

**Inspection report**  
**RICHMOND UPON THAMES**  
**Local Education Authority**

Date of inspection: September 2002

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## **Basic information about the LEA**

Name of LEA:	Richmond upon Thames Local Education Authority
Address of LEA:	Regal House London Road Twickenham TW1 3QB
Reporting inspector:	Jillian Munday HMI
Date of inspection:	September 2002

## Introduction

1. This inspection of Richmond local education authority (LEA) was carried out by Ofsted in conjunction with the Audit Commission under section 38 of the Education Act 1997. The inspection used the *Framework for the Inspection of Local Education Authorities (December 2001)*. The inspection focused on the effectiveness of the LEA's work to support school improvement. The inspection also took account of the Local Government Act 1999, insofar as it relates to work undertaken by the LEA on Best Value.

2. The inspection was based on a range of material, which included self-evaluation undertaken by the LEA, and data, some of which was provided by the LEA. That material also included school inspection information; HMI monitoring reports and audit reports; documentation from, and discussions with, LEA officers and members; focus groups of headteachers and governors; staff in other departments at that local authority; and diocesan representatives. Other agencies and LEA partners submitted written evidence of participation and joint working. In addition, the inspection team considered the earlier Ofsted/Audit Commission report on this LEA (published in February 2001). A questionnaire, seeking views on aspects of the work of the LEA, was circulated to 50 schools, and the inspection team considered its results. The response rate to the questionnaire was 92 per cent.

## Commentary

3. Richmond upon Thames is an affluent borough in southwest London. Unemployment is low and the economy of the area is strong. Substantial mobility of pupils across borough boundaries and between sectors creates admission and continuity difficulties for the LEA and for Richmond secondary schools. Since the last inspection the school population has become more diverse. The number of pupils has remained stable and there are few surplus places.

4. Primary school standards are well above national averages and above the averages of similar authorities. Between 1996 and 2001 there was a steady and creditable rise in pupils' attainment in the Key Stage 2 national tests, which was slightly better than that seen nationally. Standards at Key Stage 3 are improving, but are closer to national averages, with higher performance in English, but below average standards in information and communication technology (ICT). The percentage of pupils achieving five or more A\*-C grades at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) is above the national average. However, the percentage achieving at least one A\*-G grade is no more than the national average, with a rate of improvement well below the national trend.

5. At the last inspection in 2000 the LEA's performance was unsatisfactory. There were significant weaknesses in many core areas, although there were strengths in support for school improvement. The report also criticised the complex arrangements for the strategic management of education. The LEA had recognised the seriousness of its shortcomings. It was committed to improvement, and was therefore deemed likely to overcome them.

6. In less than two years the LEA has worked conscientiously to effect improvement and progress has been good. Focused action planning, careful implementation and systematic monitoring of progress have moved many formerly unsatisfactory areas to a point where they are now satisfactory or better. Alongside this, there have been improvements in other aspects previously judged as satisfactory. Overall, the LEA is highly satisfactory and has few areas of major weakness.

### *Strengths*

7. There are particular strengths in:

- monitoring, challenge and intervention strategies;
- identification of and intervention in underperforming schools;
- support for literacy;
- support for numeracy;
- support for gifted and talented pupils in schools;
- support for school governors;
- catering services;
- assuring the supply and quality of teachers;



- the leadership of services to support school improvement;
- the deployment of staff to support school improvement;
- admissions to schools;
- effectiveness in combating racism; and
- the quality of advice given to elected members.

8. However, even though progress has been made, the following areas remain unsatisfactory:

- the strategy for special educational needs (SEN);
- support for the curriculum use of ICT;
- asset management planning;
- property services; and
- grounds maintenance.

9. The LEA's strategy for special educational needs has improved, but the very high expectations and demands of parents and schools have not been managed effectively. The partnership with some parents is not secure and, instead of working with parents in seeking mutually acceptable solutions, officers' time is too often spent defending criticisms and appeals.

10. Strategic management of education is now more purposeful as a result of changes to the senior officer structure, which place the director for education, arts and leisure on the executive board of the council. Alongside this, new structures within the education department facilitate closer working arrangements between services. The LEA has drawn successfully on the strengths of schools in leading and developing initiatives and disseminating good practice. Its success in doing so is a reflection of its good relations with schools and of their readiness to work for the common good. Nevertheless, the considerable current demands on senior managers in areas of special educational needs are constraining further developments.

11. In May 2002, after 19 years, the political leadership of the council changed from Liberal Democrat to Conservative. It is still too early for the new administration to have gained the full confidence of schools and the training and development needs of many elected members are substantial. The chief executive and the director for education, arts and leisure give clear direction and leadership. Members recognise that they are served well by experienced and competent officers and their commitment to education is high. The new council has begun the process of clarifying strategic and financial priorities, but, until these are agreed, the detail of future plans cannot be secured. The LEA has the capacity to address the recommendations of this report and to further improve on its already satisfactory performance.

## **Section 1: The LEA strategy for school improvement**

### **Context**

12. The socio-economic profile of the London borough of Richmond upon Thames has altered little since the previous inspection. Situated in the southwest of Greater London, it remains an affluent area that is popular for its scenic location. It has a population in excess of 172,000 with a proportionally small school population of 19,922.

13. Richmond benefits from a buoyant economy and, at three per cent, unemployment is very low. The council is the largest single employer in the borough. The index of multiple deprivation for 2000, published by the Department of Transport and the Regions ranks the borough as the fourth least deprived of 354 authorities. Twenty per cent of the population earns less than £7,500 per annum and 10 per cent is described as 'income deprived' owning expensive property, but having small incomes. While entitlement to free school meals is below the national average at primary level, it is similar to the national figure at secondary level.

14. The school population is becoming more diverse. Pupils from minority ethnic groups now comprise 14.3 per cent of the school population compared with 12.4 per cent in 2001, with the largest groups being Indian and African-Caribbean. The overall current figure is broadly in line with the national average. There are 270 children of asylum seekers being educated in schools in the borough.

15. The percentage of pupils with statements of special educational need is above the national average in secondary schools. The authority maintains one nursery school, 41 primary schools, eight 11-16 secondary schools, two special schools and one pupil referral unit (PRU). Other pupils with special educational needs are educated in units attached to schools, of which there are currently nine. Seven schools are Beacon schools. Two secondary schools have been granted specialist college status, one for sport and the other for languages.

16. There are few surplus school places. At primary transfer about one third of pupils move to schools outside Richmond's maintained sector, while pupils from beyond the borough come in to take up secondary places; currently 40 per cent of secondary pupils in Richmond schools are resident outside the borough. A significant Private Finance Initiative (PFI) contract has just been completed, which provides 160 new places. Ninety of these are in two new primary schools that have opened this term. Further planned expansion will provide three units for children with special educational needs. A commitment has also been made to bid for further PFI funding to meet the rise in secondary numbers by 2007.

### **Performance**

17. A detailed analysis of the performance of schools is supplied to the LEA annually in the form of a statistical profile compiled by Ofsted. Key features of schools' performance, and changes since the previous inspection are outlined below.

18. In national tests and examinations pupils in Richmond schools continue to perform at a level that is average or above average in comparison with national standards. Since the last inspection standards have risen at all key stages.

19. Since the last inspection pupils' attainment on entry to school has remained above that found nationally. In 2001, by the end of Key Stage 1, the percentages of pupils attaining Level 2 and above was well above the national average, with boys performing slightly higher than girls in mathematics.

20. Pupils' attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2001 was well above average in all subjects at both Levels 4 and 5. Boys and girls performed equally well in comparison with national figures, although the gap in their English attainment widened. Pupils made above average progress between Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. Nevertheless, from a baseline of comparatively high attainment, improvement was slower than the national rate.

21. At Key Stage 3 in 2001, the percentage of pupils attaining Level 5 or above in mathematics and science was broadly in line with that seen nationally and in English was above the national average. The percentage of pupils attaining higher levels was in line with national averages for English and mathematics, but above this in science. Girls outperformed boys at this higher level in English, although boys did better in mathematics. In ICT, however, standards were below national average. The ambitious public service agreement (PSA) Key Stage 3 ICT targets for 2003 will only be achieved by a sharply accelerated rate of progress resulting from the implementation of the Key Stage 3 Strategy.

22. The percentages of pupils achieving one or more A\*-G grade and five A\*-G grades at GCSE in 2001 were broadly in line with the national average. However, the rate of improvement in pupils achieving one or more A\*-G grade was well below the national trend and below the trend of statistical neighbours<sup>1</sup>. Five A\*-C achievement was above the national average with the rate of improvement below the national trend and in line with that of statistical neighbours. The progress pupils make between Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 was above average. However, LEA targets for 2001 were not met. Provisional results for 2002 show a drop in all indicators. Unless the current trend is reversed, PSA GCSE targets for 2004 are unlikely to be met.

23. The numbers of pupils of African-Caribbean heritage and of looked after children are too small for robust national comparisons to be made. However, at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 the data point to underachievement and the LEA is rightly targeting activities toward raising standards of individual attainment.

24. Overall attendance figures declined in the year following the previous inspection, although provisional data for the current year show some improvement. In 2001, primary school attendance was broadly in line with national averages and secondary school attendance remained lower than that found nationally. Unauthorised absence figures had increased. The permanent exclusion rate was below the national figure for primary schools,

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<sup>1</sup> Richmond's similar authorities, against which comparisons are made, are: Bromley, Windsor and Maidenhead, Barnet, Merton, Sutton, Stockport, Harrow, Croydon and Solihull

but above that for secondary schools, although there has been some reduction since the last inspection and the 2001 and 2002 targets set in the EDP have been met.

25. There are no schools in the borough designated as requiring special measures or judged to have serious weaknesses. School inspection data indicate a very high percentage of schools being graded good or very good for overall effectiveness in the second inspection cycle.

### Funding

26. Since 1999-2000 the Standard Spending Assessments (SSA) for both primary and secondary education in Richmond upon Thames have increased by slightly more than for England as a whole. However, the SSA for 2002-03 remains significantly below the English average and over ten per cent lower than the average for outer London boroughs.

27. The council has consistently funded the education service at a level well above SSA. Following a period when the gap between the education budget and SSA decreased to four per cent in 1999-2000, the difference has risen and now stands at over nine per cent. The council has passed on more than the increases in SSA to the education service in each of the last three years. Council tax in Richmond upon Thames is the highest of all London boroughs, reflecting members' determination to protect service budgets. In spite of this, overall spending on primary and secondary schools is well below the average for outer London boroughs. The table below shows the local schools budget (LSB) for 2001-02, excluding funding from the Schools Standards Grant:

	<b>Richmond upon Thames</b>	<b>Outer London boroughs</b>	<b>All English LEAs</b>
Primary LSB per pupil	£2719	£2865	£2695
Secondary LSB per pupil	£3474	£3623	£3403

Robust comparisons for secondary schools cannot be made since the figures may be inflated by the funding of sixth forms in secondary schools, of which Richmond has none.

28. Since the last inspection the LEA has reduced its centrally retained expenditure to a level close to the average for outer London boroughs. Strategic management costs have fallen slightly; though they remain well above the average for outer London boroughs, they reflect the limited economies of scale available in this small LEA. Spending on access and school improvement have risen slightly, but the budgets for both areas are a little lower than average.

29. Centrally retained spending on SEN has fallen significantly, mainly because of the further devolution of SEN funding, and is now close to the average for outer London boroughs. The total SEN budget for 2001-02 (including special home-school transport, inter-authority recoupment and funding included specifically in schools' budgets to meet pupils'

SEN) is also close to the average. Schools' proportion of this total amounts to about 48 per cent, which is well below the average.

30. The LEA delegated to schools 86.5% of its local schools budget (LSB) in 2001-2002 (DfES adjusted figure). This is a significant increase on the previous year, but still slightly lower than the average for outer London boroughs. The table below shows the individual schools budget (ISB) for 2001-02, excluding devolved Standards Fund and Schools Standards Grant:

	<b>Richmond upon Thames</b>	<b>Outer London boroughs</b>	<b>All English LEAs</b>
Primary ISB per pupil	£2144	£2198	£2010
Secondary ISB per pupil	£2765	£2929	£2694

31. The figures show that the primary school ISB is close to the average for outer London boroughs, whereas the secondary ISB is some six per cent below the average. This reflects a similar pattern to that seen at the time of the last inspection, in that a greater proportion of the LEA's centrally retained expenditure relates to the secondary sector.

32. The LEA has been successful since the last inspection in pursuing additional external sources of income to supplement its revenue and, in particular, its capital budgets. A total of about £1.3 million secured through the council's public service agreement, the Learning and Skills Council and through Connexions will enable the LEA to target aspects of secondary education in need of improvement. The LEA has secured £16 million of public finance initiative (PFI) credits to address the shortage of primary school places identified during the last inspection, while also enhancing the quality of school premises. Funding of approximately £2.7 million, obtained through DfES schemes will further enhance the quality of buildings and provision.

### **Council structure**

33. At the time of the previous inspection the council was criticised for its inadequate and inefficient arrangements for the management of the education service. These were inhibiting progress and adding little value to educational provision in the borough. The post of chief education officer lay at third tier level with accountability to a strategic director rather than to the chief executive.

34. In May 2002, after 19 years, there was a major change in the political balance of the council. The Conservatives gained the majority of seats (39) with Liberal Democrats maintaining control of the remaining 15. There are now 32 new councillors, most of whom have no previous experience of being an elected member.

35. Shortly after the previous inspection, in May 2001, a modernised local government structure was implemented. The business of the council is now conducted through a single party cabinet structure consisting of nine councillors, with some cabinet members holding both service and cross-cutting portfolios. An education and culture overview and scrutiny committee oversees the work of the education service and examines decisions and policies, sometimes through specially established task groups. As required, the decision-making timetable is published in the forward plan to ensure transparency and to increase community knowledge of and involvement in council business.

36. Three cabinet members share the portfolio for the Education, Arts and Leisure Department and have individual responsibilities in the following areas:

- schools;
- early, adult and special education; and
- libraries, arts and sports.

37. Structures for the management of council departments were reviewed in April 2001 and the chief education officer, now the director for education, arts and leisure, reports directly to the chief executive. With the three other strategic directors she is a member of the executive board led by the chief executive. Responsibilities have been clarified and her strategic role is now well established.

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

38. The LEA has a highly satisfactory strategy for school improvement expressed clearly in the Education Development Plan 2002-2007. This plan is well structured and priorities are securely rooted in a comprehensive audit of quality and performance. Schools and other partners have been consulted and fully support identified priorities. Clear progress is evident since the last inspection when the EDP 1999-2002 was unsatisfactory; the weaknesses identified then have now been fully addressed.

39. The detailed evaluation of the previous EDP contains a good analysis of data and signals some key elements for further development. The audit takes into account an appropriate range of evidence, including the recommendations arising from the previous inspection report. Best Value principles are used in establishing the relative strengths and weaknesses of the LEA's performance. The audit highlights the gap between the LEA targets and the schools' aggregate targets for 2003 at Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4. It indicates, for including in the EDP, the work that needs to be done in order for the challenging public service agreement targets to be achieved.

40. The school improvement programme incorporates all national priorities and themes as well as two appropriate local priorities. These are organised under the following six key priority areas, all of which are well justified by the audit:

- raising attainment in secondary education;
- tackling underachievement / narrowing the gap;
- ensuring access to a socially inclusive education for all pupils;

- raising attainment in early years and in primary education;
- improving leadership and management through monitoring and evaluation and school self-review; and
- improving the quality of teaching by tackling teacher retention and recruitment and through continuing professional development.

41. Links with other local plans are identified through a matrix and are referenced within individual activities. In most cases activities are sharply focused, although there is some lack of consistency in terms of breadth and coverage. Particular care has been taken to demonstrate the support provided for raising the attainment of under-performing groups. Success criteria are generally specific and measurable, but in a few cases they are too imprecise to be useful evaluative tools. There is a comprehensive framework for monitoring and evaluation, including regular progress checking and reporting to cabinet and the overview and scrutiny committee.

42. Following the previous inspection the LEA implemented effectively a good action plan, which incorporated the key priorities from the Education Development Plan (EDP 1999-2002). Progress was tracked and most deadlines and targets were met. An effective policy has now been established for providing incremental support to schools causing concern, and good progress has been made in supporting school self-evaluation and review. There has been very high attendance at centrally offered courses targeted at improving the quality of teaching; this aspect of school activity, as evidenced by Ofsted inspections, is improving. A revised Behavioural Support Plan has been published and significant changes are being made in the structure and range of provision for pupils with no school place. Where progress has been unsatisfactory, as, for example, in attendance rates, activities for improvement are clearly identified in the current EDP. The LEA is becoming more rigorous about using data to drive improvement, although there are some areas, such as in monitoring the progress of looked after children, where management information is not used well.

43. Identified EDP activities are well managed, although the SEN strategy is not fully embedded in the plan. Implementation is underway in all priorities and progress is highly satisfactory. However, provisional test and examination results for the current year indicate that the LEA has not met some of its challenging targets, although at Key Stage 2 performance remains above national provisional figures and there are indications that standards are rising at Key Stage 3. A rigorous analysis of recent data is underway and the LEA is rightly refocusing some of its activities to address the underperformance.

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

44. The allocation of resources to priorities is highly satisfactory. This aspect was unsatisfactory at the last inspection. The LEA has made good progress and has responded well to recommendations.

45. Following a period of considerable financial austerity, the council is increasingly able to demonstrate, through resource allocation, the high priority it gives to education. The quality of longer term financial planning has improved. Individual services produce annual service plans and performance reviews, which together present a detailed analysis of areas of

budgetary pressure and required growth, and inform the council's three-year financial plan. Discussions about the next year's budget begin in good time, so that services receive an early indication of how much they are likely to receive.

46. The quality of financial planning within the education department is good. Plans are linked suitably to the objectives of the community plan and to those of other statutory plans. Additional council funding, and that received from external sources, is targeted at stated priorities such as increasing the number of school places and increasing in-borough provision for pupils with special educational needs.

47. The budget is closely monitored, at departmental and at corporate level. Cabinet members receive monthly reports and projections, while overview and scrutiny committees monitor financial progress quarterly. There has been some progress in regaining control of the SEN budget and the overspend is projected to reduce significantly in 2002-2003.

48. In the school survey, primary schools reported a high level of satisfaction with the LEA's process of consultation on the planning of school budgets. Secondary schools were far less complimentary, but their views are more favourable than at the last inspection. Schools value the LEA's willingness to discuss the distribution of the education budget, but they report only limited consultation regarding the planning of the education budget in relation to that for other council services.

49. The LEA has met all government spending targets. The funding formula is satisfactory and provides schools with a transparent indication of how their budgets have been calculated. However, the formula has changed relatively little over many years and there are aspects which are in need of review. In particular, the formula allocates a significantly lower proportion of the individual schools budget on the basis of the number of pupils than the average for outer London boroughs.

50. The LEA's accounting procedures are mostly clear and logical. However, the arrangement whereby several lump sum allocations in schools' budgets appear under the heading of 'additional educational needs' runs counter to common practice in the vast majority of LEAs. More usually, spending on additional educational needs contributes to the total spending on SEN. The different interpretation in Richmond upon Thames limits the LEA's ability to compare its total spending on SEN with that in other LEAs.

51. Schools are generally well supported in their budget making and control. The close liaison between staff in the education finance team and schools' attached inspectors ensures that the quality of financial management is appropriately regarded as one of a range of indicators of the overall health of the LEA's schools. The latest out-turn statement for 2000-2001 indicates that very few schools had negative balances at the end of the year, and secondary schools generally carried forward only small balances. However, too high a proportion of primary schools, about one third, carried forward balances in excess of ten per cent of their planned budgets.

### **Structures to ensure continuous improvement, including Best Value**

52. The council's performance in this aspect remains satisfactory, as reported following



the last inspection.

53. The council's external auditor gave an unqualified confirmation on the authority's Best Value Performance Plan (BVPP) for 2001-02, that statutory requirements had been met. The auditor reported good progress in implementing the council's performance management framework and its programme of reviews. Although the 2002-03 BVPP indicates many areas where education performance compares very favourably with other London boroughs, the service met or exceeded only about 60 per cent of the targets set for 2001-02. The vast majority of missed school improvement targets are ambitious, though realistic, and appropriate focused action is detailed within the EDP and other plans to improve performance.

54. Comprehensive guidance is available to those conducting Best Value reviews. The education service has been appropriately involved in a good range of cross-cutting Best Value reviews covering areas such as financial support services. Subsequent inspections of Best Value reviews have reported a mixed picture in terms of the quality of the services involved, but all have been judged as being likely to improve. The process has provided a rigorous challenge to existing methods of service delivery and, in a good number of cases, has led to significant change.

55. The education service is currently conducting a wide-ranging Best Value review covering 18 of the services it offers to schools. The review is progressing satisfactorily. It has been well timed to draw on the findings of the last LEA inspection report and to make best use of this report. The authority found it difficult to obtain reliable comparative data because of the differences between LEAs in the way in which services are funded and delivered. Schools and staff have been consulted extensively about their perceptions of the services. Though schools have been reluctant to engage in the process of challenging methods of service delivery, the appointment of an external consultant has provided a valuable dimension of external challenge. The quality of the improvement plans produced by each of the services is varied; some plans provide too little detail to enable progress to be monitored effectively and their overall effectiveness to be evaluated.

56. The council has issued clear and helpful guidance to improve the consistency of service planning and performance management. The service plan for education, arts and leisure appropriately draws together the actions, objectives and targets deriving from other statutory plans, relating them to the broader aims of the community plan. However, there is too little evidence of routine and regular progress monitoring. The overview and scrutiny committee monitors the service plan annually, but this is too infrequent to assure elected members that plans are being implemented as intended.

#### ***Recommendation***

In order to improve the accountability of elected members for progress within the education department:

- increase the frequency with which the overview and scrutiny committee monitors the progress being made in implementing the education service plan.

57. The quality of the self-evaluation of the work of the education service, including that evident in the EDP and the director's statement informing this inspection process, is appropriately analytical and critical.

## Section 2: Support for school improvement

### Summary

58. The LEA's provision in this area was satisfactory at the time of the last inspection, since when it has made considerable improvements in response to all the recommendations. There is now a well-defined strategy, which makes appropriate use of performance indicators, effectively identifies weaknesses in schools and allocates resources proportionately. It has contributed to the continued improvements in standards at Key Stages 1 and 2 and, recently Key Stage 3. The LEA is well placed to make further progress at Key Stage 3 and has rightly identified the need to focus more attention on raising the attainments of the lower performers at Key Stage 4.

59. Strengths of the school improvement strategy lie in the very successful identification of weaker aspects of school performance that require intervention and in the effective work to achieve improvements. The preventative focus of this work is exemplified by the fact that there are no schools judged by Ofsted to be in need of special measures or to have serious weaknesses.

60. The amalgamation of the inspection and advisory service with some of the key services for social inclusion facilitates effective co-operation in tackling areas where underachievement is associated with factors such as ethnicity or poor attendance and there are already strong signs of impact in some areas. The management support provided for headteachers and governors is highly satisfactory. There is good support in helping schools to improve their effectiveness as purchasers of traded services, but grounds maintenance and property services are of unsatisfactory quality.

61. Good use is made of external agencies and of school expertise to strengthen and enhance LEA school improvement capacity. LEA services support school improvement more effectively than at the time of the last inspection and offer good value for money overall.

### Monitoring, challenge, support and intervention

62. The last inspection found that the approach to monitoring, challenge, support and intervention was satisfactory overall, although not sufficiently differentiated. It is now good. The LEA has modified its monitoring procedures so that, while retaining their former clarity, they give greater recognition to the varying needs of schools. In consultation with headteachers, an effective system has been established whereby visits by the assigned inspector are reduced to one per year, unless the school's performance or other circumstances justify further monitoring or intervention. The published criteria for determining this are well understood by schools and have their support. The agenda for the monitoring visits are better prepared and more selective, allowing both sides to pinpoint issues in advance on the basis of improved performance data and school self-review.

63. The LEA, in keeping with its commitment to self-managing schools, has continued to support them appropriately in developing the school self-review process. It has provided training compatible with the approach set out in Ofsted's *Framework for Inspecting Schools*.

School development plans are monitored by assigned inspectors who use performance data and other available information to engage in a challenging debate about standards and areas for improvement; most schools plan in the LEA's recommended style, which draws upon the review process. Self-review has been embraced by schools, although there remains some variation between them in the way it is implemented.

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

64. The new system is highly satisfactory, ensuring that the resources are deployed more accurately in proportion to the needs of schools. The needs are determined by effective analysis of performance data and other information in consultation with headteachers and governors. Additional information, especially for benchmarking and comparisons in relation to groups of pupils, has enhanced the data since the last inspection. This helps to identify effectively specific issues affecting particular phases, subjects, or pupil groups in all or some schools. These issues are reflected fully in the EDP and, where appropriate, they are tackled jointly by the services comprising the school improvement division.

65. The remaining exception to the careful differentiation of support is that the assigned inspectors routinely attend one governing body meeting per term in every school. This is appreciated by governors, but with other forms of monitoring and review becoming increasingly comprehensive, it is no longer a cost-effective use of inspectors' time.

66. Schools now fully understand the distinction between the services to which they are entitled and those which they may purchase. Where the LEA is the provider, the options offered allow for appropriate flexibility. As recommended in the last report, there is now suitable, additional guidance to schools choosing to buy elsewhere.

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

67. This area was satisfactory in the last inspection. In its self-assessment the LEA judged performance to have remained satisfactory, but also pointed to a number of improvements. No fieldwork was carried out as part of the current inspection. However, an analysis of documentary evidence supports the LEA's assessment. The provision is now highly satisfactory with few weaknesses.

68. The range of data, including individual pupil data, now available to the LEA and schools is comprehensive. Despite some remaining technical difficulties in electronic transfer, data are shared reasonably effectively in order to facilitate the movement of pupils between phases. This information is used with increasing sophistication to gauge the value added between phases and key stages. However, some secondary headteachers are hesitant about the validity of Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 value-added information and discussions about these data will form part of the annual visit by inspectors.

69. School targets, which were sometimes unrealistic, or perceived as such, are now generally attainable. Efforts to close the gap between the aggregated school targets and those of the LEA have not been entirely successful, as more challenging targets have recently been set under the public service agreement. However, this additional challenge applies mainly at

Key Stage 3, and here the targets are in proportion to the considerable efforts being made by schools and the LEA under the national strategy.

70. The quality of support continues to be generally good. Support for secondary schools, formerly a relative weakness, has been strengthened greatly by recruiting new inspectors and consultants. The LEA disseminates good practice by recognising and promoting the expertise available from advanced skills teachers, leading teachers and key primary teachers. It works closely with its Beacon schools and other schools, which have cultivated special strengths, sometimes facilitating productive pairings of schools. It supports schools applying for specialist status and accredited quality marks. At the same time, it promotes excellence and distinctive character in its schools, as was recommended in the last report. The high degree of mutual support in school improvement owes much to the good relations between schools, and between them and the LEA.

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

71. At the time of the last inspection, support for schools causing concern was satisfactory, although categories of intervention were blurred. Provision is now very good. The LEA has addressed the issue and further developed its approach. The LEA is highly successful in identifying schools, and areas within schools, with weaknesses warranting intervention, and in working closely with schools to rectify them. The strength of the process is that it is essentially preventative. It is still the case that no school has been subject to special measures or identified as having serious weaknesses as a result of an Ofsted inspection. Most of the schools causing concern to the LEA make good progress within a reasonable timescale.

72. The LEA knows its schools well as a result of its routine monitoring procedures and identifies problems as they emerge. It has consulted effectively to produce simpler and wholly transparent criteria and categories for intervention to which headteachers and governors subscribe. There are equally clear published procedures for use in cases where professional competence is in question. The quality of the assigned inspectors' contribution is very good, particularly to action planning and organising additional specialist and intensive support where it is needed. There is good support to senior and middle managers by well qualified inspectors and consultants, headteacher mentors, literacy and numeracy consultants and, recently, ICT and Key Stage 3 consultants. As in other areas, the partnerships arranged with Beacon and other schools are helpful.

73. Schools receiving support speak of the LEA's sensitive approach and the sense of partnership engendered. Governors feel well informed and confident about the LEA's judgements. It is rare for the LEA to need to consider using its special powers, but the cases studied show that it is prepared to act resolutely when the need arises. Members are kept well informed and monitor the situation closely. The LEA budgets appropriately for graduated support to schools.

### **Support for literacy and numeracy**

74. Support for literacy and numeracy were good at the time of the previous inspection and a steady rise in Key Stage 2 standards has been evident since that time. No detailed

fieldwork was carried out in these areas during the current inspection and the overall judgements remain the same. Schools now rate the LEA's support highly and are clear that good quality training and intensive work with particular schools has contributed significantly to a rise in standards. However, provisional results for 2002 indicate a fall of one per cent in English and a one per cent rise in mathematics, with both results below target. The main challenge for this high achieving LEA is sustaining the drive and enabling schools to achieve even higher standards.

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

75. The LEA's support for raising standards in information and communication technology and using it within the curriculum was unsatisfactory at the time of the last inspection. The current inspection confirms the LEA's very thorough self-evaluation that this remains the case in spite of recent progress. Standards are below average, improvement is slower than that nationally and school perceptions continue to be unfavourable. However, the LEA now has the capacity to target resources effectively, as a result of a comprehensive review of all schools' provision. There have been improvements in school ICT development plans, the specific teaching of Key Stage 3 ICT in all schools, and an increased take-up of ICT courses at Key Stage 4. The LEA has begun to move forward and is considerably better placed to raise standards than it was at the last inspection. A firm strategy, clearly focused on support in ICT as a subject and across the curriculum, remains the key to progress.

76. The impact of the LEA's support on standards and school perceptions is limited because some of the key improvements are very recent, gathering momentum only during the last two terms. The corporate strategy for ICT, linking all schools to an area network, and the need to make systems compatible with those nationally, have been allowed to delay, unduly, the production of the co-ordinated strategy for ICT in the curriculum recommended in the last report. This strategy is still at the draft stage. Officers, as well as schools, have sometimes allowed technical problems to become confused with inadequacies in curriculum support.

#### ***Recommendation***

In order to improve LEA support for raising standards of attainment in ICT:

- as a matter of urgency, complete the consultation on and development of the ICT curriculum strategy document and disseminate it to schools.

77. The ICT adviser has sensibly been released from the technical trouble-shooting, which had consumed his time and useful additional appointments have been made, including a secondary inspector with an ICT brief and the ICT Key Stage 3 consultant. Extra consultants have been appointed to specific tasks. As a result, the schools have been supported in raising the quality of the school development plans so that they conform to the requirements of the National Grid for Learning initiative. The professional development programme has been strengthened, particularly regarding ICT management.

78. Schools have been helped in moderating teacher assessments so that they can evaluate progress against LEA and school targets. All secondary schools were supported in conducting self-reviews and, as a result of the LEA's analysis, some have been targeted for additional support. In recognition of the poor resources identified in the last report, schools have been delegated substantial extra funds, specifically for the purchase of additional equipment. The planned link with an inner city technology facility and the innovative Classrooms of the Future project offer promise only at this stage.

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

79. The LEA's support for raising standards at Key Stage 3 is highly satisfactory. Improving teaching and learning in secondary schools is high on its agenda and it has embraced the Key Stage 3 national strategy with determination, incorporating it within the EDP and adding a local dimension by identifying and targeting areas where there are barriers to progress.

80. Overall attainment is satisfactory, but the rate of improvement between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 is well below average and indicates a dip in standards at Key Stage 3 at least as severe as that found nationally. However, the change in the pupil population between the primary and secondary levels invalidates simple comparisons. To assist schools in finding objective measures of pupil progress between key stages, the LEA has encouraged the adoption of the optional national tests at Year 7. It has usefully compared the results statistically with those at Year 9, both at school and LEA levels. More recently it has taken advantage of the pupil level data now available to compare end-of-key stage results for matched groups of pupils.

81. The impact has been to show clearly that, while there are variations between the schools in the end of Key Stage 3 tests, pupils across the borough are making progress in line with national trends. There are indications that schools are not fully aware of these developments. The LEA, therefore, must persist in sharing its analyses in order to avoid schools being discouraged by the LEA's ambitious targets, and also to encourage an acceptance of the contribution being made by the Key Stage 3 strategy. Meanwhile, the LEA has made a provisional analysis of the Key Stage 3 results for 2002. This shows that standards have risen, suggesting that the strategy is already having some impact and giving cause for optimism that the targets are attainable.

82. The LEA's management of the national strategy is good; the action plans are sound and are being implemented on time. The strand managers and consultants have been chosen carefully and are well qualified for their roles. Information has been used effectively to identify needs and target resources proportionately. Consultants are actively seeking schools' evaluations at each stage and assigned inspectors are monitoring the training within schools. Headteachers are well informed and schools are generally satisfied with the quality and level of support. In particular they praise the work of consultants.

83. It is too early to be confident of the overall effect on teaching and learning, but there are numerous signs of impact in particular areas. For instance, the summer schools, usually run jointly with primary teachers, have enabled secondary teachers to benefit from insights gained through the Key Stage 2 literacy and numeracy strategies. All schools have revised

their English schemes and the majority their mathematics schemes. There are also indications of improvement in schools where consultants have worked with other services to overcome particular barriers to progress, such as low attendance.

### **Support for minority ethnic groups, including Traveller children**

84. The support to schools in raising the standards of minority ethnic and Traveller children was satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection. Recommendations were to clarify provision through a service level agreement, and to develop further the service's strategic role in advising schools on good practice in supporting under-performing groups.

85. Although this function was not subject to detailed fieldwork during the current inspection there was clear evidence, in line with the LEA's own assessment, that considerable progress had been made in response to the previous report. Support is now highly satisfactory with few weaknesses. To meet the needs of the increasingly diverse school population the work of the ethnic minority and Traveller achievement service has been extended and is closely integrated with English as an additional language support and racial equality provision. Effective cross-service links have been established, and activities in the Education Development Plan are progressing very well. For example, a detailed audit has identified the under-achievement of African Caribbean pupils and a project, involving all secondary schools and led by an external consultant, has been established.

86. The brochure of services to schools now clarifies schools' entitlements to the ethnic minority and Traveller achievement service and an information pack is available outlining the work of the service and offering guidance on raising the attainment of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds. Schools are clear about the reasons behind LEA targeted activity. Following a Best Value review, a detailed action plan is driving a good range of action, including the maintenance of a resources area, home-school liaison activities and co-ordination with external agencies. Support for Traveller children is a particular strength.

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

87. The LEA provides good support for gifted and talented pupils and has developed the strengths reported at the last inspection. The LEA's policy has been well established for some years and the standards reached by the most able pupils are generally higher than the national average. Nevertheless, as a result of close monitoring, the LEA has identified particular schools where there are weaknesses and has included targeted activities within the EDP. A designated inspector provides good leadership, ensuring that the LEA's strategy is managed coherently. Two teachers are funded to be released part-time to serve as LEA primary and secondary co-ordinators, and to manage the phase working parties, which meet regularly.

88. The central provision depends heavily, and appropriately, on the strong partnership between the LEA and schools. For example, one of the co-ordinators manages a website, which contains useful material for parents, teachers and pupils, some of which has been developed by local schools. There are projects on critical thinking, science and mathematics and annual challenge days when like-minded pupils are brought together. The summer schools draw in respected outside experts.



89. Schools are responding well to the high expectations held by the LEA. Each school has its own co-ordinator who is expected to maintain an informative register of all the gifted and talented pupils in the school. Assigned inspectors engage the schools in debate about challenging targets for these pupils and the LEA supplies comparative performance data relevant to high achievers. Each secondary school department is expected to demonstrate the particular provision it is making for gifted and talented pupils within its subject. The LEA has a good knowledge of its schools' performance in this regard. In addition to its routine monitoring, it has conducted two borough-wide surveys since the last inspection and has shared its analysis with the schools.

### **Support for school management**

90. The LEA was supporting school management appropriately at the time of the last inspection. No fieldwork was carried out in this area during the inspection, but there was sufficient evidence to support the LEA's judgement that its support is now highly satisfactory. Within this picture some good features were apparent, including the useful consultations between school managers and assigned inspectors. School self-evaluation is still well supported. The LEA has continued to encourage headteachers and aspiring headteachers to participate in national management training schemes and to apply for accredited quality marks. The continuing professional development programme still provides useful training for senior and middle managers.

91. There has been increased attendance at management training. The quality of secondary support, particularly for middle managers, has improved as the LEA has added to its expertise in this phase. A well-structured course has been devised on applying the principles of Best Value in schools and there is improved guidance on the procurement of services. Improving leadership and management is prioritised in the EDP, which targets, in particular, schools which have new headteachers, senior and middle managers, and those that are vulnerable for reasons related to performance. Data from the most recent school inspections indicate an improvement in the quality of management since previous inspections.

### **Support to governors**

92. This function was good at the time of the previous inspection and the LEA's self-evaluation indicates that this effective practice has been further developed. No additional fieldwork was undertaken and the judgement for this aspect of the LEA's work stays the same, although there are some areas for development. Consultation and communication with governors continue through the director's termly report and newly established termly meetings between the cabinet member for schools, the director, senior officers and chairs of governors. Schools particularly value the excellent governor helpline and the very high quality support given to governors of schools causing concern to the LEA.

93. The percentage of governing bodies purchasing support from the service has increased. Sixty four per cent subscribe to the full package offered to schools, and all governing bodies access some form of support from the service. Although governors sign up for courses, actual attendance is frequently too low and the updating and further development

of their knowledge and skills are thus put at risk. Recently the education consultative committee has been disbanded and changes are being made to the ways in which governors are appointed to LEA groups and panels. The rationale behind these changes has not been clarified to all parties and, as yet, an alternative consultation arrangement has not been suggested.

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

94. The effectiveness of services to support school management is highly satisfactory, although some weaknesses remain in individual services. The LEA has improved its advice to schools on the procurement of services. It has also responded well to the recommendation in the last report that it should provide clearer guidance on schools' entitlement to centrally-funded services.

95. Survey responses from both primary and secondary schools show a significant improvement in their ratings of the LEA's support to improve schools' effectiveness as purchasers of traded services. Their response is among the most positive from all LEAs surveyed. The council's corporate procurement service offers further independent advice to schools on a traded basis, over and above that available from service-specific council departments.

96. The LEA's booklet of support services to schools provides clear information about a wide range of traded and centrally funded services, whether provided by the education department or by other council departments. The booklet gives details of a good range of alternative service providers, though making it clear that the LEA cannot endorse their quality. Schools have expressed very positive views about the clarity of service specifications, and note a significant improvement since the last inspection. However, the booklet contains too little information to help schools to access building and property services, and the information on the LEA's centrally retained building and development function is too brief. The arrangements for schools to purchase traded services are clear and appropriate.

97. The council has shown a clear commitment to improving the quality and cost-effectiveness of the services it offers. Services offered by the education department are currently undergoing a Best Value review, while many of those offered by other council departments have already been reviewed. While some of the changes resulting from the process have yet to result in service improvements, the prospects are promising.

98. The quality of **financial services** provided to schools is satisfactory, but there are weaknesses in the council's financial information system. A newly configured, LEA traded service, offers various levels of bursarial support and training to schools alongside a range of external providers. Take-up of the LEA service is relatively low, but an internal survey has indicated high levels of satisfaction with the provision.

99. The centrally funded school finance support service fully meets its statutory obligations with regard to school clients and to the council. The service provides valuable financial benchmarking information to schools. There are appropriately close links with the

school improvement team, enabling assigned inspectors to include schools' financial health within their broader remit.

100. While primary schools have a high opinion of the LEA's financial support services, a minority of secondary schools rate the service as poor, citing slow reconciliation of accounts and weak payroll information. There are firm plans to replace the council's financial information management system, which is dated and does not enable schools to transfer financial information electronically to the council's systems. The monthly manual collection of financial information from schools is inefficient.

101. **Personnel** support was satisfactory at the time of the last inspection, and the LEA's self-evaluation indicates that it remains satisfactory. No detailed fieldwork in this area was undertaken during this inspection, and the judgement is unchanged.

102. Following a Best Value review, the council's corporate personnel department now provides personnel support for schools. All schools have chosen to purchase one of four levels of comprehensive support, details of which are set out clearly in the support services booklet. This also contains a helpful summary of schools' responsibilities should they choose to buy personnel services from an alternative provider. Though secondary schools, in particular, remain critical of the quality of professional personnel advice and casework, there has been a significant improvement in schools' views since the last inspection.

103. **Property services** were poor at the time of the last inspection. Despite a major reconfiguration of service delivery in February 2001, the quality of the service has improved little and is still unsatisfactory. In the school survey, schools judge that building maintenance services and the planning and scheduling of building projects are less than satisfactory, and their ratings have fallen slightly since the last inspection.

104. Following a Best Value review, the council outsourced its construction and property services to an experienced external provider. The council managed the process poorly at the outset, and there was no written contract until well after the partnership came into force. Since then, schools have experienced delays in the commissioning and implementation of LEA-funded building projects and surveys, and the council has been forced to suspend standing orders in order to ensure that school premises were ready in time. Senior council officers and managers from the external provider are working hard to improve service delivery.

105. Despite these difficulties, the contract indicates that schools have access, through the external provider, to a good range of property services, including technical support, surveying, term maintenance contracts for mechanical and electrical equipment and emergency repairs. However, the LEA does not offer schools a service level agreement for client support should they choose to purchase property services through the central contract, nor does it offer advice to schools choosing to use alternative providers. This is unsatisfactory. Schools have become aware only gradually of the range of services offered and their cost. The arrangement whereby schools commission work via the education department which, in turn, instructs corporate construction and property services contributes to delays and to frustration for schools in chasing up the progress of their building and maintenance requirements.

106. The booklet of support services contains too few details about the LEA's centrally retained building and development function. Additionally, the LEA provides too little information about schools' responsibilities in relation to the repair and maintenance of their building assets and about the support available in order to help them exercise that responsibility.

**Recommendation**

In order to improve property services:

- ensure that the respective responsibilities of schools and the council with regard to building and property maintenance are set out transparently and that schools have access to a cost-effective client support service.

107. Support for **ICT strategy, infrastructure and support for administration** was satisfactory at the time of the last inspection, and the LEA's self-evaluation indicates that it remains satisfactory. No detailed fieldwork was undertaken in this area during this inspection, and the judgement is unchanged.

108. The council's ICT infrastructure has developed considerably since the last inspection. All schools now have direct access Internet connections and the LEA has established a new traded service, the school online support service, to provide and support this filtered Internet connection via the corporate-wide area network. The council is seeking to secure the sustainability of its ICT infrastructure, as demand increases, by entering into partnership with an external provider.

109. The council has laid the foundations for a significant improvement in the use of ICT in schools' and the LEA's administration, and also for harnessing the curricular potential of ICT in schools. Schools now have access to an intranet site containing a good range of useful information. However, some aspects remain underdeveloped at this stage. For example, while e-mail communication is now commonplace between schools and the LEA, there remains much paper communication. There are, as yet, no secure facilities for the electronic transfer of information between schools and the LEA.

110. The LEA's support to schools in procuring **cleaning** services was poor at the time of the last inspection. While the number of schools choosing to buy the council service remains small, it has risen slightly recently. Overall, the quality of the service is now satisfactory.

111. The council's customer and support service manages three group cleaning contracts on behalf of schools. The contracts are relatively new and recent evaluations indicate that schools are generally satisfied with the service provided. There have been significant improvements in the quality of client support. Officers now monitor service standards frequently in all schools, making good use of new technology to record data and to produce monitoring reports. They deal with complaints promptly and effectively. Appropriately, the service also provides a consultancy service to schools choosing not to buy into the centrally managed contracts, though the fee structure for this service is not clearly set out to schools.

112. The **grounds maintenance** service was unsatisfactory during the last inspection. Insufficient progress has been made and it remains unsatisfactory, but there are promising prospects of improvement.

113. The service to schools is provided by an external contractor who supplies the authority's entire grounds maintenance requirements. The contract was negotiated some years ago and expires at the end of 2002. The council's parks and open spaces section manages the contract on behalf of schools. About half the schools currently purchase the service. The LEA's own customer satisfaction survey indicates that about two-thirds of those that responded rate the service as satisfactory or better. However, the income generated by the contract allows officers to monitor quality only about twice a year. The council does not offer technical support or advice to schools choosing not to buy into the central contract.

114. There have been major improvements in the quality of the **catering** service offered to schools. It was unsatisfactory at the time of the last inspection, but the quality is now good.

115. Following the breakdown some two years ago of the council's own catering service to schools, the council has entered into a five-year contract with an external provider to provide hot meals. The contractor is also responsible for the maintenance of heavy kitchen equipment. All primary and special schools have chosen to buy the service, and satisfaction ratings are high. The take-up of free and purchased meals is good and there is no council subsidy. The service level agreement between schools and the council enables the council to employ an external consultant to monitor the quality of the service and to provide nutritional advice to schools.

116. Schools choosing not to purchase the service are able to access suitable procurement advice should they wish to do so.

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

117. There is a good range of strategies for recruiting and maintaining the supply and quality of teachers and the LEA is reasonably successful in its efforts in the face of considerable difficulties. Residential accommodation is expensive, even by the standards of outer London. Teacher turnover is considerably higher than that of the LEA's statistical neighbours and LEAs nationally. The problem is particularly severe in secondary schools in shortage subjects. The proportion of unfilled vacancies nearly doubled between 1999 and 2000. However, the rate of increase was reduced from 2000 to 2001. The numbers of newly qualified teachers applying to the authority has reduced, but sufficient are still attracted for the supply and quality to be maintained. Furthermore, most are retained beyond the first year. Teachers are most likely to be lost later, as they approach junior and middle management. The LEA has a very detailed knowledge of the workforce and tailors its programmes accordingly.

118. The programme for newly qualified teachers is very strong. The recruitment process is rigorous and is jointly managed by the LEA and headteachers. Successful applicants rarely fail to be offered a permanent post. Virtually all primary schools subscribe to the scheme. A headteacher is funded to run the programme, which is imaginative and well documented,

offering good training for both newly qualified teachers and induction tutors. Secondary newly qualified teachers participate in sessions of general interest, but organise others within departments, often in co-operation with other schools. The LEA monitors the quality of the planning for these. The induction training is accredited towards a master's degree.

119. The recruitment and retention manager co-ordinates strategies aimed at other teachers. Recent promotional functions have been well attended and have resulted in some successes in recruiting. Programmes are offered for overseas teachers and teachers returning to the profession. Employment-based routes into teaching are encouraged. Two schools are currently being supported in their applications to become training schools. The well-regarded professional development programme is suitably varied and relevant, with a significant element aimed specifically at middle management. Again, it includes courses accredited towards a master's degree.

120. In keeping with the council's commitment to key worker housing, there are several mechanisms to make accommodation more affordable. Former caretakers' houses provide low-cost accommodation and other accommodation, at no more than the going rate, is offered in co-operation with a housing association. The LEA operates an informal bureau to find property to rent in the private sector and offers an interest free loan arrangement.

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

121. At the time of the last inspection the services contributing to school improvement were highly satisfactory, although there were some significant weaknesses. The LEA points to a range of substantial improvements, which are confirmed by this inspection. The strengths are now more marked, with some good overarching features, and there are no major weaknesses.

122. Strengths remain in leadership, deployment, induction and professional development as well as in the good quality of advice given. The good leadership is further exemplified in the robust strategic and operational planning underlying the relevant priorities of the new EDP, its timely implementation, and the purposeful restructuring of the services. The refinement of performance management, and its extension to include all members of the new division, has heightened awareness of the corporate and departmental priorities for school improvement.

123. The most serious weakness at the last inspection was a lack of differentiation in the allocation of adviser time according to schools' identified needs. This has been addressed by an improved system of differentiated support, allied to a rigorous approach to time management in the inspection and advisory service. Assignments are carefully monitored to ensure that inspectors are deployed effectively and where the needs are greatest.

124. Another major weakness was in the capacity of the services to support schools in the secondary phase and in particular areas, such as ICT. The LEA has been determined and resourceful in augmenting its expertise in both respects through new, permanent appointments and by employing outside consultants. This latter approach is cost-effective; it increases the capacity of an otherwise lean service, which provides good value for money.

Schools rate the LEA's capacity to support them much more highly than at the last inspection.

## Section 3: Special Educational Needs

### Summary

125. Since the last inspection, the LEA has improved the structure and variety of provision that is available to meet a wider range of special educational needs. It has continued to make progress in the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs in primary and secondary schools. The timeliness of processing and issuing statements has improved. Schools and teachers feel well supported with opportunities for advice and training. However, the strategy for special educational needs has weaknesses. Efforts have been made to improve the monitoring and control of the budget and to ensure that decisions on the allocation of support and placement are transparent and consistent. Not enough has been done to explain to schools the range of SEN provision they are expected to meet from delegated or devolved funding nor to gain the confidence of parents that the provision made is appropriate.

### Strategy

126. The previous inspection judged the strategy for special educational needs to be poor. There was a firm intention to promote inclusion, but documentation about how this was to be achieved was unclear. Schools and parents were frustrated about the lack of a sense of direction. Provision for emotional and behavioural difficulty was poor.

127. Although a number of improvements have been made, some aspects of the LEA's strategy continue to be unsatisfactory. The partnership with parents is not securely founded. The new SEN policy is informative, but falls short of communicating clearly the LEA's short- and medium-term strategic objectives for SEN and their rationale. It covers the items defined in the Code of Practice for SEN (2002), but fails to explain clearly the elements of provision for children with SEN (but without statements) that the LEA expects to be met from maintained schools' budget shares.

128. The LEA is making good progress with inclusion. Since 1998, the percentage of pupils with statements placed in mainstream schools has steadily increased and now exceeds the percentage for England and outer London. In 2000, 1.3 per cent of pupils aged 5-15 were placed in special schools, which is in line with the percentage for outer London and nationally. Ofsted inspections of seven schools that were conducted between January and April 2002 judge provision made by schools for pupils with SEN to be generally good. The LEA, in conjunction with a Beacon school, has made very good use of an inclusion index in procedures for school self-evaluation.

129. The structure of provision for pupils with statements of special needs has improved. Nevertheless, a high percentage of pupils in special schools is placed in the non-maintained and independent sector. To some extent, this reflects the limited capacity of a small LEA to resource a range of specialist provision. The LEA has, however, developed a number of units so that, particularly at Key Stage 1, a range of different special needs is met. Further unit provision to meet the needs of pupils in the autistic spectrum is planned within the new



Private Finance Initiative project. The LEA has also considered the needs of pupils with SEN in the development of innovative projects such as Classrooms of the Future. The structure of provision for emotional and behavioural difficulties has improved greatly and now offers more flexible opportunities for supporting a wider group of children.

130. The LEA ensures that resources are targeted on those pupils who are most in need. Appropriately, the SEN panel tightly monitors requests for multi-disciplinary assessment and placement. Panel members include the principal education psychologist, the inspector for special educational needs, the head of SEN assessment and, when appropriate, the social inclusion officer and consultant paediatrician. Headteachers and the parent partnership officer observe proceedings, but do not make decisions. However, the fact that schools are not represented as full members of the panel reduces confidence in the decisions made. Moderating statements have not been updated in the light of the new Code of Practice for SEN.

131. High numbers of referrals are made to the panel for assessment, many of which are refused. This is unproductive and does little to help regulate the expectations of schools or parents. It indicates that schools are not sufficiently clear about their responsibility to make provision for SEN under *school action* and *school action plus* of the Code of Practice and that they are ill-placed to explain such provision to parents.

#### **Recommendations**

In order to improve the implementation of the strategy for special educational needs:

- update moderating statements and guidance to assist the SEN panel to identify the children who require a multi-professional assessment, and work with schools and governing bodies to clarify and develop the threshold criteria they use when making referral decisions; and
- ensure that schools fully understand their responsibilities for meeting the needs of pupils under *school action* and *school action plus* and that parents are aware of this provision.

132. Partnership with some parents is unsatisfactory. Although parents have few criticisms about the quality of the educational provision their children currently receive, they are critical of the placement process and of administrative inefficiencies. Parents have very high expectations, which may be difficult to meet in all cases, and their relationships with the LEA can be mutually combative and demanding. Parents believe that decisions about placement are driven by considerations about resources rather than needs and that if they press their case they will eventually be successful in their requests. This view is reflected in the number of appeals and tribunals that the LEA has to defend. In the school year 2001-2002, 35 appeals were registered, of which about half were withdrawn. The tribunal found in favour of the parents in five appeals and seven are on-going.

133. The LEA has, so far, taken several reasonable steps to develop the partnership with parents, but these have had insufficient impact. The parent partnership officer is appropriately based in a local voluntary organisation and her objectivity is protected. The LEA contributes to a London mediation service, although it has not established a befriending

service. It provides information to parents on various aspects of SEN provision, which is very instructive, but not always user friendly. Parent representatives are included in the SEN consultative group, but they report that they have too little time for realistic scrutiny of papers and that follow up to the issues that they raise is too limited. Senior LEA officers, including the director of education, arts and leisure and one of the lead members for education, have met parental representatives to hear their concerns. However, these actions have not been totally successful in restoring the required level of confidence. Until this is restored, a high proportion of LEA officers' time will continue to be spent responding to continuous parental enquiries, appeals and criticisms.

### ***Recommendation***

In order to improve the implementation of the SEN strategy:

- build the confidence of parents in the process of placement of pupils with SEN by working with them and members, schools, governors, officers and support services to establish an agreed approach.

134. Special educational needs work has a very high profile in the borough and there are some unusually challenging tasks to complete. Political leadership is good and the lead member is using her auspices to work toward better relationships with parents. The LEA has access to a wide range of specialist support services. The LEA's capacity to further develop and implement the strategy is fairly lean. The lead officer responsible for implementing the strategy has several other complex responsibilities. The head of SEN administration has some strategic responsibilities, but her efforts have inevitably been directed towards improving organisational procedures.

### **Statutory obligations**

135. The previous inspection judged the discharge of statutory duties to be poor. This function is now highly satisfactory and statutory obligations are met. Considerable efforts to improve the statementing process have been successful. The process is tightly monitored and, this year, all statements have been processed within the advisory time limits. The attendance of officers at reviews has improved so that transition reviews, and those where a change in provision is likely to be required, are better targeted. The staffing of the SEN administrative section is also more stable.

136. In spite of some improvements in administrative procedures, parents still raise concerns about the quality and timeliness of responses to their queries and about the specificity with which provision is described in the statement. The quality of the small sample of statements reviewed for this inspection is in line with most statements nationally. However, planning for transition sometimes occurs too late to allow time for parents to learn about and develop confidence in the available alternatives. Neither does it allow for the effective budgeting for the projected costs of specialist independent placements if these are required.

### **SEN functions to support school improvement**

137. The previous inspection judged that the training and support for co-ordinators of special educational needs in schools was satisfactory, although the dissemination of a range of projects was not sufficient. No fieldwork was carried out and this area continues to be satisfactory and has some good features.

138. The support services for SEN provide a good range of specialisms and expertise. They are now managed from within the school improvement division. This has enabled a better link between the school improvement strategies and SEN. Special educational needs co-ordinators are well supported and training is good. Co-ordination between the work of the different services and the schools is ensured through termly in-school meetings. Projects are disseminated through regular newsletters and conferences. Nevertheless, monitoring and moderation of the provision for *school action* and *school action plus* is not sufficiently consistent to help develop the understanding of the threshold between schools' and the LEA's responsibilities.

### **Value for money**

139. The previous inspection judged value for money as unsatisfactory. The budget was overspent and financial decision making lacked transparency. There was too little monitoring of SEN funding or progress made by pupils with SEN. Since the last inspection, the LEA has improved the transparency of financial decision making and the monitoring and control of the SEN budget. Expenditure is in line with similar authorities and the provision made for pupils with SEN is at least satisfactory. Value for money is now satisfactory

140. Support for special educational needs co-ordinators in schools is effective. There are, however, inefficiencies resulting from the high number of requests for multidisciplinary assessments and the high number of appeals. Some pilot work has taken place that monitors the support provided by the school alongside the progress of each statemented pupil in Year 7. It is anticipated that this work will be extended. However, monitoring schools' expenditure and implementing methods of financial management that reinforce the objectives of the LEA's special educational needs strategy and the Code of Practice remain areas of weakness.

### **Recommendation**

In order to improve the value for money of SEN functions:

- consult with headteachers and governors to clarify a strategy for monitoring schools' expenditure on special educational needs and its impact on attainment.

141. Tight procedures for controlling and monitoring the central budget are in place and a new SEN transport policy is in operation. The council has allocated a further £0.5million to the budget allowing £300,000 to provide a contingency. In this financial year, expenditure for out-of-borough placements and transport are still projected to be higher than the amount budgeted.

## **Section 4: Promoting social inclusion**

### **Summary**

142. The council is committed to securing the best for all those living and working in Richmond and recognises that the needs of the vulnerable, excluded and disaffected must be met. There are good measures in place to combat racism and a strong corporate approach guides initiatives. Corporate parenting arrangements for the education of looked after children are weak. Asset management planning is unsatisfactory and much work remains to be done to improve the condition and suitability of school buildings. Some schools are vague about the nature and range of their responsibilities in this area, and timescales for development are unclear. Since the last inspection, however, the LEA has made progress in developing its strategy for social inclusion and this is now satisfactory.

143. The LEA has recently improved provision for pupils who have no school place and support to schools for improving behaviour and attendance. Comprehensive work is taking place to develop schools' awareness of equality issues and thus raise expectations and attainment of pupils. There are some good examples of collaboration between different agencies over specific initiatives and projects, such as work to improve school attendance, although this is still patchy overall. Many improvements are recent and thus their impact on performance is too early to judge. However, the percentage of pupils who leave school without any GCSE qualification and the absence rate in secondary schools are still too high.

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

144. The previous inspection found that the LEA's strategy to promote social inclusion was unsatisfactory. There was insufficient provision for vulnerable pupils and schools were not aware of their entitlement to support. Since then progress has been made and the strategy is now satisfactory

145. Appropriately, social inclusion initiatives are included in statutory plans such as the EDP and the Behavioural Support Plan. In addition, the LEA has supported the work of the drug action and youth offending teams, the Connexions service and efforts to tackle teenage pregnancy. The strategic overview of the contribution of different services, in particular education, health and social services is satisfactory and a local strategic partnership for children and young people has been formed. There are good examples of joint working between the main agencies, although this is still sometimes patchy. The education department has had more success internally, ensuring close working arrangements between services that support social inclusion and school improvement in order to meet the needs of pupil groups at risk.

146. Consideration has been given to appropriate routes for referral to different agencies and services, although this has not yet resulted in a single point of referral or the use of a common referral form. There is some tracking of the involvement of different services with families of pupils who are referred for behaviour support. However, this is not yet sufficiently comprehensive or co-ordinated to identify overlap or omissions in provision

particularly in view of the high proportion of secondary aged pupils living outside the borough.

### ***Recommendation***

In order to improve further the promotion of social inclusion:

- co-ordinate management information systems to enable reasons for under-attainment to be identified and gaps or omissions in provision to be addressed.

The LEA has considerably improved provision for the support for behaviour and education otherwise than at school, especially in the education welfare service,. It has made good use of limited additional resources and has effectively targeted existing resources. Unlike many of its neighbouring authorities, Richmond seldom receives additional national funding for these purposes.

### **The supply of school places**

147. At the time of the last inspection, the LEA's performance in the planning of school places was unsatisfactory. Though areas of difficulty remain, the LEA has addressed effectively the recommendations of the previous report. Performance is now satisfactory.

148. There has been good progress in addressing the shortage of primary school places. The primary Private Finance Initiative scheme has been well planned and the additional provision will supply a four per cent margin in terms of the projected need for school places, thus reaching the lower limit recommended after the last inspection. The provision also includes three units for pupils with SEN, adding appropriately to the LEA's capacity to meet the needs of its pupils within the borough. However, there remain pockets of both under- and over-provision within the borough. Only one school now has a 'bulge class', but primary schools' perceptions of the quality of school place planning have improved only marginally since the last inspection, with 40 per cent of schools still rating the LEA's work in this aspect as poor or very poor.

149. Detailed planning of secondary school places has been slow to develop. Figures for January 2002 show that there is only a 2.7 per cent margin of surplus places in the borough's secondary schools, and projections indicate a growth of about four per cent over the next five to six years. Furthermore, almost 90 per cent of the available capacity is concentrated in one school whose popularity has increased markedly, and in which there are no surplus places in Year 7. The LEA intends to make a further substantial Private Finance Initiative bid to create the necessary margin of surplus capacity, as well as addressing a range of issues concerned with the condition and suitability of school buildings. However, the planning is at an early stage of development, and is further complicated by debate surrounding post-16 provision.

150. Forecasting for primary schools is extremely accurate, and among the best in outer London. In secondary schools, the margin of error was slightly over one per cent in 2000, about average for outer London boroughs. Forecasting is particularly complex, given the high rates of both inward and outward migration of pupils transferring from primary to secondary schools, and the volatility of parental preferences. The reliability of longer-term

projections depends heavily on the accurate modelling of these factors, as well as on the impact of economic factors and housing development. The planning of the secondary Private Finance Initiative bid does not consider sufficiently the potential impact on the supply of school places arising from increased demand for places in schools with greatly improved facilities and, perhaps, with elements of post-16 provision.

### ***Recommendation***

In order to improve further school place planning:

- in consultation with neighbouring authorities, diocesan boards and the Learning and Skills Council, model the impact of the current proposals for change on the supply of and demand for secondary school places.

151. The school organisation committee is appropriately constituted and fulfils its statutory obligations. It has dealt impartially with objections relating to changes in the LEA's provision of special schools. The draft school organisation plan for 2002-07 is of satisfactory quality and, as a result of the school organisation committee's recommendations, is an improvement on the previous year's plan in terms of its clarity and its relationship with other plans. However, aspects of the data referring to pupils with SEN are imprecise.

### **Admissions**

152. Admissions arrangements were good in both primary and secondary schools at the time of the last inspection. The LEA's self-evaluation indicates that the arrangements continue to work well. No detailed fieldwork in this area was undertaken during this inspection, and the judgement is unchanged.

153. Secondary schools continue to hold the admissions service in high regard, with six of the eight schools rating the service as good or very good. Primary schools are less positive than during the last inspection, with about 20 per cent registering their dissatisfaction with the service. However, almost 90 per cent of parents received a place for their child in a school of their first preference in 2001, and the appeals panel upheld only about one third of the appeals heard. Both these figures are in line with national comparators.

### **Asset management**

154. The quality of asset management planning is unsatisfactory. There have been very recent improvements, but the LEA has not fully addressed the recommendation of the previous inspection report requiring it to bring its asset management process in line with the DfES timetable.

155. The LEA's asset management plans for 2001-02 and 2002-03 failed to gain DfES approval, mainly because they did not contain the necessary data on the condition and suitability of schools. The appraisal process also identified deficiencies in the LEA's local policy statement. Weaknesses in the management of the relationship between the council and its outsourced construction and property service in the early stages of the partnership led to a lengthy delay before the survey work began and consequent delays in its completion.

Schools were still receiving the results of their condition surveys at the time of the inspection, many months after the work had been completed. As a result of the appraisal of the 2002-03 asset management plan, the LEA lost its autonomy to use New Deal for Schools condition and modernisation grants.

156. The LEA has since submitted a new asset management plan covering the period 2002-06 to the DfES and is awaiting its assessment. The new plan relates more closely to other statutory plans, and is accompanied by the relevant data. The LEA has also re-gained its autonomy to spend NDS funding. Plans to address the highest priority work have been approved. Nevertheless, condition surveys have identified about £22 million of necessary repair work, giving a per capita bill that is well above average.

157. The LEA has made good use of increased capital resources to invest in new provision. However, there is little clarity in planning to address the broader range of maintenance and renewal stemming from the council's tendency, in the past, to use repair and maintenance expenditure as a budget regulator. The LEA's asset management working group has met only infrequently. Schools do not, in general, have individual asset management plans and some remain unclear as to the balance between their own building and maintenance responsibilities as tenants and those of the LEA as landlord. As a result, neither schools nor the LEA have a clear timescale as to when work is likely to be carried out.

#### ***Recommendation***

In order to improve asset management planning:

- ensure that the LEA fully meets its maintenance and asset management duties.

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

158. The previous inspection found that provision was poor. It was narrow in range and offered pupils very limited contact with education. There were long delays in placing children and poor rates of reintegration into mainstream school. Very good progress has been made since the last inspection and the provision is now satisfactory with some good features. If progress is maintained, the foundations are in place for the development of good provision.

159. There is a good strategy for improvement, coherently set out in all key plans. This includes a sensible range of practical tasks, plus an ambitious proposal to refocus resources made available by the closure of a special school for primary aged pupils. This has now been implemented in the face of considerable controversy. It has resulted in this small LEA having access to a varied range of provision which has the capacity to meet the needs of pupils with a wide range of behaviour problems in Key Stages 2, 3 and 4.

160. The newly designated pupil referral unit forms part of a pupil referral service, which provides outreach behaviour support for secondary schools and alternative provision for Key Stages 3 and 4 on two different sites. The pupil referral unit has only been fully operational since September 2002 and it is, therefore, too early to judge the effectiveness and quality of the provision. However, both sites offer full-time provision with opportunities to attain a

suitable range of GCSEs. All but two pupils who attend the pupil referral unit are provided with full time programmes that offer a broad and balanced curriculum. Those who still receive part-time provision do so because of their health. Pupils who attend the pupil referral unit receive the support of Connexions advisers. Reintegration rates are in line with the national figure and pupils reintegrated into school are well supported. The time required to place a child following referral has been significantly reduced and is for most pupils satisfactory.

161. The range of provision has been extended by profitable partnerships with social services, health and colleges of further education. A very good feature of the provision for Key Stage 4 pupils is the support provided by project workers funded by the social services department. In addition to the pupil referral unit, a full time prevocational scheme is organised for 24 pupils in Year 11, which includes attendance at college, including access to GCSE courses, work experience and support from youth workers. Appropriate evaluation has led to substantial improvements being made in this provision. Pupils who are admitted to the psychiatric hospital and attend a child and adolescent mental health project receive education provided by teachers employed by the LEA. Teaching is also provided, generally on a short-term basis, for a very small number of looked after children who present acute behavioural difficulties.

162. The systematic and tight monitoring of the whereabouts of pupils and their progress is good. The LEA monitors the curriculum of pupils who are placed by schools on extended work experience and those who are educated by their parents at home.

### **Attendance**

163. The previous inspection judged LEA support to improve attendance as unsatisfactory. The LEA had not met targets for reducing unauthorised absences. The support provided by education welfare officers was variable and effectiveness was reduced by the long-term absence of some officers. Support for attendance has improved and is now satisfactory, although there are still a few weaknesses.

164. Rates of attendance in 2000-2001 were below the national figure for secondary schools and the high rate of unauthorised absence in secondary schools was a matter of particular concern. After three years when the attendance rate steadily deteriorated, unverified data for 2001-2002 shows marginal improvement in primary and secondary schools, but deterioration in special schools. Sixty nine per cent of primary schools and 87 per cent of secondary schools improved their rates of attendance. However, despite this improvement, LEA targets for attendance have not been met.

165. Satisfactory steps have been taken to address the recommendations of the previous inspection. New guidelines to schools on attendance have been published, although referral criteria and procedures for progressively increasing the levels of intervention when the pupil's attendance does not improve are not clear or sufficiently systematic.

166. Attendance data is monitored, but the analysis is not sufficient to target support precisely or to evaluate the outcomes of existing strategies. Critical questions, such as the number and names of the children who do not achieve expected levels of attainment because



of attendance problems or the comparison between the rates of attendance of pupils living out of borough with those living within the borough, are not analysed regularly.

### **Recommendation**

In order to improve school attendance:

- develop more detailed analysis of pupil attendance data to inform the development of the attendance strategy and to ensure that support and intervention are targeted effectively on the most persistent problems.

167. The support provided by the education welfare service is allocated appropriately to schools in line with their needs. The staffing of this service is now more stable and schools record that support is at least satisfactory. Target setting visits to some schools have been made in conjunction with the schools assigned inspector. Staffing of the service has been enhanced to provide additional support for pupils who attend Richmond schools but live in neighbouring boroughs. There is greater and more appropriate use of legal powers. Truancy patrols have been conducted and a greater number of parents have been prosecuted because of the prolonged absence of their children.

### **Behaviour support**

168. The last inspection judged LEA support for behaviour unsatisfactory. Despite reductions in the number of permanent exclusions, provision, particularly for secondary schools, was fragmented, unco-ordinated and variable in quality and effectiveness. The LEA has taken reasonable steps to extend and co-ordinate the range of provision for supporting behaviour. This is now satisfactory, although many aspects have been put into place very recently and it is not yet possible to judge effectiveness. Secondary schools, who have not, as yet, felt the effects of the restructuring of the provision, still rate provision as poor.

169. Good and feasible strategies to improve behaviour are included in the EDP and Behavioural Support Plan. The number of permanent and fixed term exclusions has continued to fall. Provision is now better co-ordinated and has the potential to form a continuum of support to meet the range of different school and pupil needs. A primary and a secondary unit, attached to a special and a secondary school respectively, provide education for pupils with statements for emotional and behavioural difficulties. The primary unit opened in January 2002 and has appropriate staffing and accommodation. Despite a very difficult start, there are signs that pupils have settled, are making progress and are provided with good opportunities for integration. The unit plans to provide on-site targeted short-term programmes to support primary aged pupils with behavioural difficulties. In addition, two teachers provide behavioural support to pupils within schools.

170. At secondary age, the newly formed pupil referral service provides short-term placements for pupils who may be dual registered and support to schools, which may also be purchased. Link teachers between schools and the service have been identified. Support has, so far, not been provided to each school because of staffing vacancies last year and more recently because of changes to the structure and organisation of the units.

171. Appropriate steps have been taken to develop provision within secondary schools. learning support units have been established in five schools using the Standards Fund and funding from a public service agreement. Schools were well consulted on the use and distribution of the funds that have generally been used to refurbish accommodation and provide individualised ICT learning programmes. The provision of dedicated staffing for the units is less secure. The LEA has assisted the development of the units through individual reviews conducted by the inspector for special educational needs and the social inclusion officer. Nevertheless, in one or two schools the development of provision, for various reasons, is still fragile, although LEA support and advice is available.

172. The LEA has taken appropriate steps to ensure that support and training for behaviour are embedded in strategies for school improvement. The use of the Pupil Retention Grant is monitored through a written response by secondary schools.

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

173. In the previous inspection arrangements for health and safety and protecting children from significant harm were satisfactory and they remain so. The social services department confirms that the LEA discharges its responsibilities for child protection. The local authority has expressed a commitment to implementing the pan-London child protection procedures and is waiting for these to be finalised before updating existing procedures.

174. Some teachers have expressed confusion about appropriate procedures for referral to the social services department. Recently, the social services department has asked schools to inform parents about a pending referral before contacting the social services department. This requirement is not included in existing procedures, although it is a feature of the draft pan-London procedures. The lead officer confirms that this is being discussed in refresher training, but, as yet, not every teacher has attended the training. There is appropriate advice and support for schools who are reticent about approaching parents before referral and appropriate caveats are being developed to alert teachers to circumstances where contact with parents may not be appropriate.

### ***Recommendations***

In order to improve further child protection procedures:

- clarify with schools the current requirements for informing parents of school concerns about child protection, prior to making a referral to the social services department; and
- ensure schools are informed of circumstances when it is inappropriate to contact parents and from where advice and support may be obtained should difficulties arise.

175. In all other respects requirements are being met. There are appropriate policies and guidelines in place for health and safety, school journeys, and risk assessments. The LEA is represented on the area child protection committee. There is an appropriate policy and programme for training designated teachers and attendance at training is monitored.

## Looked after children

176. Support for raising the attainment of looked after children was satisfactory at the time of the last inspection. An initial scrutiny of evidence suggested that it remained so and it was therefore not identified as an area for further inspection. However, despite enhancements in dedicated staffing to support the attainment of the children, during the inspection of other aspects of LEA provision, three significant weaknesses were identified.

177. Firstly, the database of looked after children has not been completed, although data are available on the attainment of the limited number of looked after children who attend schools in the borough. Secondly, there is no clear agreement about the role that the education department will play as corporate parents in monitoring or supporting the education of children attending schools outside the borough. Finally, while there is a protocol agreed between the education and social services departments to guide decisions on the funding of residential placements outside the borough, it is not clearly understood by all parties.

### *Recommendations*

In order to improve provision for looked after children:

- ensure the completion of a shared database to enable the effective monitoring of the progress of looked after children; and
- agree with social services the corporate parenting roles and responsibilities of the education department in funding, supporting and monitoring the education of looked after children, who attend schools or residential provision outside the borough.

## Measures to combat racism

178. The previous inspection judged the LEA's action in combating racism satisfactory. The council had devised a new policy and planned a range of initiatives. Racial incidents in schools were being monitored. Progress since the last inspection has been sustained and the effectiveness of the LEA's action in combating racism is now good. A strong corporate approach determines the council's policies, management and performance in the area of equality and diversity. There is a structure of corporate and service working groups to ensure that policies are co-ordinated and embedded throughout the work of the council which are led appropriately by the most senior officers.

179. The council has agreed and is implementing a race equality scheme. Responsibilities for actions are clearly defined and training has been provided. In 2001, the council was assessed as having achieved level one of the Commission for Racial Equality's standard for managing and developing performance in equality and diversity and is working to achieve level two by April 2003. Effective work has taken place to improve the representation of black and minority ethnic groups in the council's workforce.

180. The director of education, arts and leisure leads the race equality steering group within the education department, which has appropriate terms of reference to promote race equality and raise standards of attainment of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds who

are at risk of under-achievement. Led by a Beacon school, comprehensive and sensitive steps have been taken to work with schools to develop a sound professional approach to addressing issues of equality and build awareness. An approach that can be used as part of the school's self evaluation has been developed and discussed. Racist incidents in schools are monitored appropriately.

181. Structures and procedures for consulting the minority ethnic communities are reported as sound. Of particular note is the good consultation process employed when obtaining data for monitoring ethnicity that is required for the Pupil Level Annual School Census. The Richmond borough black achievement project has been beneficial in adding the pupil's voice to improving the understanding of the experience of minority ethnic groups and the issues that have an effect on achievement. Although the attainment of minority ethnic pupils is improving, nevertheless, underachievement persists.

## Section 5: Corporate issues

### Summary

182. Education has a high corporate profile. Significant investments of time and money have been made since the last inspection and this has had a beneficial effect on service delivery. Senior officers and members work well together and have a good understanding of the relative strengths and weaknesses of the council's systems and performance. Joint planning across services is beginning to impact on fundamental problems such as the recruitment of staff and partnership work contributes effectively to the achievement of corporate targets. The new administration, only in place since May 2002, has taken appropriate steps to meet its responsibilities. Financial planning for the next three years is underway and a ten-year plan for education has been drafted. While there remains much to do, there is a clear ambition for continuous improvement and satisfactory capacity to achieve this.

### Corporate planning

183. In the previous report corporate planning was satisfactory. Although schools were largely unaware of the detail, the community plan placed a clear emphasis on education and appropriate links were made to targets in other council plans. Corporate planning and implementation overall are still satisfactory.

184. The council's commitment to education remains high. The Local Strategic Partnership, known in Richmond as the community planning and partnership forum, consists of a wide range of partners drawn together to work with the council and establish a shared vision. The agreed vision and objectives are outlined in the community plan and reflected appropriately in other council plans such as the Best Value Performance Plan. The current community plan has been amended recently to reflect more accurately the manifesto commitments of the new administration. However, the revised plan remains too wide-ranging in its aspirations and has not been fully considered in the light of budget proposals. The council is rightly refining these aspirations and producing a more fundamental list that will steer departmental planning for 2003 and beyond. Understandably, since council priorities have not yet been published, there is current widespread anxiety about the nature of the commitment to developing post-16 education and the perceived intention of the council to develop such provision in schools.

### *Recommendation*

In order to improve the implementation of corporate and departmental plans:

- work with key partners to agree a corporate strategy for post-16 provision that takes account of developments within and beyond the borough.

185. The executive board works effectively to ensure that action to meet corporate objectives is jointly established across departments. Although the community plan and the

Best Value Performance Plan do not fully echo this interrelation of departmental activity, education plans make appropriate reference to corporate strategies and plans.

186. The chief executive maintains a core role in monitoring progress and the executive board is held accountable and reports regularly on departmental developments. Roles and responsibilities of cabinet members and senior officers for monitoring aspects of corporate planning have been appropriately clarified. Members with portfolio responsibilities receive monthly reports. In education there is appropriate challenge by lead members. Best Value and public service agreement targets are closely monitored in line with the evaluation cycle for service plans across the council. Within this cycle performance management is beginning to play a more central role, particularly at senior officer level.

### **Decision making**

187. In the last inspection the speed of decision making was satisfactory, other than in SEN, and to some extent this weakness has been addressed. The SEN budget is now more tightly monitored and clearer planning systems are in place. However, management strategies for dealing with the high demands placed on this budget are not sufficiently explicit to drive consistent understanding and action. The speed, transparency and effectiveness of decision making remain satisfactory overall.

188. The new constitution has brought clarity to procedures. Decisions are recorded and appropriately communicated. Procedures for consultation with schools, partners and stakeholders are mostly sound. The council has not shied away from making difficult decisions. However, detailed consultations and rigorous examination of views and issues, such as those relating to the closure of the primary special school, have not led to a successful consensus and have not always been understood by all parties, some of whom remain anxious about resulting changes.

### **Recommendation**

In order to improve the decision-making processes:

- work with partners and stakeholders to establish appropriate consultation procedures in line with national and local guidelines.

### **The leadership provided by officers and elected members**

189. The strategic management of education was criticised in the last inspection. Particular weaknesses have been satisfactorily rectified and the director of education, arts and leisure is now a member of the executive board. Schools value this change. The effective leadership of the director has been a critical factor in the successful implementation of post-inspection action plans.

190. The leader of the council gives measured and focused direction to the council and is clear about the central issues needing to be addressed. The chief executive gives clear, directional leadership to officers and members and her commitment to improvement in education is unequivocal. However, council and cabinet meetings have not yet been fully

utilised to debate, formulate or prioritise policies. The overview and scrutiny function is developing as a forum for rigorous challenge, but there has been no programme guiding the work of the committee to ensure scrutiny is managed in a consistent and systematic way. The new committee lacks a secure knowledge and understanding of its role.

191. The new administration has, by its own admission, undergone a steep learning curve. Nevertheless, a comprehensive training programme is beginning to produce results and members are recognising the range and extent of their individual and corporate responsibilities. Clear strategic priorities have still to be fully articulated.

192. Changes have also been made in the structure of the education department below director level to focus more clearly on school improvement. This has been largely successful. The leadership given by senior officers is highly satisfactory and there is greater cohesion and clarity in the strategy for school improvement. Nevertheless, the capacity of senior officers is stretched and, in some instances, their ability to respond flexibly and proactively is curtailed by the extent of their responsibilities. Officers provide members with good, detailed, advice on key issues. For example, priorities for education expenditure are debated fully by senior officers before being presented to members for consideration in the budget planning process. Members are kept fully informed of issues emerging at both borough and individual school level; they respect and trust officers and delegate appropriate responsibilities to them. Although data are beginning to be used more effectively, reports are sometimes too long and do not always include a sufficiently focused analysis of all relevant available management information.

193. Good relationships exist with schools and a shared, collegiate approach to borough developments is a hallmark of LEA activity. Joint objectives, mutual trust and a willingness to share good practice have enabled good progress in implementing plans.

### **Partnership**

194. At the time of the last inspection the LEA's work with other agencies was effective. This positive picture has continued and the strengths previously reported have been built on. Current partnership activity involving collaboration between several agencies is highly satisfactory.

195. A range of partners is brought together under the community planning and partnership forum and works effectively with the council to promote corporate priorities. The LEA's links with other agencies are extensive. These partners understand and support the council's objectives, and an ethos of trust and openness has been generated. Some partnership projects are effectively addressing local needs. For example, LEA, adult education, and early years partners are working together to broaden the opportunities available to the Traveller community.

196. Partnerships have also been successfully forged to assist with the delivery of a number of LEA functions and allow more effective targeting of resources. The Private Finance Initiative agreement is the largest and most recent of these initiatives, but other successful examples include the school catering contract and the school improvement links with an external contractor. Joint working between council departments is beginning to

impact on recruitment and retention difficulties and partnerships across leisure and education are extending the services for sport and the arts available to schools.

197. Within this encouraging picture a few areas for development remain. Whilst there are constructive relationships with the Anglican and Roman Catholic Diocesan Boards, the work of the Standing Advisory Committee on Religious Education has not always been well supported in the LEA. Some of the councils' monitoring and evaluation procedures for projects undertaken by, or with, external partners are underdeveloped.



## **Appendix: Recommendations**

The report makes a number of recommendations.

The following recommendations should be acted upon as matters of priority:

In order to improve LEA support for raising standards of attainment in ICT:

- as a matter of urgency, complete the consultation on and development of the ICT curriculum strategy document and disseminate it to schools.

In order to improve the implementation of the strategy for special educational needs:

- update moderating statements and guidance to assist the SEN panel to identify the children who require a multi-professional assessment, and work with schools and governing bodies to clarify and develop the threshold criteria they use when making referral decisions;
- build the confidence of parents in the process of placement of pupils with SEN by working with them and members, schools, governors, officers and support services to establish an agreed approach; and

In order to improve further child protection procedures:

- clarify with schools the current requirements for informing parents of school concerns about child protection, prior to making a referral to the social services department; and
- ensure schools are informed of circumstances when it is inappropriate to contact parents and from where advice and support may be obtained should difficulties arise.

In order to improve provision for looked after children:

- ensure the completion of a shared database to enable the effective monitoring of the progress of looked after children; and
- agree with social services the corporate parenting roles and responsibilities of the education department in funding, supporting and monitoring the education of looked after children, who attend schools or residential provision outside the borough.

In order to improve property services and asset management planning:

- ensure that the respective responsibilities of schools and the council with regard to building and property maintenance are set out transparently and that schools have access to a cost-effective client support service; and
- ensure that the LEA fully meets its maintenance and asset management duties.

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

In order to improve the accountability of elected members for progress within the education department:

- increase the frequency with which the overview and scrutiny committee monitors the progress being made in implementing the education service plan.

In order to improve implementation of the strategy for special educational needs:

- ensure that schools fully understand their responsibilities for meeting the needs of pupils under *school action* and *school action plus* and that parents are aware of this provision.

In order to improve the value for money of SEN functions:

- consult with headteachers and governors to clarify a strategy for monitoring schools' expenditure on special educational needs and its impact on attainment.

In order to improve further the promotion of social inclusion:

- co-ordinate management information systems to enable reasons for under-attainment to be identified and gaps or omissions in provision to be addressed.

In order to improve school attendance:

- develop more detailed analysis of pupil attendance data to inform the development of the attendance strategy and to ensure that support and intervention are targeted effectively on the most persistent problems.

We also make the following recommendations:

In order to improve further school place planning:

- in consultation with neighbouring authorities, diocesan boards and the Learning and Skills Council, model the impact of the current proposals for change on the supply of and demand for secondary school places.

In order to improve the implementation of corporate and departmental plans:

- work with key partners to agree a corporate strategy for post-16 provision that takes account of developments within and beyond the borough.

In order to improve the decision-making process:

- work with partners and stakeholders to establish appropriate consultation procedures in line with national and local guidelines.

