*" programme. Some positive outcomes are discernable.   There has been a very significant reduction in permanent exclusions, including those of statemented pupils, although there has been an increase in fixed term exclusions.  In many respects behaviour services are well positioned to transform their support to schools. However, they currently lack coherence and continuity of staffing. These factors are essential to accelerate the rate of change, and to engage further with schools to regain their confidence and support.

*Recommendation*

- Resolve management and staffing issues to improve the implementation of the behaviour support policies and gain schools' support for the behaviour support service and the strategy.

**Support for health, safety, welfare and child protection**

94.    These functions were rated highly satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection and are now satisfactory overall.  Although considerable effort has been targeted on child protection, lack of capacity within the LEA has meant that health and safety has not been given sufficient priority.

95.    Schools are generally well satisfied with the LEA's support for welfare and child protection.   There is close working between education and social services. Shared protocols are in place and well understood.  Guidelines for schools have been revised and issued under the auspices of the Area Child Protection Committee, in which LEA officers play an active role.  Sensibly, high priority has been given in recent months to child protection training.  Virtually all designated teachers have already attended one or more sessions.  To date, about half of the schools have taken up the LEA's offer of whole school training.  All courses have been delivered jointly by education and social services.

96.    Detailed health and safety policies have been circulated to schools and a self -evaluated risk assessment procedure is in place.  However, this procedure is not robust.  Following an incident at a school, the Health and Safety Executive identified weaknesses in the LEA's monitoring and enforcement procedures.  Plans have been drawn up to remedy these using an external consultant, as the LEA lacks internal capacity.

**Provision for looked after children**

97.    Provision for looked after children was satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection but is now unsatisfactory.  The key post of looked after children coordinator was only filled in November 2004 after a long period of interim

arrangements. During this period, momentum was lost on a number of aspects. Education and social services held separate and, until recently, sometimes conflicting lists of looked after children. Although targets have been set for the attainment of looked after children and included in the PSA, no detailed targets or milestones have been set for attendance or exclusions. Data on individual children is insufficiently reliable to monitor their progress, although work is now underway to remedy this. Reporting mechanisms to members and chief officers are restricted to PSA targets and do not yet cover a wider range of measures. Although a training programme for designated teachers is now being planned, it will not be delivered before March 2005.

98.     The new coordinator for looked after children has collaborated with social services to establish a clear work plan. Sensibly, this gives priority to key areas such as improving the quality of management information, developing training programmes, avoiding exclusions, and fast-tracking school admissions for looked after children. There is a great deal to be done and it will be some time before the impact of these changes can be fully judged. However, some progress has already been made. Clear protocols have been put in place with social services. The coordinator, working with social services, has successfully targeted resources towards a priority group of children with high level needs. Case studies concerning these children indicate successes in avoiding exclusions and securing new education placements. The proportion of looked after children with personal education plans has increased from 30% in 2003 to 89% in 2005, although the quality of these is variable. There have been no permanent exclusions among looked after children during the last year.

*Recommendation*

> • Put in place clear targets with milestones for attendance and exclusions of looked after children and monitor progress with regular reports to elected members.

**Promoting racial equality**

99.     Good progress has been made since the previous inspection and the promotion of racial equality is now highly satisfactory. The council has an effective race equality strategy which is supported by a good action plan. Priority areas for development are clearly identified within the plan.

100.    The LEA has recently updated its guidance on promoting racial equality and handling racist incidents. This is a highly satisfactory document and ongoing training is offered to teachers and governors. As a result, all schools have a race equality policy and the LEA receives 100% returns from schools on racist incidents including nil returns. Monitoring of racist incidents is effectively carried out by a multi-, agency panel. There is analysis of incidents, for example, to identify patterns, potential hot spots and causes. The analysis of incidents is effectively reported to elected members through the annual performance review report and schools receive data via the Director's briefing.

101.     Representatives from minority ethnic groups have been involved in council developments and consultation exercises.   For example on equality impact assessments and the discussions around the structure of the developing children, education and families directorate.

102.     The corporate equality action plan has appropriate targets and activities to promote the recruitment and promotion of minority ethnic teachers and LEA staff into higher tier posts.   The LEA keeps a database on the ethnic backgrounds of school governors.   The governor support service is effectively exploring several initiatives in order to attract more governors from minority ethnic communities.

## Appendix A

**Record of Judgement Recording Statements**

| Name of LEA : | Thurrock Local Education Authority |
|---|---|
| LEA number: | 883 |
| Reporting Inspector: | Garry Jones HMI |
| Date of Inspection: | January 2005 |

| No | Required Inspection Judgement | Grade | Fieldwork* |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **Context of the LEA** | | |
| 1 | The socio-economic context of the LEA | 5 | |
| | **Overall judgements** | | |
| 0.1 | The progress made by the LEA overall | 4 | |
| 0.2 | Overall effectiveness of the LEA | 4 | |
| 0.3 | The LEA's capacity for further improvement and to address the recommendations of the inspection | 4 | |
| | **Section 1: Corporate strategy and LEA leadership** | | |
| 1.1 | The effectiveness of corporate planning for the education of children and young people | 3 | |
| 1.2 | The implementation of corporate planning for education | 4 | |
| 1.3 | The effectiveness of LEA decision-making | 3 | NF |
| 1.4 | The extent to which the LEA targets resources on priorities | 4 | |
| 1.5 | The extent to which the LEA has in place effective strategies to promote continuous improvement, including Best Value | 4 | |
| 1.6 | The leadership provided by elected members (including quality of advice) | 5 | |

| 1.7 | The quality of leadership provided by senior officers | 2 | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1.8 | The effectiveness of partnerships and collaboration between agencies in support of priorities | 3 | |
| 1.9 | Support for Early Years education | 2 | |
| 1.10 | Support for 14 – 19 education | 4 | |
| | **Section 2: Strategy for education and its implementation** | | |
| 2.1 | The LEA's strategy for school improvement | 3 | |
| 2.2 | The progress on implementing the LEA's strategy for school improvement | 4 | |
| 2.3 | The performance of schools | 5 | |
| 2.4 | The extent to which the LEA has defined monitoring, challenge and intervention | 3 | |
| 2.5 | The effectiveness of the LEA's work in monitoring schools and challenging them to improve, including the use made of performance data | 4 | |
| 2.6 | The extent to which the LEA's support to schools is focused on areas of greatest need | 4 | |
| 2.7 | The effectiveness of the LEA's identification of and intervention in underperforming schools | 3 | |
| 2.8 | The effectiveness of the LEA in discharging asset management planning | 5 | |
| 2.9 | The effectiveness of the LEA in relation to the provision of school places | 4 | |
| 2.10 | The effectiveness of the LEA in relation to admissions to schools | 3 | NF |
| | **Section 3: Support to school leadership and management, including schools' efforts to support continuous improvement** | | |
| 3.1 | Support to school leadership and management, including support for schools' approaches to continuous improvement | 4 | |
| 3.2 | Support for national initiatives to raise standards in literacy and numeracy at KS 1 and 2 | 3 | NF |

| 3.3 | Support for information and communication technology | 5 | |
|-----|------------------------------------------------------|---|----|
| 3.4 | Support for the national initiative to raise standards at KS3 | 2 | |
| 3.5 | Support for raising the achievement of minority ethnic pupils, including Gypsy/ Traveller children | 3 | |
| 3.6 | Support to schools for gifted and talented pupils | 4 | |
| 3.7 | Support for school governors | 2 | NF |
| 3.8 | The extent to which the LEA is successful in assuring the supply and quality of teachers | 4 | |
| 3.9 | The planning and provision of services to support school management | 4 | |
| 3.9a | The planning and provision of financial services in supporting school management | 1 | |
| 3.9b | The planning and provision of HR services in supporting school management | 4 | |
| 3.9c | The planning and provision of property services in supporting school management | 5 | |
| 3.9d | The planning and provision of information management services in supporting school management | 3 | NF |
| 3.10 | The effectiveness and value for money of services supporting school management | 4 | |
| 3.11 | The planning and provision of services supporting school improvement, particularly inspection and advisory and/or school effectiveness services | 3 | |
| 3.12 | The effectiveness and value for money of services supporting school improvement, particularly inspection and advisory and/or school effectiveness services | 4 | |
| | **Section 4: Support for special educational needs** | | |
| 4.1 | The effectiveness of the LEA's strategy for special educational needs | 2 | |
| 4.2 | The effectiveness of the LEA in meeting its statutory obligations in respect of SEN | 3 | |

| 4.3 | The effectiveness of the LEA in exercising its SEN functions to support school improvement | 3 | |
| 4.4 | The extent to which the LEA exercises its SEN functions in a way which provides value for money | 3 | |
| | **Section 5: Support for social inclusion** | | |
| 5.1 | The overall effectiveness of the LEA's strategy for promoting social inclusion | 4 | |
| 5.2 | The LEA provision for pupils who have no school place | 5 | |
| 5.3 | Support for school attendance | 4 | |
| 5.4 | Support for behaviour in schools | 5 | |
| 5.5 | Support for health, safety, welfare and child protection | 4 | |
| 5.6 | Provision for looked after children | 5 | |
| 5.7 | The effectiveness of the LEA in promoting racial equality | 3 | |

*NF' under fieldwork means that no fieldwork was conducted on this function during this inspection.*

**JRS numerical judgements are allocated on a 7-point scale:**
Grade 1: Very good; Grade 2: Good; Grade 3: Highly satisfactory; Grade 4: Satisfactory; Grade 5: Unsatisfactory; Grade 6: Poor; Grade 7: Very poor

**Note: in the case of JRS 1:** *socio-economic context of the LEA and* **JRS 2.3:** *performance of schools,* **grades relate to comparisons against national averages:**
Grades 1-2: Well above; Grade 3: Above; Grade 4: In line; Grade 5: Below; Grades 6-7: Well below.

## Appendix B

**Context of the inspection**

This inspection of Thurrock LEA was carried out by Ofsted in conjunction with the Audit Commission under section 38 of the Education Act 1997.

This report provides a commentary on the inspection findings, including:

- the progress the LEA has made since the time of its previous inspection in 2002;

- the overall effectiveness of the LEA and its capacity to improve further;

- the LEA's performance in major aspects of its work;

- recommendations on areas for improvement.

The summary is followed by more detailed judgements on the LEA's performance of its individual functions, which sets the recommendations for improvement into context.

All functions of the LEA have been inspected and judgements reached on how effectively they are performed. Not all functions were subject to detailed fieldwork, but in all cases inspectors reached their judgements through an evaluation of a range of material. This included self-evaluation undertaken by the LEA, data (some of which were provided by the LEA), school inspection information, HMI monitoring reports, and audit reports. In addition, the inspection team considered the earlier Ofsted/Audit Commission report on this LEA and a questionnaire seeking the views of all schools on aspects of the work of the LEA. In those areas subject to fieldwork, discussions were held with LEA officers and members, headteachers and governors, staff in other departments of the local authority, diocesan representatives, and other agencies and LEA partners.

The functions that were not subject to detailed fieldwork in this inspection were:

- the effectiveness of LEA decision making;

- the effectiveness of the LEA in relation to admissions to schools;

- support for national initiatives to raise standards in literacy and numeracy at Key Stages 1 and 2;

- support for school governors;

- the planning and provision of information management services to support school management.

Inspection judgements are made against criteria that can be found on the Ofsted website. For each inspected function of the LEA an inspection team agrees a numerical grade. The numerical grades awarded for the judgements made in this inspection are to be found in Appendix A. These numerical grades must be considered in the light of the full report. Some of the grades are used in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment profile for the education service.

## Context of the LEA

The Borough of Thurrock lies on the river Thames to the east of London. It has a population of over 143,000 people (2001) of which 4.7% are from minority ethnic communities. The main settlements include Grays, Stanford/Corringham, South Ockendon/Belhus, Tilbury and the developing community of Chafford. The borough is a major part of the Thames Gateway area, a corridor identified by the government as an area for significant urban development. As part of the Thames Gateway sub-region the population of Thurrock is expected to increase by around 50% with up to 25,000 new homes proposed in the next 20 years. The ethnic composition of the population is becoming increasingly diverse and this is likely to continue.

The economy is diverse with a particular focus on logistics and the retail trade. Unemployment stands at less than 2% compared with the national average of 2.4%. However, there is considerable under-employment with part time working becoming common place. In the index of multiple deprivation (2004), Thurrock has 24% of its survey areas in the lowest quartile but only 14% in the upper quartile. In addition, there are pockets of intense deprivation within the borough with high levels of crime, anti social behaviour and poor health.

The proportion of primary pupils (18.2%) and secondary pupils (14.3%) eligible for free school meals is broadly in line with statistical neighbours and that found nationally. The percentage of pupils with English as an additional language and the number of students with statements of SEN in primary schools and secondary schools are in line with that found nationally and in statistical neighbours. The proportion of primary (0.8%) and secondary (1.4%) aged pupils placed in special schools is in line with the national average. Nursery provision is available in 15 of the LEA's primary schools. Currently 77% of three-year-olds and 87% of four-year-olds receive at least part time nursery provision.

There are 60 schools in the borough, comprising nine infant schools, nine junior schools, 30 primary schools, 10 secondary schools and two special schools. There are two pupil referral units. Seven schools have specialist status and there is one beacon school. An Excellence Cluster contains eleven schools.

## The performance of schools

Attainment in Thurrock schools varies between phases with pupils making greater progress in the secondary sector than primary. Attainment on entry to school is well below the national average. Performance remains well below the national average and that of statistical neighbours in English at the end of Key Stage 1. In

mathematics performance is in line with statistical neighbours but below the national rate.  At the end of Key Stage 2 attainment in English and mathematics remains well below the national average and below that of statistical neighbours, while science is below the national average but in line with that of statistical neighbours.  However in Key Stage 3, although attainment is below the national average in English and science, it is in line for mathematics.  At Key Stage 4 the attainment of pupils is in line with national averages for all indicators and above that of statistical neighbours.

The rates of improvement at Key Stage 1 are in line with the national trend for English and well above for mathematics.  Performance trends at Key Stage 2 are above the national trend for English and science but in line for mathematics.  At Key Stage 3 the trend is well above the national trend for English, above for science and in line for mathematics.  This improving picture continues at Key Stage 4 with the trends being above those found nationally and well above for the proportion of pupils gaining 5+ A*-C grades at GCSE.  However, in 2004 there was a significant decline in the percentage of pupils gaining 5+ A*-C grades at GCSE.

Value added data shows that Thurrock was in line with national figures for Key Stages 2 to 3 and above for Key Stages 3 to 4 in 2003.

Thurrock failed to meet all of its attainment targets in 2004.  At present rates of improvement it is unlikely to meet future targets.  The performance of schools in relation to floor targets is well below the national levels, 27% of primary and junior schools failed to reach the floor target of 65% of pupils gaining level 4 in English in 2004, compared to 17% nationally; 35% failed to reach this target in mathematics, compared to 23% nationally.  At Key Stage 3 in 2003 seven of the nine eligible secondary schools had achieved the 2004 floor target of 60% of pupils gaining Level 5 and above in English and eight had achieved this in mathematics.  While all of the schools in 2003 achieved the 2007 floor target of 25% of pupils gaining 5+ A*-C grades at GCSE, one school fell below this level in 2004. The LEA has already reached the national 2004 target of 38% of pupils achieving five A*-C grades.

The proportion of primary schools graded good or very good in Ofsted inspections is well below average compared to both similar LEAs and nationally, but the proportion of secondary schools with similar standards is above average.

Attendance in primary schools has declined slightly since the time of the previous inspection and is below the national average.  Attendance in secondary schools has, however, improved and is above that found nationally and in statistical neighbours.  Permanent exclusions were above national rates and similar LEAs in 2001/2002.  LEA data for 2003/2004 show that permanent exclusions have reduced significantly in the last year.

## Funding data for the LEA

| Schools budget | Thurrock | Statistical neighbours average | Unitary Average | England Average |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | £ per pupil | £ per pupil | £ per pupil | £ per pupil |
| Individual schools budget | **2,876** | **2,788** | **2,795** | **2,900** |
| Standards fund delegated | 47 | 52 | 56 | 63 |
| Excellence in Cities | 37 | 50 | 28 | 35 |
| Schools in financial difficulty | 0 | 6 | 4 | 4 |
| Education for under fives (non-ISB) | 107 | 56 | 87 | 85 |
| Strategic management | 70 | 36 | 31 | 30 |
| Special educational needs | 103 | 119 | 116 | 126 |
| Grants | 4 | 32 | 26 | 26 |
| Access | 66 | 71 | 63 | 60 |
| Capital expenditure from revenue | 21 | 26 | 19 | 24 |
| **Total schools budget** | **3,331** | **3,235** | **3,224** | **3,354** |
| Schools formula spending share | **3,230** | **3,014** | **3,057** | **3,197** |

*Source: DfES Comparative Tables 2003-04*

| LEA budget | Thurrock | Statistical neighbours average | Unitary average | England average |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | £ per pupil | £ per pupil | £ per pupil | £ per pupil |
| Strategic management | 42 | 101 | 89 | 99 |
| Specific Grants | 22 | 16 | 18 | 14 |
| Special educational needs | 43 | 28 | 36 | 36 |
| School improvement | 33 | 39 | 35 | 38 |
| Access | 183 | 105 | 137 | 142 |
| Capital expenditure from revenue | 0 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| Youth and Community | 69 | 59 | 70 | 75 |
| **Total LEA budget** | **393** | **350** | **387** | **406** |

*Source: DfES Comparative Tables 2004-05*

**Note:** All figures are net
Funding for schools in financial difficulties excludes transitional funding.
Averages quoted are mean averages; the original DfES Comparative Tables quote median average figures, not the mean average.

**Notes**