



**OFFICE FOR STANDARDS
IN EDUCATION**

**INSPECTION OF
RICHMOND UPON THAMES
LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY**

February 2001

**OFFICE OF HER MAJESTY'S CHIEF INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS
in conjunction with the
AUDIT COMMISSION**

CONTENTS	PARAGRAPHS
INTRODUCTION	1 - 3
COMMENTARY	4 - 11
SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT	
Context	12 - 18
Performance	19
Funding	20 - 25
Council structure	26
The Education Development Plan	27 - 32
The allocation of resources to priorities	33 - 38
Recommendations	
SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT	
Implications of other functions	39
Monitoring, challenge, support, intervention	40 - 44
Collection and analysis of data	45 - 48
Support for literacy	49 - 53
Support for numeracy	54 - 59
Support for information and communication technology	60 - 65
Support for schools causing concern	66 - 68
Support for school management	69 - 72
Support for governors	73 - 77
Support for early years	78 - 79
Recommendations	
SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT	
Corporate planning	80 - 88
Management services	89 - 96
Recommendations	
SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATION PROVISION	
Strategy	97 - 101
Statutory obligations	102
School improvement	103 - 105
Analysis and value for money	106
Recommendations	

SECTION 5: ACCESS

School premises	107 - 110
The supply of school places	111 - 116
Admissions	117
Provision of education otherwise than at school	118 - 121
Attendance	122 - 124
Behaviour support	125 - 128
Health, safety, welfare and child protection	129
Children in public care	130 - 131
Ethnic minority children	132 - 136
Gifted and talented pupils	137 - 139
Measures to combat racism	140
Social exclusion	141 - 143
Recommendations	

APPENDIX: RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

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

2. The inspection was partly based on data, some of which was provided by the LEA, on school inspection information and audit reports, on documentation and discussions with LEA members, staff in the education department and in other Council departments. In addition, a questionnaire seeking views on aspects of the LEA's work was circulated to all its schools. The response rate was 82 per cent.

3. Group discussions were held with representatives of schools and the LEA's partners. The inspection also involved studies of the effectiveness of particular aspects of the LEA's work through visits to one nursery school, nine primary schools, two special schools, six secondary schools and one joint education and social services centre. The visits tested the views of governors, headteachers and other staff on the key aspects of the LEA's strategy. The visits also considered whether the support that is provided by the LEA contributes, where appropriate, to the discharge of the LEA's statutory duties, is effective in contributing to improvements in the schools, and provides value for money. The inspection also took account of relevant evidence from HMIs' national monitoring work.

COMMENTARY

4. Richmond upon Thames is one of the outer boroughs of Greater London. It is a relatively affluent authority with one of the lowest unemployment rates in the country. Many local children attend schools in the independent sector, both at primary and secondary level. A significant number of pupils who attend Richmond LEA primaries also leave the authority at 11 to attend secondary schools in neighbouring authorities. Conversely, many pupils from other authorities enter Richmond schools, especially at secondary level. Overall, the LEA's secondaries cater for a less advantaged cohort than the primaries.

5. Pupils in Richmond schools begin their statutory schooling attaining above the standards expected nationally. The performance of primary schools is well above that found nationally. At secondary level, performance is less good, but even so all schools are achieving at least in line with like schools elsewhere and half perform better than comparable schools.

6. The Council has consistently given a high priority to education, although the amount by which its funding exceeds the Standard Spending Assessment has reduced steadily from 1995/96 to 1999/00. It has, however, increased by one per cent this financial year. During this period elected members have protected school budgets whilst cutting costs at the centre.

7. The strategic management of education is unnecessarily complex, and during the last three years, when there have been three substantive and two acting Chief Education Officers, some important developments in service planning have been cut and others inefficiently deployed. The senior management structure of the Council has not been fully assessed in terms of the value it has added to the effectiveness of the LEA. The recent appointment of a new Chief Education Officer has been welcomed across the authority.

8. Whilst the LEA performs many of its functions satisfactorily, the weaknesses are significant. In general, the strengths lie in the area of school improvement, where the schools receive sound support and advice from LEA inspectors, and in some facilities management services. No schools are in special measures or have serious weaknesses. Other areas of work, such as support for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) and for vulnerable pupils are sometimes weak, as are some other management services, although there are signs of improvement. Clear information is not provided on schools' responsibilities should they decline to purchase a service from the LEA, and information does not enable schools to make fully informed purchasing decisions. The authority is also having significant difficulty in controlling its SEN budget.

9. The following functions are exercised particularly effectively:

- the support for literacy;
- the support for numeracy;
- the support to governors;
- the support for early years; and
- the management of school admissions.

10. The LEA provides satisfactory or good services in some other areas, but the following functions are not exercised adequately:

- some aspects of the Education Development Plan;
- the clarity of the LEA's strategy for special educational need (SEN);
- the speed of processing SEN statements;
- the planning of school places;
- the support for pupils who have no school place;
- the support for school attendance;
- the support for pupils with behavioural problems;
- the support for curricular information and communication technology;
- asset management planning; and
- the quality and value for money of property services, cleaning and caretaking, grounds maintenance, and catering.

11. These weaknesses constitute a seriously defective performance in some of the most basic areas of LEA work. The LEA is aware of its shortcomings, and gives some basis for optimism for the future. Members and officers are committed to improvement, and have sought external assistance in achieving it. However, the unnecessarily obscure arrangements for management of the education service are an obstacle to progress and there is little evidence that they add value to the educational provision. The Council needs to review the structure in order to create a more effective and efficient system. Provided that the Council does this, we believe that the LEA is capable of improvement. The LEA will require another inspection within two years.

SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Context

12. The London Borough of Richmond upon Thames is in the south west part of Greater London. It has a population of 192,000.

13. Forty-one per cent of the population work in the borough, mostly in banking, finance and insurance, distribution, hotels and restaurants, health, education and public services. There are high numbers of self-employed people and a few large companies. The unemployment rate, at 2.7 per cent, is one of the lowest nationally. It is a relatively affluent authority, with the proportion of adults in the higher social class categories well above that found nationally or in similar LEAs.

14. The authority maintains one nursery school, 39 primary schools, of which 15 have nursery units attached, eight 11–16 secondary schools and three special schools. Seven schools are designated by the Department for Education and Employment as Beacon schools, two of which are secondary and five primary. There are 20,018 pupils in Richmond schools: 835 nursery; 11,533 primary pupils (including 1,719 under-fives in reception classes); 7,490 secondary pupils; and 160 pupils in special schools.

15. The schools are popular. There is a low number of surplus places and in some areas of the authority the number of primary age pupils exceeds the schools' standards admission numbers. Around 13 per cent at primary and 39 per cent at secondary come from neighbouring LEAs. At primary transfer, around 30 per cent of pupils move to independent, selective, Roman Catholic or single sex schools in other LEAs.

16. Ethnic minorities comprise 12.4 per cent of the school population, compared to 11.7 per cent nationally and 20.8 per cent in the LEA's statistical neighbours. The percentage population of each minority ethnic group is similar to that found nationally, with the exception of Asian and Chinese groups which are higher than the national averages.

17. The numbers of primary and secondary pupils with statements of special educational need (SEN) are in line with the national averages but the secondary proportion is above that in similar authorities.

18. Entitlement to free school meals at primary level is below the national average. At secondary level, it is similar to the national figure.

Performance

19. The key features of schools and pupils' performance in 1999 were:

- pupils' attainment on entry to school is mostly above that found nationally;
- attainment at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2 in the core subjects of English,

mathematics and science is well above national averages. Boys and girls perform equally well;

- at the end of Key Stage 3, the percentage of pupils achieving level 5 or above is in line with national averages in English and mathematics and above in science. At level 6 and above, pupils' attainment exceeds the national averages in all three core subjects. There is no significant difference between the performance of boys and girls;
- at GCSE, pupils' performance for five or more A*-C grades and the average points score (APS) per candidate are above the national figures. It is in line for one or more A* - G grades. With the exception of girls performing marginally better at achieving five A* - C grades, elsewhere the performance of boys and girls is similar. The most recent University of London Institute of Education (ULIE) report shows that all the secondary schools are achieving at least in line with like schools, with half doing better than this;
- since 1995, the rate of improvement in the core subjects at the end of Key Stage 2 is higher in English, but lower in mathematics and science, when compared with national figures. For the same period, the rate of improvement for pupils achieving one A*-G grade at GCSE is better than the national rate. At five A*-C grades, it is lower than nationally;
- attendance at primary schools is above the national average, with unauthorised absence lower. Secondary attendance is lower than that found nationally. Unauthorised absence was higher than the national average in 1999 but has generally been in line since 1995;
- permanent exclusions at primary school are below that found nationally. At secondary school, they are well above;
- no schools have been put into special measures, and none are designated as having serious weaknesses;
- the percentage of primary schools graded 'very good' or 'good' in OFSTED inspections is above both statistical neighbours and national averages. Evidence from those schools that have been inspected twice suggests improvements have been made in the quality of education and management, with the school's climate remaining very good;
- the percentage of secondary schools graded 'very good' or 'good' is below both the national and statistical neighbours' averages. However, evidence from those schools that have been inspected twice suggests that improvements have been made in the school's climate and management, while the quality of education has remained constant and below that found nationally.

Funding

20. Although the Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) for school provision in

Richmond upon Thames is significantly below the outer London borough average, the Council's spending on education has been consistently above the SSA. However, the gap between expenditure and the SSA has been steadily decreasing: from 13 per cent in 1995/96 to four per cent in 1999/2000. During this period the central services of the LEA were substantially reduced to protect schools' delegated budgets but there were still some significant reductions in delegated funding. Whilst the LEA has consistently made education a high spending priority, schools' recent experience has, until the current year, been one of steady decline in real terms. This, and the means by which some reductions have been made, have adversely affected relationships with the LEA. For 2000/2001 the increase in Education SSA was more than fully passed on.

21. Overall spending on primary and secondary schools is below the outer London borough average. The fact that there are no sixth form pupils in Richmond upon Thames' schools affects the secondary comparison. Provision for pupils aged 11-15 will be significantly closer to the average.

	Richmond upon Thames	Outer London boroughs	All English LEAs
Primary Local Schools Budget (LSB) per pupil	£2,330	£2,442	£2,294
Secondary Local Schools Budget (LSB) per pupil	£3,004	£3,138	£2,987

22. The proportion of the LSB controlled centrally in 2000/2001 is relatively high (ISB 80.0 per cent of LSB) compared to the average for outer London boroughs (81.8 per cent). However, devolved funding for pupils with statements of SEN in mainstream schools makes up a substantial proportion of the difference. Schools are generally content with the range of responsibilities delegated, but the method of devolving funding for statemented SEN support, where allocations are normally below the cost of making the provision specified, is unsatisfactory and contentious. Centrally controlled spending on statutory and regulatory duties is above the outer London borough average, but that on school improvement is below. Arrangements for charging the costs of central services to the education budget are satisfactory.

23. Delegated funding for Richmond upon Thames primary and secondary schools shows a somewhat different relationship with the outer London averages than for the overall figure. This indicates an unusually high allocation of centrally controlled expenditure to the secondary sector.

	Richmond upon Thames	Outer London boroughs	All English LEAs
Primary Local Schools Budget (ISB) per pupil	£1,866	£1,898	£1,734
Secondary Local Schools Budget (ISB) per pupil	£2,437	£2,606	£2,433

24. Arrangements for co-ordinating submissions and developing bids for grant aid

are satisfactory. The LEA has been energetic in pursuing opportunities, but its income has been modest overall, reflecting the relatively affluent nature of the local population. Exceptions to this have been the bids for New Deal for Schools and Infant Class Size Grants. Information and advice for schools on the preparation of bids for building works have been particularly good.

25. Before 1999/2000, the Council was largely reliant for its education capital spending on contributions from its revenue budget and the use of capital receipts. Since then, grant income has increased significantly, whilst the use of these other funds has been at least sustained. A substantial and complex Private Finance Initiative (PFI) scheme to increase primary school provision on seven sites in the borough has been approved by the DfEE. The LEA has also successfully secured a number of Section 106, 'planning gain', agreements to improve school provision, some of them quite substantial. Overall, it has demonstrated initiative in this area of work.

Council structure

26. The Council comprises 34 Liberal Democrats, 14 Conservative and four Labour. There are currently eight committees, one of which is education with 27 members. The political make-up is ten Liberal Democrat members, four Conservatives and one Labour. There are two co-opted voting members, two voting parent governor representatives and eight non-voting community advisers. The Council has been slower than many others to respond to central government's proposals for modernising local government but it will, from May 2001, change to a leader and cabinet system.

The Education Development Plan

27. Officers and Council members regard the Educational Development Plan (EDP) as a significant document in the planning for education within the authority. However, whilst it has some strengths it also has some significant weaknesses which make it unsatisfactory.

28. The EDP has eight priorities:

- support school improvement through self-review;
- raise achievement in literacy;
- raise achievement in numeracy;
- increase provision and raise achievement in ICT;
- support school improvement through promoting professional development and training opportunities;
- raise individual achievement and promote personal development;
- support schools in managing pupils' behaviour to raise achievement and

reduce disaffection; and

- promote excellence and the distinctive character of each school.

29. The 2000 EDP is an updated version of the original plan that was approved by the Secretary of State in 1999. This version contains some improvements in the quality of detail of identified priorities, especially in terms of key personnel and costs. The links with the Behaviour Support Plan, Early Years Childcare and Development Plan, Class Sizes Plan and the Fair Funding Plan are now more explicit. It remains very ambitious, but rightly includes school self-review and the national priorities in literacy, numeracy and ICT.

30. Many of the priorities and their associated activities now have a much clearer focus and rationale than in the original EDP. They are also more closely allied to an audit of the strengths and weaknesses within the authority. Performance data have been satisfactorily used and appropriately linked to evaluations and mid-year reports, together with annual reports from inspectors. Sufficient work has also been undertaken to collate and quantify officers' work against the priorities as an aid to allocating resources more appropriately to priorities. The priorities for literacy and numeracy link well with the implementation of the national strategies and the ICT priority is appropriately based on the weaknesses identified in the schools' OFSTED inspection reports. Headteacher training also fits satisfactorily with the activities in the priority for school improvement through professional development and training opportunities. The targets set and progress made against these priorities are satisfactory.

31. The schools' survey confirmed that the vast majority of primary schools were satisfied with both the clarity of the EDP strategy and the level of consultation. Secondary schools, however, were significantly more critical. Almost all schools visited supported the priorities, but in a quarter there was a feeling that the plan was too broad to be realistically achievable.

32. Although the practice is better than the EDP indicates, there are still significant weaknesses with the updated plan. The imprecise nature of the success criteria used does not allow for easy monitoring of progress against clear and quantifiable targets. The failure to milestone the timescales for completion of priorities and activities similarly limits the ability to monitor progress formatively. The activities in the priority to raise individual achievement and promote personal development do not link sufficiently clearly with the first four priorities, especially for able pupils, pupils of ethnic minority heritage, children in public care and pupils with special educational needs. The priority to promote excellence and the distinctive character of each school is too broad and insufficiently targeted on intervention in inverse proportion to success. Some progress is being made in individual activities for these two priorities but, overall, more coherent action is necessary. Despite increasing use of expertise in Beacon schools, there is insufficient clarity in the EDP about how the LEA intends to challenge its high performing schools to improve further.

The Allocation of resources to priorities

33. Only now is the Council beginning to develop a three-year financial plan that clearly identifies changing needs, key developmental priorities and how the necessary resources will be secured. Services have not had detailed guidance on the direction in which overall spending is expected to move, nor have they been required to reflect this in their own planning. This has been a clear shortcoming, particularly as budgets have been sustained by the steady draining of reserves and where an increase in demand for particular services (i.e. provision for refugees and homeless families and for pupils with SEN) has been substantial and difficult to control. The consequences of poor long-term financial planning have included inadequate investment in the repair and maintenance of school buildings and the use of measures to limit spending, which have adversely affected relationships with schools.

34. The LEA's scope for altering the existing pattern of resource allocations to reflect developing priorities has been limited by the comparatively low, and reducing, overall budgetary provision for education. It has also been substantially affected by an inability to control the rise in spending on SEN provision and associated transport costs. A significant factor has been tribunal decisions in favour of parents seeking out of borough special school provision. At the very least, there has been a failure by the LEA to budget realistically in these areas. There have been significant overspends, despite increases in budgetary provision. So substantial and potentially destabilising for the education budget is the growth in this spending that bringing the situation under some reasonable control is a key precursor to a more developmental approach to budget management.

35. There are early signs of a new preparedness by the LEA to review and revise spending patterns in the light of objective assessments of current need. However, acute sensitivity within the education system to change within a relatively low budgetary provision, as well as necessary caution when SEN spending is not yet under control, makes any degree of significant redeployment of funding highly problematic.

36. Budget consultations with schools include discussions with headteacher and governor representatives at formative stages of the process. There is some confidence in the openness of dialogue at that stage but probably because limited outcomes reflect the difficulties outlined above, there is not a high level of satisfaction with the consultation process.

37. The LEA's funding formula essentially reflects the pattern of expenditure at the outset of Local Management of Schools (LMS). It includes some reasonably clear explanations of the resourcing standards involved. The LEA has recently worked with schools, using the services of an external consultant, to review the formula. However, this review did not seek to explore in great breadth or depth the underpinning educational rationale. There was a broad consensus amongst schools that the existing formula operates reasonably fairly in distributing the funding available, and that the focus should be on priorities for the use of any future growth. Whilst a reluctance to contemplate change within a largely fixed funding total is understandable, there is some evidence that the formula may be inhibiting the LEA's

school planning activities. For this reason alone it would be well advised to keep the formula under review.

38. The LEA's arrangements for conducting Best Value reviews are sound, and comprehensive guidance for those conducting reviews has been produced. This includes helpful advice on approaches to consultation, benchmarking service, performance and cost, and options for service delivery. Requirements aimed at ensuring appropriate challenge have recently been strengthened. The External Auditor has reviewed the preparation and publication of the Council's Best Value Performance Plan and confirmed that statutory requirements have been met. The Council has responded to the Auditor's recommendation that it strengthen its systems for producing performance indicators and targets by introducing a quarterly process of monitoring by members and strategic directors. The development of a more extensive range of local indicators is currently under way.

Recommendations:

In order to improve the strategy for school improvement it will be necessary to:

- require all services to develop budgetary strategies compatible with the overall community plan;
- ensure that the financial provision for the support of pupils with special educational needs (SEN) is realistic, and that the SEN strategy has particular regard to budgetary management; and
- improve the EDP by specifying clearer, quantifiable success criteria, more detailed timescales, better links across the different priorities for vulnerable pupils, and a more focused priority relating to promoting excellence and the distinctive character of each school.

SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Implications of other functions

39. The LEA is committed to supporting school improvement as an aid to raising standards. The Inspection and Advisory Service (IAS) plays a key role in working with schools. The quality of their support work is evaluated later in this section of the report. Staff in schools value their contact with officers and inspectors from the LEA and most derive benefit from their advice and support. Some LEA services contribute positively to school improvement. These are in financial services, personnel, transport and admissions and in the use of ICT in school administration. Some LEA services, however, do not provide effective support for schools. These are mainly in the facilities management services, school premises, planning of school places, support for pupils educated otherwise, support for school attendance, and support for pupils with behaviour problems.

Monitoring, challenge, intervention and support

40. The LEA's approach to monitoring, challenge, intervention and support is satisfactory. It has some good features but is not yet sufficiently differentiated. The majority of schools understand how the authority performs these functions.

41. The main channel for this provision is the work of assigned inspectors, who make half-day visits to each of their schools every term. These monitoring visits are intended to develop school improvement and self-review through analysis of performance and management data in the School Management Information File (SMIF). The visit in the autumn term focuses on target-setting and the two subsequent ones give attention to a range of school, local and national issues; the agendas are agreed in advance. The schools find these visits demanding but, in most cases, stimulating and helpful in improving their practice. Each visit results in a written report of main findings and key issues, copies of which are sent to the headteacher and chair of governors. Although most headteachers find the termly visits useful, one annual visit to discuss data and agree targets is sufficient for those schools that are already carrying out self-review and self-improvement successfully. This is particularly the case as the LEA gives all schools the opportunity to purchase additional attached inspector time as required, and well over half the schools do so. In practice, the LEA does differentiate to a limited extent its allocation of core assigned inspector time to schools but it is sensibly committed to reviewing its collection of data and programme of visits where schools demonstrate they are doing especially well. Such an adjustment would bring the LEA's practice more in line with the Code of Practice on LEA/School Relations.

42. The SMIF visits are undoubtedly challenging. While occasionally the targets proposed go beyond challenge and become unrealistic, the work of assigned inspectors usually challenges schools effectively. Their careful preparation and perceptive questions cause schools to consider, and often improve, their policies and procedures. Most schools are still developing their practice of self-review and, in the LEA's view, rather less than a fifth currently have good systems. The LEA accepts that it needs clearer strategies for helping good schools to perform even better and it

is making increasing use of the expertise of the Beacon schools as it rightly seeks to improve its dissemination of good practice.

43. Assigned inspectors' concerns arising from a visit may lead to a higher level of intervention. The LEA's intervention in schools causing concern is dealt with below. Intervention occasionally takes place in high-performing schools that need help with a particular problem. The literacy and numeracy teams intervene supportively and effectively in schools where, for example, results have dipped or a key member of staff has left unexpectedly. The range of support provided by the small inspection and advisory team, referred to in other parts of this section, is satisfactory overall and in some cases very effective. However, primary schools are better served than those in the secondary phase. The post of principal inspector for secondary school improvement remains vacant, and support for classroom practice in secondary schools is limited. The service is making increasingly judicious use of the expertise in its schools and of consultants to compensate for the gaps in its coverage.

44. The IAS is well led and its work effectively planned. The work patterns of its staff are appropriate and are well monitored against EDP priorities. Inspectors have suitable experience and expertise in relation to their responsibilities. Members of staff are appraised and their targets reviewed half-yearly. Suitable professional development opportunities are provided. New recruits to the IAS receive appropriate induction, which includes mentoring and work-shadowing.

Collection and analysis of data

45. The data provided for schools by the LEA are currently satisfactory and are being improved in several important respects. The LEA's use of the data in the target-setting process is also satisfactory, but lacks some effectiveness until the data are further developed.

46. Schools have broadly welcomed the data in the SMIF. It places the schools' performance in the context of other schools in the LEA and nationally. The file includes baseline data, local and national performance benchmarks, and comparative information on school organisation and resource deployment. The data, which are updated regularly, are well presented in graphs and tables. The file also includes useful retrospective analyses and is accompanied by relevant questions for the schools to consider. However, the data are currently not as sophisticated as those used by some of the schools, especially in the secondary phase, which allow analysis of the performance of individual pupils over time in order to identify the value added by a school. The LEA is rapidly developing its individual pupil data to this standard. It is also close to the point where it will be able to transmit data to schools electronically, some successful piloting having already taken place. The quality and range of data on the performance of ethnic minority pupils, and of children in public care and other vulnerable groups are also being improved. Training on the use of data has been generally well received by schools' senior and middle managers and by governors.

47. The schools and the LEA agree that the target-setting process is very demanding. It involves a discussion between the assigned inspector, the

headteacher, and often the chair of governors. The LEA sets a target band that ranges from the attainable to the aspirational, and includes an improvement factor related to the school's past and current performance and to the LEA's targets. In most cases, targets are agreed within the suggested band for the school but protracted negotiations are sometimes needed. Difficulties arise when the school's data on individual pupils' prior attainment indicate a lower target than that suggested by the LEA on the basis of the performance of previous year groups and the need to meet its own demanding targets. A procedure that is often appropriately challenging is occasionally unrealistic in its demands. Nevertheless, because this is a LEA with high performing schools, the targets for improvement that it and its schools must meet will always be demanding.

48. In the main, the schools welcome the challenge given through the well-prepared and pertinent questions of assigned inspectors; for example, about a school's analysis of the performance of its groups of ethnic minority pupils. As yet, discussions between assigned inspectors and schools do not go sufficiently beyond negotiations on percentages to consideration of strategies for using data in improving teaching and learning.

Support for literacy

49. The LEA supports literacy very well.

50. At Key Stage 2, results in the National Curriculum tests in English are well above average in comparison with LEAs with similar socio-economic characteristics and with the nation as a whole. There was a steady but creditable improvement in standards every year from 1996 to 1999, when 83 per cent of pupils attained Level 4 or higher. This proportion matched the LEA's target for 2000 and is only five per cent short of the target for 2002. Conscious of the danger of under-achievement in high-performing schools, the LEA sets targets for level 5+ and, in 1999, 33 per cent of Year 6 pupils achieved this standard; this performance was well above that of statistical neighbours and the nation as a whole. The results at Key Stage 1 are also well above the averages for statistical neighbours and the nation, while those at Key Stage 3 are in line with the performance of statistical neighbours and that found nationally. In GCSE examinations, the proportion of pupils gaining A*-C grades in English is above that found nationally.

51. The very effective literacy team consists of the strategy manager and the literacy consultant. The strategy is very well managed and productive links have been established with the numeracy strategy and with some other LEAs. The literacy and numeracy teams work closely and effectively together, for example in relation to early years and on family projects, and share a joint resource base with information and communication technology (ICT). A combined literacy and numeracy steering group has wide representation, including governors, and meets termly. The literacy action plan is thorough and fits well with the relevant EDP priority. The team is strongly committed to the strategy and has responded positively to all initiatives, such as booster classes.

52. The LEA has enhanced the effectiveness of the support for literacy by providing additional funds to enable the literacy consultant's post to be full-time. This

has enabled her to provide a range of targeted support for virtually all schools, including those in need of intensive support and those already achieving high standards. The consultant's work is of the highest quality and respected by the schools. Effective training sessions are open to all schools and often aimed at specific year groups, such as phonics for Year 3. Some courses promote literacy across the curriculum, for example in science and in ICT. Literacy training for newly qualified teachers (NQTs) has provided ready access to non-intensive schools. Any schools not represented at literacy training courses are followed up.

53. Eight expert teachers have been identified to spread good practice and five headteachers who have successfully managed the strategy give advice to heads of schools where literacy needs further development. The strategy is currently being developed in secondary schools. A secondary advanced skills teacher supports the extension of literacy into Key Stage 3 and through summer schools; she has also presented the strategy to secondary English teachers. All assigned inspectors have been trained in the strategy and monitor its implementation in their schools. Target-setting is taken very seriously and most schools have set challenging targets for Key Stages 1, 2 and 3, as applicable.

Support for numeracy

54. The support for numeracy is very good.

55. In the 1999 National Curriculum mathematics tests, 80 per cent of Key Stage 2 pupils achieved Level 4 or higher. This exceeded the LEA's target by three per cent and was well above the averages for the LEA's statistical neighbours and for the nation as a whole. An improvement of seven per cent is needed to attain the 2002 target of 87 per cent and the LEA is justifiably confident that this will be achieved as the strategy has increasing effect. Mathematics results at Key Stage 1 are above those for statistical neighbours and well above national figures. Those at Key Stage 3 are in line with the averages for both statistical neighbours and the nation. In GCSE examinations in 1999, 48 per cent of pupils gained grades A*-C in mathematics, compared with 43 per cent nationally.

56. The support for numeracy has been strengthened by the LEA's provision of sufficient additional funds to enable the appointment of the consultant to be full-time. She forms a very effective team with the mathematics inspector. The strategy is well managed by the acting chief inspector, who also manages the literacy strategy, and the work of the team is highly respected in schools. The literacy and numeracy steering group aids communication and consultation.

57. An audit of schools' needs has been conducted and the consultant has worked in virtually every primary school. She also holds a termly meeting for mathematics co-ordinators and other interested teachers. Effective training is provided on a range of topics, sometimes in co-operation with another LEA. The training courses are well attended, and accompanied by well-produced booklets of ideas for teachers. The quality of support materials produced for schools is very high. A particularly helpful and popular booklet, with accompanying training, helps teachers to include pupils with special educational needs in numeracy lessons.

58. Twelve leading mathematics teachers (LMTs), covering every year group, have been trained in co-operation with a neighbouring LEA. They are already having a positive impact, for example in the reception year. The LEA has begun to develop the strategy in secondary schools. A secondary advanced skills teacher is helping schools to promote numeracy in Year 7, and teachers of mathematics in Year 7 are now able to observe LMTs teaching classes in Years 5 and 6. This is helping to raise the profile of the national strategy at secondary level. Assigned inspectors, who have been trained in the strategy, monitor its outcomes against demanding targets. The schools receiving intensive support include some that have been identified as under-performing as well as the lowest performers.

59. All secondary schools have hosted summer schools in either literacy or numeracy, with three focusing on numeracy in 1999. One of the Beacon schools has a mathematics focus and the early excellence centre includes an adult numeracy workshop.

Support for information and communication technology

60. The LEA's support for ICT in the curriculum is unsatisfactory overall. In the secondary phase it is poor, and the schools largely make their own arrangements for support. OFSTED inspections have shown that, while the proportion of schools in the borough making poor progress in ICT is little different from that found elsewhere, comparatively few are making good progress. The LEA is now giving support for ICT greater priority but much remains to be done.

61. The EDP priority on ICT, with nine appropriate activities, is a sensible response by the LEA to the weaknesses identified in the schools' OFSTED inspection reports. However, a co-ordinated approach to the development of ICT in the classroom is lacking and the schools are unclear about the LEA's strategy. The ICT development plan indicates firm intentions for improvement by setting very challenging targets for 2002. This plan also states that schools do not plan well for ICT and they lack sufficient modern equipment. With justification, the common view of schools is that it is unreasonable to expect the curriculum adviser for ICT to carry sole responsibility for the support in this aspect. In practice, too much of the adviser's time is spent on advising schools on the installation of equipment for the National Grid for Learning (NGfL). The LEA does not offer any technical support and there is no maintenance support scheme. There is very little curricular support or advice.

62. The LEA's ICT service has two strands: the support to which schools are entitled under the NGfL, and consultancy that they pay for if they choose. Few schools make use of the latter. The primary schools appreciate the positive response they receive to their problems, but advisory support is thinly spread across all the schools in the LEA and over a range of responsibilities encompassing strategy, structure and the curriculum.

63. All but four of the LEA's schools have improved their equipment and infrastructure through their involvement in NGfL. All now have ICT development plans; the LEA has provided recent training on how to revise them and 80 per cent have done so. A similar proportion uses a scheme of work produced by either the LEA or the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA).

64. The LEA has given appropriate attention to raising teachers' competence in ICT and over 700 have successfully completed the CLAIT training, arranged in co-operation with the tertiary college. The LEA's intention is to provide a good foundation for the New Opportunities Fund (NOF) training when schools decide to begin. Currently, the LEA provides NOF training for three primary schools; five other primaries and all the schools in the secondary phase have chosen other providers. Helpful termly meetings for the schools' ICT co-ordinators are held, for example on the use of ICT in mathematics. Two Beacon secondary schools are providing advice and support to other schools in the primary and secondary phases.

65. The LEA is not in a strong position to know the level of pupils' attainment and progress in ICT. Little progress has yet been made in the schools' development of mechanisms for the formal assessment of pupils' ICT capability. The LEA is planning a meeting with secondary schools on building assessment into ICT teaching.

Support for schools causing concern

66. The LEA's support for schools causing concern is satisfactory. Since the start of OFSTED school inspections in 1993, only two schools have been designated as having serious weaknesses. Both made satisfactory progress and were removed from the serious weaknesses list at their next inspection. No schools have been put into special measures. Overall, this is a much better position than in most LEAs.

67. The LEA's formal intervention strategy is based on a four-stage process that uses the OFSTED criteria for serious weaknesses and special measures. Stage One is resourced from within the school. Stage Two requires a school improvement plan that identifies the main action points needed to address the areas of concern. Stages Three and Four build upon Stage Two, but also provide for formal intervention from the LEA. There are currently three schools at Stage One, nine at Stage Two and one at Stage Three. The four stages are appropriately differentiated in terms of level of intervention, but there is a blurring of the criteria at the point of moving from one category to another, which is causing confusion on the part of recipient schools.

68. During school visits to eight of the 13 schools currently designated by the LEA as causing concern, four showed a lack of understanding of what category they were in and how the criteria were used to identify the level of support deemed necessary. However, LEA intervention and support are having a positive effect upon these schools and progress is being made in most of the identified weaknesses. Individual inspectors work systematically with headteachers and governors, using the school improvement plan effectively to set targets for improvement. The monitoring of progress is secure and information gained about each school is shared between senior officers, and with the chair of the education committee on a regular basis. This ensures that the LEA has an appropriate and up-to-date knowledge about those schools causing concern.

Support for school management

69. Overall, the LEA supports school management well. It is working hard to build positive relationships with senior staff in schools, particularly in the secondary and special phases, where there have been past difficulties with communication.

70. Assigned inspectors usually stimulate management thinking in schools through the discussions during termly visits. Well over half the schools purchase additional assigned inspector support to help them develop aspects of their work, such as development planning and lesson observation. The LEA has replaced its established self-review training with the OFSTED course on self-evaluation. So far, about three-quarters of the schools, including some with advanced systems of self-review, have participated in the course and it has been well received. The LEA also encourages other routes to self-management; for example, six schools now have the Investors in People award and about a quarter are involved in the Excellence model.

71. The headship training plan fits well with the EDP. The balanced provision for senior management includes an annual leadership conference for heads and deputies in all phases, which is planned by a joint steering group of heads, deputies and members of the IAS. In 1999/2000, headship training included sessions on self-evaluation, performance management, interviewing, threshold assessment and admissions. The induction and mentoring programme for new headteachers has received largely positive evaluations. Nine heads have completed the DfEE's Leadership Programme for Serving Headteachers (LPSH) and the LEA is encouraging a similar number to apply. Three aspiring headteachers have gained the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH), another nine are in training and the LEA has received a further seven applications. Sensibly, the LEA maintains a register of heads' and deputies' qualifications. Members of the IAS have trained as threshold assessors, performance management consultants or governors' advisers in order to be able to help schools, formally or informally, with these aspects of their work.

72. The LEA's sound programme of continuing professional development is well targeted to the EDP priorities and to the schools' perceived needs. The brochure includes information about relevant courses by other providers. A panel of teachers evaluates the programme and there are regular meetings of schools' professional development co-ordinators for planning and review. A strong emphasis is placed on phase panels for both curricular subjects and for aspects such as equal opportunities. While schools report some variability in quality and attendance, they judge the panels to be effective overall. Where the LEA is short of the required expertise to lead the panels, it makes judicious use of consultants and of skilled teachers in its schools. Similarly, it makes sensible and generally successful attempts to compensate for its lack of secondary management expertise by using consultants and retired headteachers, for example in a school improvement project with secondary schools. Appropriate use is also made of secondments from schools, usually for one day weekly, to develop support for such groups as newly qualified teachers (NQTs), classroom assistants and able pupils. There are, however, comparatively few productive links with other LEAs. The comprehensive induction programme for NQTs meets national requirements and includes a handbook and other support for induction tutors.

Support for governors

73. The LEA provides very effective support and training, tailored to governors' needs. Currently, there are only two vacancies on the schools' governing bodies.

74. The governor support service is very well managed by a highly effective officer who is widely respected by governors and schools. The service is very responsive and every school has a named governor support officer. As part of a borough-wide review of services, an audit of needs led to a re-structuring of the support for governors. The main activities are: co-ordination of training; provision of information and advice; induction of new governors; and support for governing body clerks. The schools are able to purchase support at different levels according to their needs and circumstances, and about 80 per cent do so, the great majority choosing the full service on offer.

75. Training is provided through central courses and is also tailored to individual schools' needs if required. Governors report that the quality of training is very good although the level of attendance is variable. The training on performance management has been well received. New governors, of whom there were 250 in the past year, are inducted effectively. Governing bodies are helped to find a clerk, if required, and very good training and induction for clerks are provided. Governors receive advice and information through a helpline, well-produced newsletters, and a helpful handbook that is updated regularly.

76. Governors are consulted routinely through the CEO's termly report, the main features of which are commented on by well-briefed assigned inspectors at governing body meetings. It is a substantial document that some governors feel requires responses in unreasonably short timescales and needs to be more specific to schools' circumstances. However, it informs governors on a range of issues, both local and national, and gives them the opportunity to express their views to the LEA. Before the CEO's report is published, the LEA meets the governors' forum, which is a local association of governing bodies. The forum is a powerful and well-informed group that some governors feel, in practice, is not fully representative of ordinary governors. Unusually, the LEA does not arrange regular meetings with the chairs of governing bodies. On major issues, such as Fair Funding, the LEA holds meetings with the forum and also with other governors. The chair and vice-chair of the forum are co-opted members of the education committee and governors are represented on the education consultative group and other groups dealing with aspects such as SEN, 14-19 provision and Private Finance Initiatives. The second draft of the EDP was reportedly changed significantly after consultation with governors.

77. Considerable and increasingly successful effort is made to involve governors in their strategic role, in the analysis of performance data, and in the target-setting process. In one case, significant support was given to the governing body of a school experiencing serious difficulties.

Support for early years

78. The support for early years education is very good. The Early Years and Childcare Development Plan is a detailed document, broadly based and representative of an early years philosophy approved by the private, voluntary and maintained sectors. There are very good working relationships between the different partners, with a confidence in LEA officers to link with, and appropriately support, the non-maintained sector. For example, members of the early years partnership have

particularly valued recent work using LEA evaluation materials for the foundation years.

79. The LEA has supported the development of early years through appropriate curriculum initiatives and advisory teacher support. In 1996, the LEA linked with a higher education institution to jointly develop teachers' understanding of pupils' learning in the early years. Although no longer running, the initiative was well received by schools and appropriately prepared them for the national developments in Desired Learning Outcomes and its replacement, Early Learning Goals. More recently, the creation of a 0.6 early years advisory teacher has been timely and is linking well to the development of the early excellence centre on the site of the nursery school.

Recommendations

In order to improve support for school improvement it will be necessary to:

- differentiate, by individual school need, the number of core monitoring visits to schools by assigned inspectors; and
- present a clearer ICT strategy, and improve the range and quality of advice.

SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Corporate planning

80. The Community Plan, written in April 2000, supersedes the Corporate Plan 1999 - 2000. It improves upon its predecessor by giving a greater prominence to working co-operatively with other providers in the authority, and giving a clearer emphasis to education by using the targets set out in the Council's Lifelong Learning Development Plan and Education Development Plan. Appropriate reference is also made to other community aspects of learning, in particular to the arts, culture and leisure. Taken as a strategy for lifelong learning, the plan provides a satisfactory overview of what the authority intends to achieve over the next three years.

81. Few schools visited showed any clear knowledge of the plan, although most knew of its existence. Headteachers and governors in the schools visited considered the broad educational priorities of the Education Development Plan to be more important and relevant for schools. Clearly, the policy benefits of the Community Plan are not yet apparent to schools.

82. Procedures for evaluating the Community Plan are satisfactory. The IAS evaluates the targets in the Educational Development Plan systematically against the success criteria, and along with other information collated by officers and inspectors, provides the basis of progress reports. This information is of a satisfactory standard to provide Council members with a helpful update of what the authority has achieved.

83. The Council attaches high importance to education and has protected school budgets at the expense of cuts at the centre. The speed of financial decision-making is satisfactory, other than in SEN.

84. The executive management board, comprising the Chief Executive, three strategic directors and the director of finance, is the main officer group responsible for decision-making within the authority. It meets every week and invites third tier service managers, one of whom is the Chief Education Officer, to these meetings when the need arises. Each strategic director has responsibility for a number of service managers. The 'Opportunities for All' strategic director currently line manages education, leisure services and information technology. Education and some areas from leisure services are soon to merge.

85. Whilst the 'Opportunities for All' strategic director is responsible for a range of areas that include aspects of social services, education, leisure, IT, property and finance, his prime role in education relates to its corporate position within the authority and the way it links to cross cutting issues. Examples of cross cutting work have included developing the PFI initiative, the Public Service Agreement, and links with some of the LEA's partner agencies. The Chief Education Officer's responsibility is for educational matters, with no specific brief for any of the cross cutting issues. However, these respective leadership roles and responsibilities are unclear, with little evidence that this management structure adds value to the educational provision in the authority. During the last three years, when there have been three substantive and two acting Chief Education Officers, some important developments in service planning, primarily but not exclusively for SEN and vulnerable pupils, have been cut

and others inefficiently deployed. A majority of schools visited indicated that they viewed the Chief Education Officer, not the strategic director, as providing the main leadership for education within the authority.

86. The appointment of the new Chief Education Officer has been welcomed across the authority and schools are hoping that this signals the beginning of development and improvement.

87. Links between Council members and senior officers are good. Members of the education committee meet regularly with senior officers, including the strategic director and Chief Education Officer. The quality of information they receive is good, and includes unpopular advice when it is needed.

88. The LEA works well with other agencies. There is good communication with the Diocesan officers, especially with members of the IAS. Clear and effective links have been established with Richmond upon Thames College (tertiary) to ensure a co-ordinated approach to the post-16 provision for local pupils. The LEA has also worked effectively with the West London Training & Enterprise Council to promote education and business links in the Borough for both pupils and teachers. Links with the Richmond Adult Community College and CfBT West London Careers are progressing well, and owe much to the efforts of individual officers from the IAS. Although detailed management arrangements have some imperfections, the collaboration of education and social services in the work of the Strathmore Centre is an important development and greatly valued by schools.

Management services

89. Support for schools in the procurement of services is satisfactory. The information provided to schools on traded services is good in terms of the range of support available, but less so in terms of a clear definition of the performance standards to be expected. Information on service entitlement for those activities that continue to be centrally funded is very limited in most cases, but there are examples of good practice. Clear information is not provided on schools' responsibilities, should they decline to purchase a service from the LEA. Overall, the information does not enable schools to make fully informed purchasing decisions.

90. Consultation with schools on service performance and development is good and the LEA has responded well to the views it received. The LEA conducted a major questionnaire survey in 1999 and a marketing event was also held this year, at which school staff and governors could meet with service managers. Service managers also attend Headteachers' Forum meetings to discuss their services. The choice offered for the traded services meets most of schools' needs.

91. Support for financial management is satisfactory. Accounting arrangements meet all schools' basic needs and the reconciliation of data held at school and LEA level is not problematic. Information and support for school budget planning and review are good. Staff are generally regarded as responsive and helpful. Useful indicative information on school delegated budgets is provided. The payroll service works satisfactorily, but depends on paper returns by schools to the LEA, and visits

to schools by LEA staff to enter related financial information into their financial information systems. This is an inefficient process. Monitoring of school spending by the LEA is appropriate. Few schools have had deficits in recent years, with only one giving significant cause for concern. Financial benchmarking data is provided as part of the school management information file (SMIF) visit.

92. Support provided by the personnel service is satisfactory. A high turnover of staff in recent times has affected support to some schools. Comprehensive written advice is provided and management information for schools is improving. Casework support is generally regarded by schools as reliable and robust, whilst maintaining due care for the interests of individuals. The administration of the annual NQT recruitment exercise is good and, with the high quality of the induction support, is regarded as being a major asset in addressing steadily worsening recruitment difficulties. Staff retention is a key issue for schools, largely because of the high costs of housing in the area. The LEA has taken some steps to address this issue.

93. The provision of school meals is unsatisfactory. Funding has been delegated to schools and all primary and special schools buy into a client support service offered by the Best Value and Business Planning Unit. Provision is currently by the LEA's direct services organisation (DSO), which won the contract in a competitive tendering exercise, following a period of provision by a private sector provider. Difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff because of low wage rates relative to living costs locally have resulted in significant disruption to the service, including the provision of packed lunches instead of hot meals in some schools for periods of time. Take-up has suffered accordingly, and this has led to rising unit costs and a significant operating loss by the DSO. A fundamental review of the nature of provision is currently under way, prior to early termination of the current contract and a retendering exercise. Appropriate steps are being taken by the LEA to consult schools and parents as part of this review and to involve potential future suppliers at an early stage.

94. Home to school transport provision is generally sound but heavy traffic means that some journey times are excessively long and pupils' punctuality can therefore be a problem. Creating additional routes to reduce the number of pick-ups has added to the LEA's costs. The current key issue in terms of escalating costs, is the rise in the number of children with statements of SEN requiring transport. A significant overspend of the budget for SEN transport is projected for the current year. Following a review by a members task group, a decision has been taken to transfer the management of the service from the education department to the environmental and operational services department. The intention is to bring more specialist expertise to bear and to improve aspects of service monitoring. Moving the focus of service management will not in itself, address the main reason for increasing expenditure, which is the increase in demand in the SEN sector. The establishment of an inter-departmental Transport Liaison Group is a positive step.

95. The LEA strategy for information management and ICT support is developing satisfactorily, but is poorly documented. Strategy documents provide a detailed list of the activities planned but lack timescales, outcome indicators, performance targets and coverage of resourcing implications. The documents are, therefore, much less

helpful than they might be as a means of monitoring progress and of informing schools and providing them with guidance on developing their own systems. The LEA has usefully established a working group with representatives from schools and the local tertiary college to advise on all aspects of ICT development for curricular, data collection and transfer, and administrative purposes. Information on developments is provided piecemeal to schools. A major presentation on strategy was made two years ago but this has not been updated in any comprehensive way since.

96. Schools' basic needs for administrative ICT systems are being met, although incompatible software in the primary and secondary sectors does not help the transfer of information. The LEA provides training and user support for the software used by primary schools and some secondaries, and this works well. The LEA does not provide a repair and maintenance service, so most schools buy from the private sector. The LEA provides schools, on request, with recommended specifications for hardware purchase and information on possible suppliers. ICT systems within the education department are mainly independent of each other, with the use of electronic links with schools for data exchange underdeveloped. However, this should be rectified following the establishment of broadband link in the near future. There is a Council Intranet but schools are not connected to it at present.

Recommendations:

In order to improve the strategic management it will be necessary to:

- clarify and improve the strategic role of the Chief Education Officer;
- revise the information booklet for schools on LEA services to include clearer guidance on entitlement to centrally funded services and information on schools' responsibilities, should they decline to purchase a service from the LEA; and
- produce a strategic development plan for information management and ICT administrative support covering planned activities, timescales, resource implications, performance indicators, and targets and circulate the plan to all schools.

SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATION PROVISION

Strategy

97. The authority has a firm intention to promote the inclusion of pupils with SEN into mainstream provision where practical. However, the LEA's strategic documentation does not make clear to schools and parents how it intends to co-ordinate the work of the special schools with that of the support services and with provision in mainstream schools for pupils with SEN.

98. There is a long history of discussion with schools, and public consultation, on the future development of SEN provision, but these, and associated reports by consultants, have led to little action. In particular, the lengthy deliberations over the future of one special school with declining numbers have cast a shadow over developments in primary provision for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD). In general, it is clear from school visits undertaken during this inspection that, overall, many schools feel frustrated at the lack of leadership and purposeful direction from the LEA. The Council is currently consulting on a new proposal for resource deployment, reflecting a clearer strategy. Provision for EBD pupils is fragmented and weak, and needs urgent development, as is described in section five of this report.

99. Schools visited were often sceptical about the nature of recent changes in LEA procedures, frequently attributing these to the budgetary pressures experienced by the authority and frequent changes of staff in the department. The LEA is currently having considerable difficulty controlling its SEN budget. It spends a lower proportion of its overall schools' expenditure on non-statemented pupils with SEN than the average for outer London boroughs. However, it spends an above average proportion on statemented pupils. The implication is that the balance of its expenditure is not sufficiently weighted towards early intervention. Additionally, it anticipates an overspend on SEN this year of £550k. The authority believes that the burden of residential placements will reduce in the next few years, as older pupils leave the system. However, there is no documented plan to bring the budget under better control. The rise in the proportion of secondary pupils with SEN statements from 1994 to 1999 was three times as great as the rise nationally, and the proportion is now above that in similar authorities.

100. There have been numerous cases where parents have taken a grievance about provision for their child to the SEN Tribunal or to the Ombudsman. This has been time-consuming for the authority. The LEA has not involved individual parents sufficiently in discussion about SEN provision and its development. However, following a new appointment in the department, improved procedures have been instituted for negotiation with parents, and the LEA is now more successful in resolving cases without parents having recourse to external bodies. The parent partnership service now gives good support. There is still a need for increased consultation with representatives of parents of pupils with SEN about all SEN developments.

101. A particular problem in strategic management has been the lack of transparency about some issues, and the mechanism for devolving the funding for SEN statements has been widely seen by schools as problematic because the

funding does not normally match the provision specified in the statement. A further problem has been the complexity of arrangements for managing certain SEN units attached to mainstream provision. This has left some issues of SEN provision unresolved.

Statutory obligations

102. The authority has an unsatisfactory record in meeting national targets for the speed with which it produces SEN statements. Last year only 38 per cent were produced within 18 weeks (although this number rose to 57 per cent when taking account of exceptions). The authority recognises this weakness and has taken steps to speed up the process. New staffing is in place and new monitoring procedures should also be helpful. The delays apart, the actual quality of the statements is generally satisfactory, and in other respects the authority meets its statutory obligations.

School improvement

103. The LEA gives satisfactory support to mainstream schools in a range of ways. The SEN inspector makes an important contribution to school improvement by scrutinising each school's SEN policy to ensure that it meets with national guidance, and gives advice where appropriate. This is an unusual and worthy commitment for a LEA and is a good means of monitoring school procedures.

104. The SEN inspector keeps schools well informed about current national developments. The LEA provides good training for special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs) and there are useful networks for sharing and disseminating information. Schools have made good use of a national initiative on SEN training provided through the LEA. They have received good support from the authority's SEN inspector. In general, schools are well informed about SEN procedures.

105. The educational psychology service provides support to schools through a good range of relevant projects. The sensory support teams, also, are valued in the schools visited and the SEN advisory teachers (SEATs) provide a useful service. In some schools this work has led to useful early intervention to support pupils. However, business plans for individual services vary in format and quality. Valuable multi-disciplinary meetings take place regularly in schools, involving SEATs and educational psychologists planning provision with the SENCO. There are a number of useful projects in place across the authority to promote higher standards by pupils with SEN, though these are not well publicised.

Analysis and value for money

106. The authority does not monitor in detail schools' use of their SEN funding and does not measure, overall, the progress made by pupils with SEN. The LEA is concerned about its budget problems, and is now monitoring more closely its use of out-of-borough placements. However, in general, the authority has given insufficient attention in the past to the need to provide good value for money and the current quality of provision does not justify the rising costs. Accordingly, the LEA gives unsatisfactory value for money in meeting SEN.

Recommendations:

In order to improve the provision for special educational needs it will be necessary to:

- make a clearer statement of its overall vision for SEN and the means by which this will be achieved. This should include an audit of need, an analysis of the budgetary implications of intended policy, deadlines for implementation and how success will be measured;
- improve working relations with parents via the establishment of a mediation service, to work alongside the existing parent partnership service; and
- ensure the client services branch disseminates an evaluation of the work of SEN projects currently in place as an aid to the development of good practice in schools.

SECTION 5: ACCESS

School Premises

107. The LEA's asset management planning is weak. It has failed, by several months, to meet the DfEE's deadline for submitting data on the condition of its school buildings. It was also late in sending an updated Local Policy Statement, and will be late, by some weeks, in submitting information on the suitability of school premises. The conversion of these data into the format required by the DfEE has been highly problematic. The survey reports are also limited in terms of specifying the individual works required and the division of funding responsibilities between schools and the LEA. Without the latter, it is difficult for schools to estimate, with any accuracy, what their deployment of funds should be. It is similarly difficult for officers to give authoritative advice to members during the LEA's budget-making process. Overall, schools lack confidence in the survey process.

108. The LEA has been poorly served by its construction and property services department and has decided to outsource the majority of its functions from February 2001. Whilst this may provide a longer-term solution to the LEA's professional support needs, the short-term effect has been to worsen the situation as many of the staff involved have left the authority. The pressure on remaining officers has correspondingly increased. Staff within the education department have borne a particularly heavy burden, especially as the period of decline has corresponded with a major increase in the funding available, in particular in New Deal for School (NDS) grants. Staffing difficulties have also adversely affected the management of some building projects.

109. It is not possible, at present, to compare the backlog of repair, replacement and improvement needs in schools with budgetary provision. The LEA's assessment is that only the highest priority works have been funded from central budgets, for an extended period of years. This has, in part, been the result of poor overall financial management within the Council and the tendency to use repair and maintenance expenditure as a budget regulator. Another key factor has also been the need to deploy much of the available capital funding to meet the need for additional school places. NDS funding has recently enabled the LEA to adequately meet schools' repair and replacement needs. However, should this not continue at present levels there would be significant difficulties in the future. An asset management working group, with school and diocesan representatives has recently been established to advise the LEA on its planning and the priority use of available funding.

110. Schools are not well supported by the LEA in fulfilling their own property management responsibilities. The LEA no longer offers schools a client support service for some major aspects of building maintenance, although a list of approved contractors is available on request. Day-to-day repair and maintenance work can be commissioned direct from its direct services organisation. The quality of work is variable with very long delays in invoicing. The Best Value and business planning unit provides client support for cleaning and grounds maintenance. Almost half of schools buy a grounds maintenance service but only a small minority buy the cleaning service.

The supply of school places

111. The LEA has an exceptionally difficult task to fulfil, particularly in forecasting the demand for school places. A great deal of time and ingenuity has been applied to the planning process, but the current position is unsatisfactory and the confidence of primary schools is low. The key issue is the very low margin, under two per cent, of places over pupils in the primary sector. This overall position masks a difficult situation in a number of local areas, where the number of pupils on roll exceeds schools' standard admission numbers. The extent of real parental choice in such a situation is very limited. Steps to manage this in the short term have been disruptive, and much of the existing accommodation remains overcrowded.

112. Over 30 per cent of primary age children resident in the borough attend independent schools and by Year 7 the figure rises to some 40 per cent. This is not a stable position, however, and significant fluctuations occur, often at very short notice. Parental regard for individual LEA schools is also particularly sensitive to the latest pupil performance data and inspection findings. Despite satisfactory liaison with schools and other partners, the LEA is unable to forecast demand, even only one year ahead, within the accepted benchmark range of +/- one per cent. The LEA's response to such fluctuations has included opening a series of 'bulge classes' in primary schools. These are disruptive of class organisation and budget management as the year group concerned moves through the school.

113. A further complicating factor is the comparatively low funding levels in the LEA's primary schools, particularly at Key Stage 1. This makes schools very sensitive to the effect of roll fluctuations on their budgets, since they are dependent on average class sizes remaining high. Steps to increase the margin of places in a local area can be understandably unwelcome in such a situation and schools can be particularly critical of short-term measures if the roll projections on which they are based prove to be inaccurate. The LEA is currently in a position where it is criticised both where it acts to enhance provision and where it does not.

114. The LEA is facing further increases in primary school numbers over the next five years and beyond. It has obtained DfEE agreement to a PFI scheme involving two new schools and the expansion of provision at four more. Its target is a four per cent margin of places over pupils, an improvement on the current position but still low by national standards. Given the complexity of delivering the PFI scheme to the required timetable, it will do well to meet this target. There has already been slippage. The associated planning issues are complex and liaison with the other Council departments has not always been smooth. There is a real danger that the LEA will be living from 'hand to mouth' for some years to come.

115. In the secondary sector there is currently a bigger margin of places over pupils, albeit still below the outer London borough average. However, the majority of the surplus places are currently in one school and this is now full in Year 7. Significant increases in roll are expected overall in the next five years and additional provision will be necessary.

116. The LEA's School Organisation Plan was produced on time after full

consultation and has been recently updated. It provides a clear summary of the projected need in the primary and secondary sectors, together with the action required. The plan is weaker in its coverage of special schools, post-16 and in the provision for children educated otherwise than at school. Given the statutory requirement for full-time provision for such children from September 2002, it is particularly important that the associated accommodation needs are reflected in the Plan. The absence of substantial coverage of all three issues in the Plan masks the extent of the development and review work that is actually being undertaken.

Admissions

117. The admissions arrangements for both primary and secondary schools are well managed and well regarded by schools. Some improvements could be made in the admissions literature for parents, but there are also some areas of particularly good practice. The timetable for admission to the reception year is appropriate. The administration of admissions is efficient and the LEA handles the very large number of appeals well. Arrangements for the transfer of pupils with SEN statements to mainstream secondary schools are well designed to support inclusion. An Admissions Forum, with wide representation of interested groups, was established in the summer of 1999.

Provision of education otherwise than at school

118. Provision for excluded pupils is poor. The expenditure by the LEA on education out of school is about half that spent by other outer London boroughs. The authority does not maintain a pupil referral unit (PRU). The only provision for these pupils, unless they obtain a place at the EBD unit attached to a mainstream secondary school, is therefore individual or group tuition provided by the individual tuition service. There is currently a delay between the date of exclusion and the commencement of the tuition. However, the LEA intends to increase resourcing and thereby meet the national 2001 deadline for earlier provision of this tuition.

119. Younger pupils generally receive less than ten hours individual tuition a week, but Year 10 pupils have a slightly broader experience, and Year 11 pupils also undertake a day at college and some careers education and guidance each week. None receive more than 20 hours education per week. Excluded pupils below Year 11, after receiving individual tuition, are generally found places in other schools through the placement panel, which attempts to ensure, in conjunction with parental preference, that no school receives an unduly large number of such cases, but pupils have generally been out of school too long before starting at their new school. Those with SEN statements, or in the process of statutory assessment, go through the SEN Panel and in some cases have had very lengthy periods of individual tuition.

120. The LEA recognises the weakness of its provision and is currently consulting on a proposal to establish one or more PRUs, with the intention of making full-time provision available. However, there is no firm starting date for achieving this. The LEA is also seeking to extend the individual tuition system in the meantime. A new post has recently been created to manage exclusions and reintegration to mainstream schools. This is an area of work where policy development has been overdue but improvements now appear to be in sight.

121. By contrast, the arrangements for checking provision for pupils educated at home are sound: an inspector and the principal education welfare officer visit the homes, and there is a system for monitoring the data received.

Attendance

122. The education welfare service (EWS) was reorganised when it reduced in size in the academic year 1999/2000. It now gives a greater proportion of its time to attendance work. This is appropriate, as the secondary attendance figures have fallen for the last two years and the LEA failed to meet its targets for 2000 for reducing unauthorised absences in both primary and secondary schools. The new pattern of deployment of education welfare officers sensibly gives greater support to schools with poor attendance, but there is no service level agreement guaranteeing a specific level of provision.

123. Clear guidance on attendance is given to schools and parents, and the authority meets its statutory functions. Individual casework comprises the majority of the service's work and, although there is evidently some variability of quality, it is generally regarded by schools as being undertaken at least satisfactorily. However, the long-term absence of a significant proportion of officers last year put considerable strain on the service's ability to meet its commitments to schools.

124. The service wisely intends to develop its role in advising schools on attendance, and has already begun useful work in some schools where this support is particularly needed. This work makes some use of attendance data in order to focus support, and gives attention to broader social inclusion issues. Some Richmond schools have experienced difficulties where certain pupils are the responsibility of education welfare services of other LEAs. Richmond's service has tackled this well by making agreements with other LEAs to establish their respective roles and has done its part in developing further liaison.

Behaviour support

125. The provision for behaviour support is unsatisfactory. Primary provision comprises a small behaviour support team, and a special school for EBD pupils. Secondary provision comprises: outreach support from the Strathmore Centre (a centre run jointly with the social services department); an EBD unit attached to a mainstream school; a programme at the Strathmore Centre for Year 11 pupils at risk of exclusion or offending; and multi-agency support for young people with mental health problems. In addition, the LEA has recently provided an increased level of advice to secondary schools, has reviewed schools' behaviour policies, and offered additional support on a traded basis. However, overall, the LEA spends very little on implementing its Behaviour Support Plan in comparison with other outer London boroughs, and the evidence of this inspection showed that the level of support given to schools and pupils is inadequate and has specific weaknesses.

126. In general, primary schools find the LEA's support at least satisfactory, although several schools visited had experienced difficulties in gaining support from the primary support team when they needed it. There is some evidence of the

effectiveness of this team's work in helping to keep difficult pupils in mainstream education. However, the overall expenditure on the primary phase includes the establishment of an EBD school which is almost half-empty. The authority recognises the unbalanced nature of this provision and is seeking to close the special school and re-deploy its funding.

127. Secondary schools are generally much less satisfied with the support provided: half believe it to be poor. The outreach support from Strathmore Centre has been found to be of very variable quality, and some aspects of its management are weak; for instance, there is no service level agreement detailing the service which will be provided. Although several schools feel the need for more support, only one has sought to purchase this from Strathmore. By contrast, the day programme at the Centre appears to have had some success with very vulnerable pupils, owing to the good level of collaboration there between education and social services. Liaison between this programme and mainstream schools was applauded by two schools visited. Nevertheless, there are management problems: the accommodation is unprepossessing, the curriculum is restricted, and the LEA has not evaluated the quality of provision systematically. According to a recent consultant's report there are also some management problems concerning the EBD unit at a mainstream school, although the unit provides a satisfactory quality of education.

128. In general, then, this is a problematic aspect of the LEA's work. In the past, provision has been uncoordinated and has not met schools' or pupils' needs. The LEA met its target for improvement in the exclusion rate this year, but it is difficult to credit this achievement to the authority rather than to the schools themselves. Nevertheless, three initiatives give grounds for some optimism about improvement. A new managerial post has been created with responsibilities including behaviour support, and this is already bringing a much clearer vision and sense of purpose to what the authority is doing. Some useful developments are now in hand. Secondly, the education department has engaged consultants to give advice on its provision across the age range. Thirdly, as a result of the consultants' reports, the Council is now consulting on a proposal to transfer resources to the secondary phase, and to develop a better continuum of provision, including enlarging the behaviour support team and establishing one or more PRUs.

Health, safety, welfare and child protection

129. The LEA's current guidance to schools on child protection gives clear advice on appropriate procedures and is about to be updated to take account of national changes. The education welfare service (EWS) is a partner in the local training arrangements, and multi-disciplinary courses at different levels are available to school staff, some covering specialist topics. A new course provides an update on the new national procedures for assessing children in need. Although the LEA is aware of the designated person for child protection in each school, it does not have a system for ensuring that schools update their child protection training regularly. The authority offers a range of health education training to schools, with different levels of courses covering drugs education, HIV/AIDS and other aspects. The LEA has recently revisited its health and safety policy and has asked each governing body to produce its own policy. The LEA has issued guidelines to schools on physical

restraint of pupils. It checks the safety of equipment used in schools. The authority is involved, through the Training and Enterprise Council, in health and safety checks on pupils' work experience placements. Overall, this range of activities represents satisfactory provision by the LEA.

Children in public care

130. There are currently about a hundred children in the care of Richmond upon Thames Council, of whom a significant minority are unaccompanied asylum-seekers. Many, however, are educated out of the borough. The education department has a satisfactory knowledge of which schools are attended by those educated in the borough, and the schools are kept informed that these children are in public care. The education department provides full-time individual or group education for several children who have no school place.

131. The education department is moving rapidly to improve its oversight of educational provision, in order to remedy the weaknesses that exist at present. The EWS has recently surveyed the achievement of those educated within the borough, but has not yet collected data on the remainder. However, a database is under construction, which will include all relevant material and will be available to the education and the social services departments. All schools have recently been advised to identify a designated teacher with responsibility for provision for these pupils, and the LEA is intending to provide training for these teachers this term. Schools have been asked to develop Personal Education Plans for these young people; these will be discussed with social workers. The officer responsible for this area of work has briefed elected members on their responsibilities, and a Council steering group is maintaining oversight. Some social workers have attended briefing sessions from education staff. A joint education and social services policy is in preparation. In general, this represents a good level of activity by the education department.

Ethnic minority children

132. The numbers of minority ethnic pupils, including Travellers, at 12.4 per cent of the school population, is in line with the national figure. They are dispersed across a large proportion of schools. The LEA has established a new, though small, service to meet these pupils' needs. Its strategic aims are sound, and include data analysis and consultancy, as well as direct support to pupils acquiring English as an additional language (EAL). In addition, the authority provides training for schools on the needs of refugee and asylum-seeking children, of whom there are a considerable number, and in some cases provides education welfare support to their families.

133. The authority has detailed data on the ethnic composition of the schools and of each school's EAL needs. This is used to deploy peripatetic staff, mainly for direct EAL work but also for some work with mainstream staff, where the pupils' needs are greatest. There were indications that staff needed further support in a significant number of schools visited and a few schools are uncertain of the level of support they can expect.

134. The LEA has been slow to collect data on the performance of the various ethnic groups and it is has, therefore, not yet formulated policies relevant to particular groups. This analysis, undertaken this year systematically for the first time, suggests that Black groups may be under-performing, especially at secondary schools, relative to other groups. This adds urgency to the need for the service to develop a more strategic role, particularly in giving advice to school staff.

135. Provision for Travellers, when inspected in 1998, was well planned: it aimed to encourage full-time attendance. Provision for house-dwelling Travellers and for circus families was good. Since 1998, when the service was slightly under-resourced, the authority has increased the amount of provision.

136. In general, the links between the minority support service and other services are sound and are improving. Links with the IAS are good, and assigned inspectors now raise questions with schools about minority group provision and achievement during the SMIF visits. Links with the numeracy and literacy strategies, and with SEN support, are in place.

Gifted and talented pupils

137. The LEA has a longstanding commitment to improving classroom provision for very able pupils, and to extending the opportunities available to them. It has produced a helpful policy and has initiated a range of potentially helpful activities, some of which call on the expertise of further and higher education providers. The authority expects all schools to develop their own policies, and gives advice where appropriate. This proved particularly valuable in one school visited. Assigned inspectors enquire into provision for able pupils during the SMIF visits.

138. Working parties have been established for primary and secondary schools respectively, led by part-time co-ordinators funded by the LEA, and good use has been made of national expertise and of local Beacon schools. The authority's approach is sensibly catholic: it has recently developed a web-site as a resource base for able provision, open to parents and pupils as well as to staff. The LEA is now supporting an innovative course in thinking skills for a small number of Year 8 pupils, intended to lead to external accreditation. In general, the LEA's activities have an appropriate emphasis on promoting higher level literacy and numeracy skills but, wisely, also include some other aspects of the curriculum such as media education. However, it has yet to ensure that its activities support the needs of pupils with particular talents in some aspects of the curriculum.

139. There are some indications of the effectiveness of the LEA's work: almost all schools have an able pupils' policy, and the majority have a co-ordinator. Schools' involvement in the working parties is increasing. Whilst it is not possible to identify direct links with educational outcomes, it is noteworthy that Richmond pupils achieve well above the national average at the higher levels of the English, mathematics and science in Key Stages 1 and 2. Furthermore, all the secondary schools are above the median for their national benchmark group for pupils attaining level 6 in English at Key Stage 3 and most are also above the median in mathematics and science. In general, this area of work is a strength in the LEA's provision.

Measures to combat racism

140. The education department has a history of initiatives to oppose racial harassment, and this is now being strengthened as a result of new Council policy (which preceded the report of the 1999 inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence). The Council has developed a system for monitoring racial crime, and is now seeking to meet equality standards. The education department has instituted an action plan including measures to ensure racial equality in its own staffing procedures. Within the department there is an anti-racial harassment steering group with broadly appropriate membership, except that it lacks representation from elected members. A range of appropriate initiatives is in place, such as guidance to schools and parents, training for new staff and an anti-racist publicity campaign. Schools have recently been asked to record racist incidents and the education department collates the data. A small number of schools did not send in a return. Assigned inspectors enquired into schools' monitoring procedures during their routine visits last year and the service wisely intends to discuss particular racist incidents with schools in future years. The education department monitors exclusions by ethnicity. Overall, the education department is making a sound response to the Macpherson Report.

Social exclusion

141. Overall, the authority is not making adequate provision for vulnerable pupils. Some of its key functions, such as attendance support, provision for children in public care and minority ethnic pupils, are exercised with clear aims and appropriate procedures, but these and other functions sometimes suffer from weaknesses in the range of what is provided. Schools are not always aware of what they are entitled to, and the authority has not always been able to meet its commitments when, for instance, its staff have been absent. Beyond these difficulties, which can be remedied by administrative action, there are more serious problems in providing behaviour support for schools and meeting the needs of pupils who have no school place. With these, schools and pupils are dependent on the Council pressing forward with improved policy and a greater commitment of resources.

142. The authority has consulted schools about some aspects of its work on inclusion. It has sensibly begun the process of self-challenge by using external consultants to evaluate its provision in some areas and is now acting on their findings. Some recent action by the LEA has been stimulated by its own analysis of data, and it is also currently responding to a critical review of provision by the District Auditor. However, it has not yet embarked on a thorough analysis of the cost-effectiveness of its provision and has not yet achieved a clear model for targeting its resources.

143. Overall, though, despite the range of problems, this is an area of work where much has been accomplished recently in clarifying service policies and procedures, developing new activities, and implementing some useful quality assurance measures. There is good reason to believe that, given the right overall policy steer, further progress will be made.

Recommendations:

In order to improve pupils' access to education it will be necessary to:

- ensure that a suitable margin of school places over anticipated demand is provided, of at least the level of 4 per cent currently planned for the primary sector;
- reassess the relationship between the class size assumptions in the funding formula and the likely sizes of classes in Key Stage 1 in particular;
- take action to bring the asset management process in line with the DfEE's timetable;
- address jointly, the issues of planning school places and delegated funding for schools;
- assess the requirements for repair, replacement and improvement expenditure against the budgetary provision held centrally by the LEA and that delegated to schools;
- provide a service level agreement between the client services division and schools to give a clearer specification and commitment to the role of the education welfare service in supporting attendance;
- act urgently, when consultation on its current improvement plan is completed, in order to give better support to schools regarding pupils with behaviour problems. Its action should be based on the need to improve practical support for secondary schools and to create full-time provision for pupils out of school;
- regularly monitor the educational progress of all children in public care, including those educated outside the borough, and record this, as planned, on a joint education and social services database; and
- ensure that the minority ethnic support service specifies its commitment to schools more clearly through a service level agreement, and should develop its strategic role in advising schools on good practice in supporting under-performing groups.

APPENDIX: RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations:

In order to improve the strategy for school improvement it will be necessary to:

- require all services to develop budgetary strategies compatible with the overall community plan;
- ensure that the financial provision for the support of pupils with special educational needs (SEN) is realistic, and that the SEN strategy has particular regard to budgetary management; and
- improve the EDP by specifying clearer, quantifiable success criteria, more detailed timescales, better links across the different priorities for vulnerable pupils, and a more focused priority relating to promoting excellence and the distinctive character of each school.

In order to improve support for school improvement it will be necessary to:

- differentiate, by individual school need, the number of core monitoring visits to schools by assigned inspectors; and
- present a clearer ICT strategy, and improve the range and quality of advice.

In order to improve the strategic management it will be necessary to:

- clarify and improve the strategic role of the Chief Education Officer;
- revise the information booklet for schools on LEA services to include clearer guidance on entitlement to centrally funded services and information on schools' responsibilities, should they decline to purchase a service from the LEA; and
- produce a strategic development plan for information management and ICT administrative support covering planned activities, timescales, resource implications, performance indicators, and targets and circulate the plan to all schools.

In order to improve the provision for special educational needs it will be necessary to:

- make a clearer statement of its overall vision for SEN and the means by which this will be achieved. This should include an audit of need, an analysis of the budgetary implications of intended policy, deadlines for implementation and how success will be measured;
- improve working relations with parents via the establishment of a mediation

service, to work alongside the existing parent partnership service; and

- ensure the client services branch disseminates an evaluation of the work of SEN projects currently in place as an aid to the development of good practice in schools.

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- reassess the relationship between the class size assumptions in the funding formula and the likely sizes of classes in Key Stage 1 in particular;
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- regularly monitor the educational progress of all children in public care, including those educated outside the borough, and record this, as planned, on a joint education and social services database; and
- ensure that the minority ethnic support service specifies its commitment to schools more clearly through a service level agreement, and should develop its strategic role in advising schools on good practice in supporting under-performing groups.

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