

**Reading**

**Local Education Authority**

**Inspection Report**

**Date of Inspection: January 2005**

**Reporting Inspector: Heather Richardson HMI**

© Crown copyright 2005. This report may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that all extracts quoted are reproduced verbatim without adaptation and on condition that the source and date thereof are stated.

A report from the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) and the Audit Commission (AC) under section 38 of the Education Act 1997.

A further copy of this report can be obtained from the respective local education authority.

Inspection reports are available on the Ofsted website ([www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)).

# Contents

Page

## Basic information

### Summary 6

Introduction 6

Main findings 6

Recommendations 6

### Section 1: Corporate leadership of education 6

Summary table of judgements 6

Corporate planning for education and its implementation 6

Decision-making 6

Targeting of resources 6

Strategies to promote continuous improvement, including Best Value 6

Leadership by elected members 6

Leadership by senior officers 6

Strategic partnerships 6

Support for Early Years 6

Support for 14-19 education 6

### Section 2: Strategy for education and its implementation 6

Summary table of judgements 6

The strategy for school improvement and its implementation 6

The LEA's monitoring, challenge and intervention in schools and the targeting of support 6

Effectiveness of the LEA's identification of, and intervention in, underperforming schools 6

Asset management planning 6

Providing school places 6

Admissions to schools 6

### Section 3: Support to improve education in schools 6

Summary table of judgements 6

Support for school leadership, management and continuous improvement 6

Support for the national initiatives at Key Stages 1 and 2 6

Support for the national initiative at Key Stage 3	6
Support for raising the achievement of minority ethnic pupils, including Gypsy and Traveller children	6
Support for gifted and talented pupils	6
The supply and quality of teachers	6
Effectiveness and value for money of services to support school management	6
Effectiveness and value for money of services to support school improvement	6
<b>Section 4: Support for special educational needs (SEN)</b>	<b>6</b>
Summary table of judgements	6
The strategy for SEN	6
Statutory obligations	6
SEN functions to support school improvement	6
Value for money	6
<b>Section 5: Support for social inclusion</b>	<b>6</b>
Summary table of judgements	6
The strategy for social inclusion	6
Provision for pupils educated other than at school	6
Support for attendance	6
Support for behaviour	6
Support for health, safety, welfare and child protection	6
Provision for looked after children	6
Promoting racial equality	6
<b>Appendix A</b>	<b>6</b>
Record of Judgement Recording Statements	6
<b>Appendix B</b>	<b>6</b>
Context of the inspection	6
Context of the LEA	6
The performance of schools	6
Funding data for the LEA	6

## Basic information

Name of LEA:	Reading Local Education Authority
LEA number:	870
Address of LEA:	Civic Offices Civic Centre Reading RG1 7TD
Reporting Inspector:	Heather Richardson HMI
Date of Inspection:	January 2005



## Summary

### Introduction

Reading LEA continues to enjoy many economic advantages, including a thriving economy and low unemployment. Across the borough, the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is similar to that found nationally. However there are pockets of deprivation and one of the authority's 15 wards ranks among the 5% most deprived in the country. Reading's school-age population is a similar proportion of its total population to that found nationally, but there is a significant migration of secondary-age pupils. Some are drawn into the borough's selective schools while others attend their nearest school, now in a neighbouring authority. Overall, 40% of the borough's secondary-age pupils are not educated in Reading.

The performance of Reading's schools is variable. Standards of attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 are in line with those in similar authorities,<sup>1</sup> but below national averages. There is considerable variation in the performance of the seven secondary schools in the LEA, two of which are high-performing selective schools. The performance of secondary schools overall at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) is below the national averages on most measures, with some widening gaps. Pupils' attendance in primary schools is in line with national averages, and exclusions are now below average. Attendance in secondary schools is well below the national average. In 2003 the exclusion rate had dropped to below the national average. There was a steep rise in 2004, which included pupils educated in schools in other LEAs.

A significant restructuring of the education directorate is underway. A new joint directorate of education and children's services will be operational from April 2005. Two lead members are linked to this directorate, one of whom leads on education.

---

<sup>1</sup> Reading LEA's statistical neighbours are: City of Bristol, Southampton, Merton, Portsmouth, City of Derby, Hillingdon, Enfield, Brighton and Hove, Bury and Hounslow.

---

**Main findings**

**Summary:** Reading LEA remains satisfactory, but by the finest of margins. There are notable strengths, including partnership with other agencies and the reduction in the number of schools causing concern. There have been significant recent improvements, but progress since the previous inspection has been insufficient overall. The LEA has still to tackle adequately its school improvement strategy, its support for special educational needs and aspects of its support for some vulnerable pupils. Elected members, officers and schools acknowledge that the educational standards across the borough are not yet high enough and that relationships with secondary schools have, until recently, been strained. However, the LEA is on the cusp of change and there is now a mood of cautious optimism. In a short time, the new director has secured widespread support and confidence from schools and other partners. Priorities are clear, as is the commitment of elected members and senior officers to greater transparency in the LEA's dealings with schools. The new joint directorate is working within a stronger corporate framework and performance management is improving. Where weaknesses exist, the LEA has the capacity to tackle them and to bring about improvement.

<b>Areas of strength</b>	<b>Areas of weakness/for development</b>
<b>Corporate leadership of education</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council spending on education</li> <li>• Collaborative work with partners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quality and use of some information provided to elected members</li> <li>• Support for 14-19 education</li> </ul>
<b>Strategy for education and its implementation</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support for collaborative work in schools</li> <li>• The reduction in the number of schools causing concern</li> <li>• Admissions to schools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standards of attainment, notably at GCSE</li> <li>• Clarity and consistency of monitoring, support challenge and intervention in schools</li> <li>• Quality, monitoring and evaluation of plans</li> <li>• Asset management planning</li> </ul>
<b>Support to improve education in schools</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support for the primary national strategy</li> <li>• Progress made through the Key Stage 3 strategy</li> <li>• Human resources services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The development of self-managing schools</li> <li>• Management and cost-effectiveness of services to support school improvement</li> <li>• Support for gifted and talented pupils</li> </ul>
<b>Support for special educational needs (SEN)</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Range and quality of training for special educational needs co-ordinators</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clarity and speed of implementation of the SEN strategy</li> <li>• Value for money</li> </ul>
<b>Support for social inclusion</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The council's commitment to social inclusion</li> <li>• Progress made in combating racism and in child protection</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Statutory requirements for education of excluded pupils</li> <li>• Provision for looked after children</li> </ul>



## Recommendations

### Key recommendations

**Corporate Plans:** Ensure that plans, notably the Education Development Plan and service plans, are sufficiently precise to inform rigorous monitoring of progress and evaluation of outcomes, including value for money.

**Monitoring, challenge, support and intervention:** Define clearly the procedures for monitoring, challenge, intervention and support and ensure these definitions are used transparently and consistently to target support to the areas of greatest need.

**Special Educational Needs:** As a matter of urgency, devise a clear strategy for the SEN component of inclusion, with fully costed plans, so that the funding implications are made clear and value for money can be assured.

### Other recommendations

#### **Corporate leadership of education**

**Targeting of resources:** Ensure that reports to elected members outline clearly the financial implications of their policy decisions.

**Early Years:** Improve transition from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1 by strengthening the quality and consistency of transfer processes and information.

**14-19:** Ensure that developments in 14-19 provision properly address equality of opportunity and breadth of provision, and provide good value for money.

#### **Strategy for education and its implementation**

**Asset Management Planning:** Ensure survey work on school buildings is completed on time and informs the preparation of an accurate summary of investment needs.

**School Places:** Ensure the timescales for the completion and implementation of the School Organisation Plan are met.

#### **Support to improve education in schools**

**Gifted and talented pupils:** Improve the provision for and monitoring of gifted and talented pupils, to ensure parity of provision across all schools.

**Services to support school management:** Improve procedures to measure cost effectiveness accurately.

#### **Support for special educational needs**

**Special Educational Needs:** Ensure that the statutory requirements for publication of special educational needs information for parents and carers on an LEA website are met.

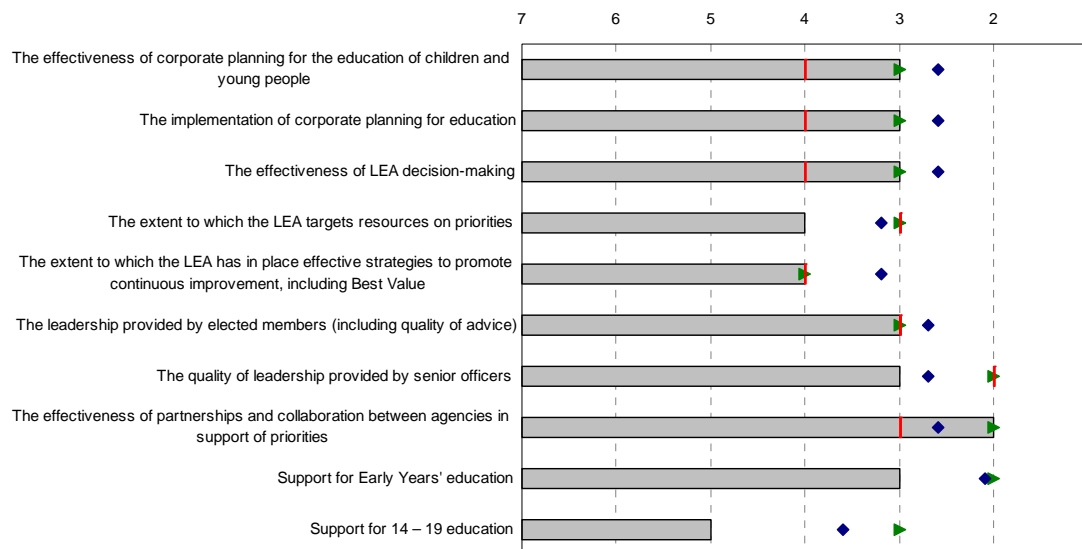
#### **Support for social inclusion**

**Education other than at school:** Ensure that all pupils educated other than at school receive their statutory entitlement to full-time education.

**Looked after children:** Ensure that all looked after children have high quality personal education plans, with clear outcomes.

## Section 1: Corporate leadership of education

### Summary table of judgements



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

### Corporate planning for education and its implementation

1. Both corporate planning for education and its implementation have improved and are now highly satisfactory. The community strategy, completed since the previous inspection, sets clear priorities which are reflected in corporate plans. The recent addition of a children's theme to the community strategy reinforces the commitment of the council and its partners to coherent provision, as well as highlighting the critical relationship between education and the future prosperity of the borough. There is increasing alignment in the plans of the LEA and its partners to achieve common goals relating to children and young people. These objectives, especially in relation to raising standards of attainment, are well understood by officers, partners and elected members.

2. Planning for education has focused recently on the establishment of the joint directorate for education and children's services. This has combined clear policy direction with pragmatic action. On the retirement of the previous director of education and community services, elected members took the decision to move directly to a joint directorate. This decision is consistent with the council's strategic aims and medium term priorities and its timing avoided potential uncertainty within the directorate. Sound steps have been taken to manage the changes, although it is recognised that implementation will take time. Progress towards the joint directorate has strengthened the engagement with partners, including their

---

involvement in the recruitment of the new director. As a result, partners have confidence in both the strategy and the appointment.

3. Strategic and operational plans are increasingly linked, but not all education plans are sufficiently precise to support rigorous monitoring and evaluation. Quantifiable targets are not always timed and resource allocation is not always set out. As a result, although reporting is regular and performance management is improving, neither is yet sufficiently rigorous to assess fully the LEA's performance over time or in comparison with other authorities. This has implications for determining how effectively the LEA allocates resources to priorities. At a strategic level, resources are targeted clearly to priorities; at the operational level, this is more opaque, not least because of imprecise plans. However, under the leadership of the new director and the chief executive, work is currently being undertaken to improve the quality of planning and resolve these weaknesses.

#### ***Recommendation***

- Ensure that plans, notably the Education Development Plan and service plans, are sufficiently precise to inform rigorous monitoring of progress and evaluation of outcomes, including value for money.

#### **Decision-making**

4. Decision-making is now highly satisfactory. Collective cabinet responsibility for decision-making is clear, and procedures for routine decisions are established. Elected members have taken some difficult decisions, including pressing ahead with an early move to the joint directorate, as well as decisions over school closures. In the case of a controversial closure of a special school, for example, members consulted fully with parents and other interested partners to resolve difficulties prior to taking the decision.

#### **Targeting of resources**

5. Previously highly satisfactory, the way in which the LEA allocates its resources to priorities is now satisfactory. This reflects the higher expectations placed on LEAs and the modest progress Reading has made since the previous inspection. Spending on education is a high priority and reflects the commitment of elected members. The education budget for 2004-05 is set at 1% above the formula spending share and increases have been passed on fully to schools. The LEA makes good use of opportunities to seek additional funding, such as the New Opportunities Fund and targeted capital funds. Spending generally reflects national priorities and the four education priorities of the corporate plan. However, the LEA's approach to allocating resources is not systematic. There is no clear link with services plans and no medium term financial plan.

6. The Schools Forum is used appropriately, and is actively involved in discussions about financial planning. Its work is helping to build a stronger

---

relationship between the LEA and schools and to overcome the perceived lack of transparency in budget setting.

7. The establishment of a funding formula working party, charged to look in detail at specific issues, has led to a number of amendments to the formula. As a result funding has been redirected to areas of identified need, such as special educational needs (SEN) and early years provision. However, there remains a degree of concern, among primary schools in particular, about the overall equity of the formula. The LEA has been slow to respond to this and has yet to undertake a more fundamental review involving primary and secondary schools.

8. Budget making is generally accurate, with regular budget monitoring and reporting to officers and members. However, the quality of analysis in reports does not always allow members to understand fully the implications of spending decisions, most notably in relation to SEN expenditure which remains high and is increasing. The LEA's monitoring of school finances is good and its work with schools has led to an appropriate fall in the overall level of school balances over the last two years. Early information provided this year to schools on their indicative budgets represents a significant improvement in timing on the previous year.

#### ***Recommendation***

- Ensure that reports to elected members outline clearly the financial implications of their policy decisions.

#### **Strategies to promote continuous improvement, including Best Value**

9. The LEA's approach to continuous improvement remains satisfactory. The council responded well to recommendations from the previous inspection and has significantly improved its work on Best Value. However, progress in performance management is at an early stage.

10. Achieving Best Value is now a strength, with a more rigorous approach to service review and improvement through the revised corporate Best Value framework. This is based on good assessment of risk and is linked to corporate priorities. The council regularly receives and acts upon external evaluations. It has, for example, undertaken a range of actions that have led to a change in its Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) category from fair to good. The Best Value Performance Plan received an unqualified opinion from the council's auditors. Scrutiny within reviews has also improved and now concentrates on strategic outcomes rather than unnecessary detail. Schools recognise that reviews have led to improvements to services. The review of human resources, undertaken in response to criticisms at the time of the previous inspection, has resulted in fundamental changes to the structure and approach of the service. Similarly, the review of school improvement led to the introduction of training for governors on the use of data.

11. The monitoring of education performance at corporate level is systematic, with regular reports to members on key education indicators. However, performance management within the directorate of education and community services has been inconsistent. Service plans have not been used routinely to drive improvement and appraisals were reliant upon individual managers rather than established cycles. More recently, the directorate has benefited from a structured approach to performance management across the council. A performance management culture among senior officers is emerging. Performance reporting is not yet robust, but is now a regular feature of senior management meetings. The council's policy for individual staff management, which the directorate will implement from April 2005, has clear systems to improve further its performance management.

12. The accuracy of the LEA's self assessment for this inspection was mixed. In some aspects of school improvement and SEN, the LEA was over-generous in assessing the progress made, but many of the other service assessments were accurate. The new leadership of the directorate has recognised the gaps in its developing knowledge of the LEA's performance.

### **Leadership by elected members**

13. Leadership by elected members remains highly satisfactory. The priority given to education is reflected in their spending, as well as through collaboration with partners. It is integral to their commitment to social inclusion and to *Every Child Matters*. Hence, although the timing of members' decision to establish a joint directorate was opportunistic, it was consistent with long-term policy. Members now recognise and are confronting key issues faced by the LEA, most notably standards of attainment and the quality of relationships with secondary schools.

14. Two lead members are linked to the new joint directorate. Although one member takes the lead for education, both take part in briefing sessions with senior officers, together with the chair and vice-chair of scrutiny. Recent improvements to the quality of information provided to members have made them more fully aware of limitations in some information previously supplied. These limitations have constrained the effectiveness of their monitoring of the work of the directorate to date. Although information had been supplied routinely, the lack of comparative or contextual data often masked the performance of the LEA and its schools. Members also rightly accept that the remit of the school improvement panel now warrants review, to clarify its role in relation to scrutiny.

### **Leadership by senior officers**

15. Leadership by senior officers is now highly satisfactory. At the time of the previous inspection it was good. That judgement reflected the way in which senior officers were tackling the large number of schools causing concern, excessive surplus places and poor buildings. There has been much productive work since the previous inspection, but some weaknesses have not been addressed fully, notably in the strategies for school improvement and SEN. The need to work in new and different ways with schools has been faced only relatively recently. Under the

---

leadership of the new director of education and children's services, the LEA now has clearer goals and has begun to forge new relationships with its schools, and the capacity for further improvement is good.

16. The new director has succeeded in gaining the confidence of schools, other partners, elected members and officers in a very short period of time. Schools recognise that there is already greater transparency in the LEA's approach and endorse the director's principle that key issues, most especially standards of attainment, need to be tackled jointly. As a result, schools express greater confidence in the LEA than was the case a few months ago. This is particularly important given the major changes which the implementation of the new directorate will bring.

17. Senior officers are now working within a stronger corporate framework, including improving performance management. In addition, the leadership programme for senior staff, initiated by the chief executive, is building the leadership and management skills of assistant directors. There is greater challenge to the work of the directorate from the corporate management team as the directorate is increasingly drawn from a position of relative detachment into the corporate centre.

18. Greater transparency now characterises relationships between senior officers and elected members. Although there are currently no routine briefings for backbench and opposition party members, information supplied to members is more comprehensive. This includes reports as well as regular briefings to lead members and the chair and vice-chair of scrutiny.

### **Strategic partnerships**

19. Partnership work has improved since the previous inspection and is now good. There is a strong commitment from both elected members and senior officers to working with partners to achieve clear priorities and corporate objectives. Secure partnerships at both strategic and operational levels are already producing some early, but perceptible, benefits for children and young people. The shared understanding of the LEA and its partners of the benefits of collaborative work, and the determination to exploit opportunities to achieve common goals, means there is good capacity for further improvement.

20. The context for partnership work has strengthened as the Local Strategic Partnership has become more established and the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership (CYPSP) has been created. These partnerships have built on earlier groups, thus maximising existing knowledge. Education now has a higher profile within the community strategy, reflected in the decision to create an additional theme to draw together all work relating to children. This decision was the result of wide consultation, reflecting an increased awareness among partners not only of the *Every Child Matters* agenda, but also of the importance of education to Reading's ambitions as a regional centre and a 'learning city'.

---

21. Good strategic partnership with health and social services has already resulted in joint activity, such as the funding of a healthy schools co-ordinator. Further joint work is scheduled through extended schools, one of which is already established, and through new local area multi-agency centres. The creation of the joint directorate of education and children's services is providing additional impetus to inter-agency work. Nevertheless, elected members, senior officers and partners recognise that more needs to be done to develop the understanding of colleagues and schools of the implications of joint working.

22. The LEA's partnership work now includes productive relationships with the dioceses and good support for the Standing Advisory Committee for Religious Education (SACRE). The development of 14-19 education is benefiting from improved partnership with the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and with other providers. Good relationships characterise the Early Years and Childcare Development Partnership (EYCDP).

### **Support for Early Years**

23. Support for early years education, not previously inspected, is highly satisfactory. The range and quality of early years provision is improving, with good support from the early years team, including training, quality assurance and the dissemination of good practice across private, voluntary and maintained settings. However, the systems designed to support transition from early years to Key Stage 1 are not sufficiently robust and the Foundation Stage has not yet made sufficient difference to pupils' attainment at Key Stage 1.

24. The EYCDP has exceeded its childcare targets, especially within Sure Start and Neighbourhood Nursery centres. A high percentage (91%) of 3- and 4-year-olds access nursery education provision, with a third of parents using provision within the non-maintained sector. A quarter of childcare places are used by non-residents, a significant factor in Reading's above-average spending on early years. Members of the partnership have been involved actively in the development of initiatives such as Sure Start and Neighbourhood Nurseries. Plans for children's centres are well-advanced and linked to a number of the LEA's nursery schools, located in disadvantaged communities. As the CYPSP has developed its strategic role, the EYCDP's role has modified into a complementary consultative and information-sharing group.

25. The LEA has provided good support to settings on the use of the Foundation Stage profile, including training and documentation. However, it is recognised that there is some inconsistency in the use of the profile in schools and settings which has yet to be redressed, particularly at the point of transition to Key Stage 1. There are improving links between early years staff and the school improvement teams through the early years advisers. Good support is provided through additional SEN support for early years settings, and there are satisfactory links with LEA inclusion services.

---

---

**Recommendation**

- Improve transition from early years education to schools by improving the quality and consistency of transfer information.

**Support for 14-19 education**

26. The support provided for 14-19 education is unsatisfactory. Secondary schools are diverse in character, but the LEA has been slow to effect change in the curriculum for 14-16 year-olds. Its review of sixth form provision, recommended in the previous inspection report, has also been slow. Nevertheless, the provision has a number of strengths, and the capacity for improvement is satisfactory. The appointment of a 14-19 adviser, who has the confidence of key partners, has resulted in more rapid progress. The draft strategy, drawn up in collaboration with schools and other partners, includes a clear statement of entitlement for 14-19 year-old pupils, and its objectives clearly link into those of the Education Development Plan (EDP) and to other local and regional plans. There is an accurate assessment of the main weaknesses in current provision and detailed action plans for improvement.

27. There is underachievement by pupils at Key Stage 4 overall. The rate of improvement in the proportion of pupils achieving five or more GCSEs at grades A\*-C or A\*-G is below average, and too many young people achieve no GCSEs. The proportion of young people who are not in education, employment or training at age 16 is too high. Pupils aged 14-16 do not currently have equality of access to vocational provision. There is little provision at levels 1 and 2 in school sixth forms, and level 3 provision is not yet planned coherently to reduce unnecessary duplication and small groups. Attainment at level 3 is better. In 2004, attainment on level 3 courses in sixth forms was just above the national average and higher than that of statistical neighbours.

28. These weaknesses are recognised by the LEA and its partners and are shaping plans for the future. Most, but not all, schools now offer some vocational opportunities. This is done either in-house, including a particularly extensive vocational curriculum in one school, or through local further education provision. There is some well-regarded alternative provision for disaffected young people. Detailed work is in hand to establish enhanced vocational options and routes leading to further study in September 2006, possibly through a skills centre. Plans are progressing for a consortium which will collectively provide post-16 education from September 2005. Not all schools will be participating in these ventures, at least initially. Plans also include an increase in level 2 provision post-16. For the first time, a prospectus showing all the opportunities available in Reading for post-16 students in schools or further education is being produced.

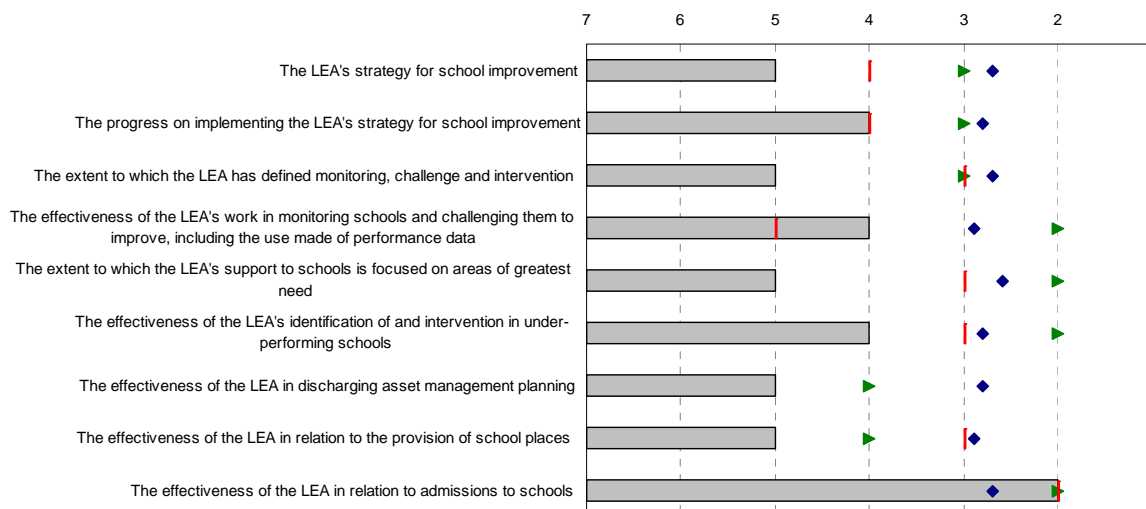


***Recommendation***

- Ensure that developments in 14-19 provision properly address equality of opportunity and breadth of provision, and provide good value for money.

## Section 2: Strategy for education and its implementation

### Summary table of judgements



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

### The strategy for school improvement and its implementation

29. The LEA's strategy for school improvement has structural weaknesses in its planning and in the clarity and transparency of support and intervention in schools. The LEA and its schools acknowledge that standards are not yet high enough. Some aspects of performance are in line with the averages found nationally and in similar authorities, such as English and mathematics at Key Stage 3 and the average points score at GCSE, but there is a widening gap in the percentage of pupils gaining five or more GCSE A\*-C grades. Although there is closer correlation between current performance and schools' aggregated targets, some LEA targets are not achievable given current rates of progress. Nevertheless, there is much good work with schools which is resulting in improvement, and the implementation of the strategy is satisfactory overall.

30. There are strengths in the LEA's support for collaborative work between schools and for school admissions. The LEA currently has no schools in special measures, a significant improvement, and there is much good work with individual schools. The LEA's successes in school improvement are, to a large extent, the result of the efforts of individual officers working with schools to raise standards and enhance provision. This includes the work of school advisers and the well-targeted work of the primary national strategy and Key Stage 3 teams, and the ethnic minority achievement service. There are strengthening links between the school

improvement service and services supporting SEN and social inclusion in implementing the strategy.

31. The LEA has consulted with schools and other partners about its strategic approach to school improvement, both as expressed in the Education Development Plan (EDP) and in its more recent school improvement strategy. Although the EDP priorities reflect national and local priorities, the current activity plans are too imprecise to match activities with success criteria, track resources and monitor progress. The LEA acknowledges that its evaluations of the EDP are not sufficiently rigorous and that the link between evaluation and subsequent planning is underdeveloped. The recently published school improvement strategy also has key weaknesses. It neither sets out the LEA's definitions for monitoring, challenge and intervention nor the criteria for school classification. This lack of clarity is exacerbated by a service level agreement (SLA) in which there is no explicit correlation between costs, entitlement and need.

32. These structural weaknesses, although fundamental to the transparency and coherence of the strategy, and which impact on its overall effectiveness, are readily resolved. Key principles for improvement have already been shared with schools, which challenge the LEA and its schools to enter a more mature and transparent relationship. Schools have responded well and the LEA is now well poised to move forward.

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

33. At the time of the previous inspection, the LEA's work in monitoring and challenging schools, including the use of data, was unsatisfactory. This is now satisfactory, mainly as a result of improvements in the quality of data to challenge schools. The range and quality of performance data produced by the LEA has improved greatly over the last two years and supports more accurate identification of the areas for improvement and support for individual schools. Performance data are well used by advisers to plan their termly monitoring visits and to provide challenge to schools. Monitoring visits are appropriately based on schools' detailed self-evaluation and are followed up by useful reports to headteachers and chairs of governors. These visits are valued by most primary schools and, increasingly, by secondary schools and special schools as providing useful support for school improvement. However, the LEA is only introducing a greater level of differentiation in its monitoring of the most effective schools this year.

34. The LEA provides good support for its Excellence Cluster and for schools in receipt of the leadership incentive grant (LIG). In these areas of its work, resources are focused on the greatest areas of need, and increased challenge is accelerating improvement.

35. Other aspects of the LEA's work in this area are now unsatisfactory. The weaknesses in the LEA's monitoring, support and intervention centre on the absence of clearly stated definitions of these functions and the criteria against which schools

---

---

are categorised. There is a lack of transparency, schools are confused about the rationale for placing them in a particular category, and the LEA has not set out clearly for all schools what is their entitlement to support. The SLA adds to the confusion. This gives schools access to a wide range of services, but does not specify how much they get for their money as provision is based on demand. This creates some dependency as schools are unclear about core entitlement, entitlement through the SLA, and what they are responsible for purchasing beyond this. In addition, an audit of teaching is carried out in a quarter of primary schools each year regardless of their effectiveness. Much effort has been invested in consultation with schools over the new school improvement strategy, but the LEA has not addressed these fundamental issues and cannot demonstrate clearly that its support is focused on areas of greatest need.

### ***Recommendation***

- Define clearly the procedures for monitoring, challenge, intervention and support and ensure these definitions are used transparently and consistently to target support to the areas of greatest need.

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

36. This was highly satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection when the LEA had rightly focused intervention and intensive support on improving underperforming schools, particularly those in special measures. Performance is now only satisfactory. The LEA has been slow to intervene in secondary schools causing concern and, as a result, standards have not risen sufficiently.

37. There are currently no schools in special measures and the number of other schools causing concern has reduced over time. However, Ofsted has identified three schools as having serious weaknesses in the last 18 months. Intervention and support by the LEA has led to reasonable progress in all cases. Intervention in primary schools has been timely and effective but less so in secondary and special schools. This is partly explained by the fact that the LEA has a strong partnership with primary schools but, until recently, has had difficult relationships with its secondary schools. The LEA has, nevertheless, tackled the worst underperformance in secondary schools by closing one school and taking steps to replace another with an Academy. Improved systems, high calibre school improvement officers and the strengthening relationships with secondary schools make the LEA's capacity for improvement in this area good.

### **Asset management planning**

38. Asset management planning is unsatisfactory. Progress since the previous inspection has been slow and, as a result, the LEA does not hold up-to-date information on the condition of its buildings. As a consequence, it has not identified the investment needs of all schools and cannot determine whether the condition backlog is increasing or decreasing.

39. Work on recording condition, sufficiency and suitability has been subject to a number of delays since the LEA inherited its building stock in 1998. Information on suitability is almost five years out-of-date and the work to update the information, though underway, will not be completed until 2006. The LEA has adopted a piecemeal rather than strategic approach to the upgrading of its schools buildings. A number have been improved and a longer term strategy for primary schools has been developed, but plans for secondary schools are limited to a review of the recently unsuccessful Building Schools for the Future bid.

40. Other aspects of asset management are satisfactory. The Asset Management Plan has sound links to the council's education priorities and other plans. There is regular discussion with schools on priorities for investment through a headteachers' forum. Devolved capital budgets are effectively monitored and schools are now engaged in dialogue on how best to use their resources, focusing on school improvement and raising standards.

#### ***Recommendation***

- Ensure survey work on school buildings is completed on time and informs the preparation of an accurate summary of investment needs.

#### **Providing school places**

41. The LEA's planning of school places is now unsatisfactory. Insufficient progress has been made in key areas. The number of surplus places remains high, and a significant minority of schools have more than 25% of spare places. There is currently only a draft school organisation plan (SOP) in place, the LEA not having produced a plan in 2003 and 2004.

42. Although the planning of school places is complex, the LEA has not afforded sufficient priority to tackling key issues. Local government reorganisation located some schools in adjacent LEAs, while still serving Reading's population. This has contributed to the situation in which 40% of pupils attend a secondary school outside Reading. The complexity has been made more difficult in recent years because projections of pupil numbers were not accurate.

43. Improvements are now underway. There have been changes to staffing and resources and a new system for projecting numbers is producing more reliable data. In addition, the LEA now has a draft SOP for 2005/06 which, although subject to further discussion, has been agreed in principle by the School Organisation Committee (SOC). The draft plan meets all statutory requirements and includes an appropriate strategy to tackle surplus places through area-based reviews. The SOC is properly constituted and has taken some difficult decisions on school closure and amalgamation. This includes closing a secondary school, to be replaced with an Academy.

**Recommendation**

- Ensure the timescales for the completion and implementation of the School Organisation Plan are met.

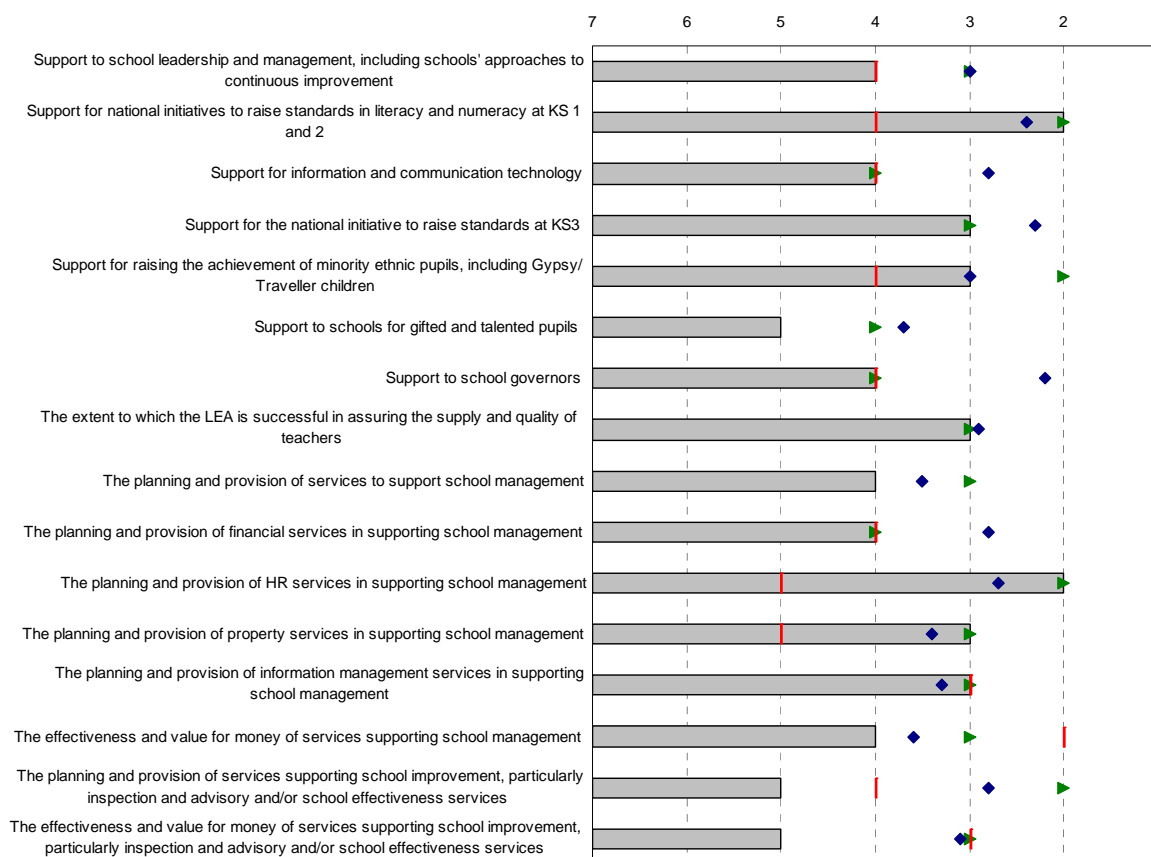
**Admissions to schools**

44. The LEA's arrangements for the administration of school admissions continue to be good. Procedures comply fully with the Code of Practice and co-ordinated arrangements for admissions have been implemented ahead of national requirements. Information to parents is comprehensive and all pupil allocations are made at the same time. The criteria for oversubscription are clearly defined and fair. A high proportion of parental preferences are met and appeals are dealt with quickly. Few appeals are successful. The Admissions Forum is properly constituted and actively consults with schools.

45. Despite these good arrangements, the LEA is receiving strong criticism from some schools and a small number of parents over new arrangements. Changes have been introduced in a positive attempt to reduce the high number of pupils leaving the borough at the age of 11. This has led to a reduction in choice for some, but is designed to meet the council's declared aim of giving a high preference to parents who choose schools within Reading rather than in neighbouring authorities. The council has rightly undertaken to conduct a review of the position in March 2005.

## Section 3: Support to improve education in schools

### Summary table of judgements



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

### Support for school leadership, management and continuous improvement

46. Support for school leadership and management remains satisfactory. There are significant strengths in some services, most notably human resources and the primary national strategy, although support for gifted and talented pupils is unsatisfactory. There is a clear and shared drive to raise standards but the way in which the authority works is not always transparent and does not adequately promote self-managing schools.

47. Appropriate training is provided for headteachers and other senior leaders. This supplements that from the national college and includes a course designed to promote retention by developing leadership potential. The primary leadership programme has been very successful in building leadership capacity in primary schools. Good support and training for headteachers and governors on the use and

interpretation of data has been well received, underpinning the drive for higher standards. Training and support for governors has been strengthened and the authority is working hard to improve governor recruitment. Useful training has also been provided on developing schools' self-evaluation skills. The LEA has responded sensibly to low up-take of some centrally provided training by offering school-based training. The LEA is aware of the need to make more systematic use of feedback from schools to improve services.

48. Much improved data on the performance of schools has led to better targeted advice, training and support. School review is more robust and based on the schools' own self-evaluation. It is welcomed by most schools, with both visits and subsequent reports to headteachers and governors contributing valuably to school improvement planning. However, these strengths are limited by the lack of clarity in the LEA's categorisation of schools and the provision of support, undermining schools' capacity to manage their own improvement.

49. The LEA has sound knowledge of best practice through monitoring visits, school reviews and other visits carried out by advisers and officers. This knowledge is shared across the service through regular team meetings and helpfully disseminated through publications, such as the Key Stage 3 magazine, and through conferences and school-based events. Little use is currently made of the LEA's website for this purpose, but good use is made of an increasing number of leading professionals to model and promote best practice in other schools.

### **Support for the national initiatives at Key Stages 1 and 2**

50. Support for the National Primary Strategy has improved and is now good. This is because it is well led and managed by the primary strategy manager and clearly focused on raising standards by improving teaching and learning. A strong team of skilful consultants has deservedly gained the respect of schools. Work is strengthened by close co-ordination with the wider primary team to ensure that the strategy is central to the LEA's school improvement work.

51. The LEA knows its primary schools well and uses this knowledge to target support and intervention on the greatest areas of underachievement. It has been successful in raising standards at Key Stage 2. There has been improvement over time, particularly at Level 5, and a reduction in the number of schools below floor targets. Attainment is now in line with that of similar authorities but remains below the national average. Standards at Key Stage 1 are generally below those found nationally and in similar authorities, following low attainment on entry. However, the rate of improvement is better, and closer work with the early years team is developing to improve pupils' progression from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1.

52. The strategy has been successful in building capacity within schools. Primary consultant leaders have worked effectively to help senior leadership teams focus on raising standards and the success of the primary leadership programme has been recognised nationally. The capacity of the strategy team is strengthened by the well-targeted use of advanced skills and leading teachers in schools. A coherent

---



and co-ordinated approach to support and challenge for primary schools is achieved through close links with other key players, such as the area SEN officers and the Excellence Cluster project manager.

### **Support for the national initiative at Key Stage 3**

53. A highly satisfactory strategy is in place for improving pupils' attainment and progress at Key Stage 3. It is having a positive impact at both whole school and subject level. The LEA's support for the Key Stage 3 strategy is well regarded by secondary schools and is a major influence in improving the relationship between these schools and the LEA. There is a strong team of enthusiastic and knowledgeable consultants and effective leadership by the strategy manager has brought greater coherence to the work. Although there was a dip in performance in 2004, standards at Key Stage 3 have improved over time and results in 2003 were among the most improved nationally.

54. Analysis of data is used well to target support to underachieving groups and individuals and consultants' visits to school are well-focused. Schools acknowledge that whole school work, notably assessment for learning and literacy across the curriculum, has been particularly successful in improving teaching and learning. The work of the Key Stage 3 consultants is well integrated with that of the wider secondary team, thus ensuring that work with schools is well aligned. Good examples of joint work with advisers include departmental reviews and training for the LIG collaborative. Schools are well-informed on strategy developments and good practice through a comprehensive newsletter. The strength of the team and their preparedness for future developments, coupled with schools' confidence in their work, means there is good capacity for further improvement.

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

55. This aspect of the LEA's work is now highly satisfactory. There has been good progress since the previous inspection, particularly in the development of support for minority ethnic pupils, although actions have not yet fully improved outcomes. There is good leadership of the programme of support for English as an additional language (EAL) and ethnic minority achievement (EMA), and the work of the team is well-regarded by schools. The plan for developing EAL is well-considered and is being implemented effectively. Five primary schools are piloting new strategies for teaching and learning and raising achievement. There is careful monitoring of pupils' progress, particularly in these five schools, and the results of monitoring show that the activities are raising pupils' attainment.

56. The EMA team work jointly with link advisers and head teachers in analysing data and setting targets for the attainment of minority ethnic pupils. The proportion of minority ethnic pupils in Reading's schools, at 32%, is above average. The attainment of pupils of Pakistani heritage, who form the largest minority ethnic group in the borough, is improving. There has also been some improvement in the attainment of other groups, including pupils of Black African background. An

---

---

initiative to support the motivation and personal development of pupils of Black Caribbean heritage is helping individual pupils to improve their self-confidence and attitude to learning. Further improvement of the achievements of some groups of minority ethnic pupils remains a priority, particularly for pupils of Black Caribbean and mixed White and Black Caribbean heritage at GCSE. There is good support for individual refugees, including liaison with carers and other agencies. Satisfactory and cost effective support is provided for Gypsy and Traveller pupils through consortium arrangements with other LEAs.

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

57. Support for gifted and talented pupils is unsatisfactory. Despite recent progress, including guidance to all schools, and some good support in the Excellence Cluster, support for all schools across the LEA is under-developed and hence provision for pupils is variable. The LEA has established secondary school co-ordinator groups, but not all schools attend and there is little support for primary schools outside the Excellence Cluster. The LEA is active in supporting training opportunities for co-ordinators in association with a local higher education institution. However, participation in LEA training for the broader range of schools is low.

58. There are some examples of sharing of practice, especially within the Key Stage 3 strategy but, overall, there is little dissemination of good practice to schools outside the Excellence Cluster. The LEA manages the summer school programme and the reporting of outcomes effectively. This includes appropriate training on evaluation and the dissemination of outcomes, both by schools and from the officer for gifted and talented pupils. There is, however, no further tracking of these pupils after transition to secondary school. Some partnership work in the arts, music and sports provides additional opportunities for talented pupils, but the LEA is not sufficiently active in promoting more extensive programmes. Support to address the emotional needs of gifted and talented pupils is at an early stage and schools are not yet sufficiently involved in the auditing of need or design of provision.

#### ***Recommendation***

- Improve the provision for and monitoring of gifted and talented pupils, to ensure parity of provision across all schools.

### **The supply and quality of teachers**

59. This aspect of the LEA's work is highly satisfactory. The LEA undertakes a good range of activity to both recruit and retain staff, with varying success. Schools are competing for staff in a difficult context, including high housing costs. The LEA makes significant efforts to recruit and support newly-qualified teachers (NQTs) and this has benefited primary schools. The local authority's scheme to assist key workers in purchasing housing has also helped, as has early payment of NQTs. The LEA has good links with higher education institutions, but secondary schools still

have to work hard to recruit teachers, particularly in shortage subjects such as science.

60. The LEA provides satisfactory support to retain staff. Support for NQTs led to an improvement in retention into their second year of teaching in 2003/04. Graduate and overseas trained teachers are well supported with induction programmes and support in working towards qualified teacher status. However, career development routes are not clear. The LEA is currently reviewing its continuous professional development strategy, including providing more tailored training, with early indications of success.

### **Effectiveness and value for money of services to support school management**

61. The planning, provision, effectiveness and value for money of services to support school management are satisfactory. Schools now regard most services as at least satisfactory and individual services are improving, some significantly. Although there is limited benchmarking, the costs of services are broadly in line with similar LEAs. The LEA has taken sensible steps to address schools' concerns over technical support for information and communication technology. Following the recommendations in the previous inspection report, schools now receive better information about services. However, not all of the recommendations have been fully met. The current service level agreements (SLAs) available to schools have improved, but quality is variable. The best are very clear about what schools will receive and what this will cost; others are imprecise.

62. The LEA's annual trade fair of providers enhances the ability of schools to make informed decisions and thus overcomes some of the shortcomings of the SLAs. Several schools have a history of procuring their own services, and the fair encourages more schools to be discriminating purchasers. Not all services to schools are the subject of regular monitoring against performance indicators. Similarly, the LEA's measuring of the cost effectiveness of its services is under developed. Prices are related to the costs of provision, but not all services carry out these calculations in sufficient detail. The council is increasingly aware of its role as a broker of services and a number of centrally negotiated contracts are available, with schools consulted appropriately over services on offer.

63. The quality of financial support and payroll services to schools remains satisfactory. The LEA works closely with schools over budget setting, including termly meetings with headteachers and bursars to resolve particular issues. The monitoring of school budgets identifies schools with financial difficulties, and good support and monitoring is provided to facilitate their recovery. However, variations in schools' financial independence have resulted in inconsistent financial information system across the LEA and its schools. Variations in schools' recording systems limits the efficiency of the LEA's monitoring.

64. The quality of the human resources (HR) service has improved significantly and is now good. All recommendations from the previous inspection have been met

---

---

and the schools survey rates the service as good. Support for casework is timely, consistent and regarded positively by schools. All recent contracts have been issued within the statutory period. Model policies are up to date, easily accessible by schools and subject to regular revision in conjunction with schools. Some matching of central and school records has taken place, although this is not yet systematic. Improvement in the service has been characterised by strong corporate involvement, including a Best Value review, and regular discussions with schools and professional associations.

65. Property services to schools also responded well to recommendations made in the previous inspection and are now highly satisfactory. Overall, schools rate the quality of property services in the top quartile when compared with other LEAs, although secondary schools are less positive. The service is now much more customer-focused with a dedicated schools' help desk. All schools buy into the emergency service. Most capital projects are delivered on time and within budget.

#### ***Recommendation***

- Improve procedures to measure cost effectiveness accurately.

#### **Effectiveness and value for money of services to support school improvement**

66. Despite some good features, this area of the LEA's work is now unsatisfactory. Service leaders are not fully aware of the strengths and weaknesses of their services, service plans lack precision and are not of consistent quality. Plans focus on the right priorities, but intended outcomes, costs, and timescales are unclear. In addition, weaknesses in the LEA's procedures for monitoring, challenge, support and intervention lead to confusion about levels of support from services.

67. Most schools buy into the SLA that entitles them to a wide range of services, but there is no detail of the level of support to which schools are entitled. The recommendation in the 2003 Best Value review, that a more rigorous SLA should be drawn up, differentiating support and setting out clear costs, has not been met. Schools still obtain services largely on demand. Although expenditure on LEA services is low, value for money is obscure, given the lack of clarity over entitlement.

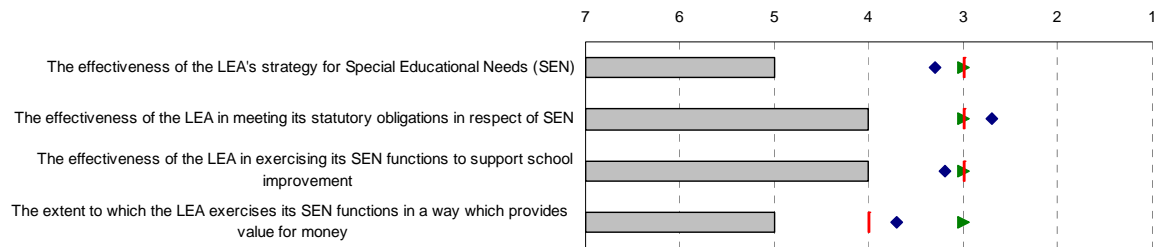
68. Nevertheless, school improvement services are generally well regarded by schools, not least because of the expertise and experience of officers. There is a clear and shared understanding over raising standards and that challenge is critical to this process. The national strategies are making a significant contribution to raising standards. In addition to the educational welfare, school psychological and behaviour support services are contributing to improving attendance and behaviour and thus to raising standards.

69. Most services are aware of the need to deploy staff in line with the needs of schools and the national strategy teams manage this particularly well. There are clear systems for line management and workloads are monitored. Performance

management has been improved through the incorporation of the national standards for school improvement professionals, but it does not yet reflect service targets. Professional development needs are identified through performance management and relevant training strengthens expertise, for example, the provision of Ofsted training for consultants. Sound procedures are in place for recruiting new staff and a number of good appointments have been made in the last two years. These new appointments, together with improved management structures have increased the confidence of schools and strengthened capacity for future improvement.

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

### Summary table of judgements



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

### The strategy for SEN

70. The council has a clear commitment to the inclusion of pupils with SEN but, despite a range of purposeful actions, the LEA's strategy is now unsatisfactory. Insufficient progress has been made since the previous inspection. Strategic planning lacks coherence and the monitoring and reporting of progress is insufficiently rigorous. However, the LEA has now put into place the building blocks to support the next steps and has good senior management capacity to drive its strategy forward.

71. The LEA did not manage to secure the momentum in implementing the recommendations from its own SEN review that was anticipated at the time of the previous inspection. The decision to update the review slowed progress, and there has been insufficient action by officers to speed up the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs. Schools' understanding of inclusion of SEN pupils is variable and some special schools do not have a clear enough view of their future role. The LEA has failed to communicate its overarching strategy, despite consultation with schools. There is also insufficient awareness in schools of the funding strategy for delegating budgets to support early intervention.

72. The LEA has undertaken some key actions to underpin its strategy, including the well-managed closure and re-designation of a special school, but this is not yet accompanied by sufficient capacity in mainstream schools. Progress on the reduction of statements is also slow. The decision to develop retained services to support early intervention is appropriate, but it is not matched sufficiently by systems to evaluate its impact and assess value for money.

73. The 2003 audit of needs identified useful priorities, but planning is not yet sufficiently robust or coherent. The inclusion policy implementation plan is more detailed than the EDP, but neither is sufficiently precise to match activity with success criteria or to monitor progress. More significantly, costs are not clearly set

out. As a result, there is a lack of clarity about how the LEA will achieve value for money for its SEN spending, which is already significantly above average and is set to rise. Reporting to elected members is regular, but the lack of precision in plans, outcome measures and costs constrains rigorous scrutiny.

### **Statutory obligations**

74. The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory obligations has declined and is now satisfactory. There has been a clear focus on the timely completion of assessments and this is now in line with national comparisons. The most recent LEA data indicates that all statements without exceptions are completed on time. However, the LEA is not currently meeting the requirement to provide information to parents via a website. There are clear criteria for statutory assessment, linked to the SEN code of practice. The LEA is ceasing to maintain some statements and has achieved a low rate of formal mediation and SEN tribunal referrals through good casework. The parent partnership service has successfully trained parent support workers and parents have good access to SEN officers.

75. The quality of statements is good. The LEA recognises that it has an excessive number of statements and, while the process of producing them is efficient, substantial resources are taken up in their administration. The LEA has succeeded in reducing some bureaucracy by improving the annual review and referral forms. There is targeted attendance by officers at annual reviews, but challenge to some of the high cost placements is not sufficiently robust. Pupils' individual education plans contain insufficient detail to monitor their progress precisely.

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

76. This was also highly satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection, but is now satisfactory, a reflection of the higher expectations on LEAs and the early stage of some of the LEA's work. The recommendation to provide a comprehensive training programme has been met. The range, quality and frequency of training for special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs), including accredited training, is now good.

77. In contrast, the dissemination of good practice for schools has been slow. Annual joint reviews of schools' inclusive practice, involving school improvement officers, the behaviour support team and educational psychologists, are planned but have yet to be established. Nevertheless, there are some emerging examples of good joint work between the school improvement service and the pupil support service. There are also clear criteria to guide schools on how to support pupils with varying levels of SEN.

### **Value for money**

78. The LEA's value for money for SEN has declined and is now unsatisfactory. High costs are not reflected in improved outcomes for pupils. Some, but by no

---

means all of these costs, reflect the geographical context of the LEA, and are the result of cross border payments that are difficult to control. However, most significantly, there is currently no clear strategy for controlling SEN spending or for ascertaining value for money.

79. The progress made by SEN pupils is broadly in line with national comparisons, but costs are significantly above those found nationally and in similar LEAs. Despite the high spending, low levels of funding go to support statemented pupils. This is one of the consequences of the LEA's failure to reduce significantly the high number of statements and the associated administrative costs. SEN costs have been steadily rising with no obvious increase in benefit to pupils. Current funding plans depend too heavily on the closure and replacement of one special school. There is a lack of clarity about how rising costs will be controlled. Plans are not clearly costed and reports to elected members contain insufficient information on budget implications to enable them to monitor and challenge SEN spending. There is some monitoring of delegated budgets to schools, but this does not yet have sufficient priority given its importance in underpinning the inclusion strategy.

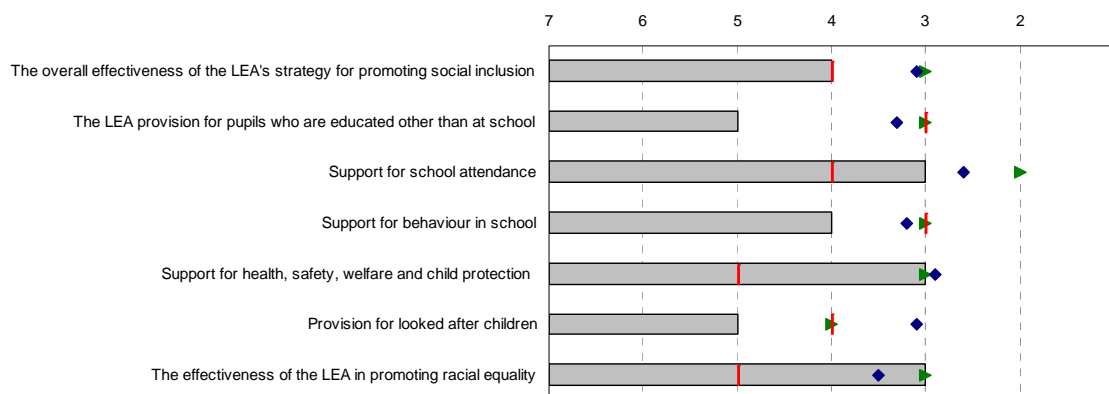
***Recommendations***

- As a matter of urgency, devise a clear strategy for the SEN component of inclusion, with fully costed plans, so that the funding implications are made clear and value for money can be assured.
- Ensure that the statutory requirements for publication of SEN information for parents and carers on an LEA website are met.



## Section 5: Support for social inclusion

### Summary table of judgements



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

### The strategy for social inclusion

80. The strategy for social inclusion is satisfactory. Following the recommendation from the previous inspection, the LEA has now set out its overarching strategy. This has been informed by consultation with partners and, significantly, with children and young people. There is a clear direction for social inclusion which also acknowledges the needs of pupils with SEN. Strong features include the LEA's partnership work, the behaviour improvement programme (BIP) and the development of the extended school. The LEA has made good progress in some aspects of its work, including its support for combating racism and for child protection, both previously unsatisfactory. However, there are still some weaknesses, especially in provision for pupils out of school and for looked after children.

81. The councils' commitment to social inclusion is clearly expressed in corporate plans, and this priority is reflected in the community strategy. Work with external partners is well advanced, as illustrated by the good cross-agency representation on the CYPSP and some joint-funded projects. There has been limited pooling of budgets to date, either within the authority or with external partners, but the key principles for joint working are increasingly well established. Services are being delivered in an increasingly coherent way with good links, for example, between the school improvement service, the behaviour support service and the education welfare service. The move to the joint directorate is integral to social inclusion.

82. However, much remains to be done. Although clearly linked with the overarching strategy, associated plans are not yet robust. The 2004 Best Value review of services to children highlighted the need for efficiency, but cost-

---

effectiveness is not currently a key consideration in routine service planning. Aspects of provision for some vulnerable children are not yet satisfactory and the LEA's systems for tracking the progress of these children are not yet secure. Despite good partnership work within the borough, collaboration with neighbouring authorities has yet to resolve issues such as exclusions, which are critical to social inclusion in Reading.

### **Provision for pupils educated other than at school**

83. Provision for the education of pupils who are out of school is unsatisfactory. The attainment of pupils in alternative provision at GCSE A\*-G grades is in line with the average found nationally and in similar authorities. However, there is insufficient provision for pupils in Key Stages 3 and 4 and statutory duties are not being met. Only 63% of excluded pupils at Key Stages 3 and 4 receive more than 20 hours of education per week.

84. The LEA has a high number of children not in school, three times the national average. The situation is made more complex by the high rate of exclusions of Reading pupils from schools in neighbouring authorities, especially in the last year. The LEA is taking steps to improve the flexibility of its provision through restructuring its pupil referral units. Action has also been taken to work regionally on new strategies for improvement, but this is at an early stage.

85. There are some positive features of the support for excluded pupils. The re-integration of pupils back into mainstream school is well-managed through clear plans negotiated with receiving schools. There are good links between the school improvement service and the educational welfare service in managing the attendance and follow-up support for children who have been excluded.

86. The LEA's monitoring and support for children educated at home is highly satisfactory. Provision for teenage parents and pregnant schoolgirls is improving and is resulting in good rates of transition to part-time further education courses. These pupils now have greater access to mainstream education through flexible provision based on the extended school. Pupils who are in hospital receive their statutory entitlement to education.

### ***Recommendation***

- Ensure that all pupils educated other than at school receive their statutory entitlement to full-time education.

### **Support for attendance**

87. Support for attendance has improved and is now highly satisfactory, although secondary school attendance has yet to show sufficient improvement. Schools have confidence in the LEA's support, notably the work of the expanded Education Welfare Service (EWS). There is an increasing focus on the link between pupils' attendance and their attainment and progress, with well-targeted actions to

---

improve the attendance of specific groups of pupils. Primary school attendance is in line with national averages. Unauthorised absence, a weakness at the time of the previous inspection, has improved at a faster rate than nationally and is now in line with the national average. Two-thirds of primary schools improved their attendance figures in 2003/04, bringing attendance within 0.7 percentage points of the EDP target. Secondary school attendance is in line with that in similar authorities, but it is below national averages and fell short of the EDP target in 2003/4. Moreover, unauthorised absence is rising in secondary schools and is now above the averages found nationally and in similar authorities.

88. The LEA provides clear guidance to schools on attendance, through both documentation and a good range of training opportunities. Schools are subject to good challenge, both in setting their annual targets and in subsequent termly reviews by the EWS. Good communications between the EWS and members of the school improvement service, including the Key Stage 3 consultants, promotes coherent work in schools. There are good examples of targeted action, such as attendance panels and truancy sweeps, run jointly with the police. Breakfast clubs are leading to improved attendance in primary schools. The monitoring of child employment is well managed and has been commended in an independent review of practice.

### **Support for behaviour**

89. Support for behaviour is satisfactory. The LEA's behaviour support plan is clear, with well co-ordinated initiatives. Exclusion rates in primary schools have reduced and the well-targeted BIP is also leading to lower rates of exclusions in participating schools. Permanent exclusions had been reducing in secondary schools, but there has been a recent increase. In addition, the costs of the LEA's provision are high, as are the rates of both permanent and fixed-term exclusions for pupils with SEN.

90. Headteachers are working actively with the LEA through the inclusion monitoring group and are committed to reducing exclusions. The LEA has a clear understanding of which groups of pupils are vulnerable to exclusion and it has developed a secondary behaviour support service to improve inclusive practice. All secondary schools with high exclusion rates have purchased services from the new behaviour support team, to develop improved preventative strategies. There has been some useful collaboration with neighbouring LEA officers, with joint training and development work. This is particularly pertinent given the high proportion of exclusions of Reading pupils from schools in adjacent LEAs.

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

91. Support for health and safety, welfare and child protection has improved significantly and is now highly satisfactory. Work in these areas is adequately supported by corporate and cross-agency planning. All schools now have trained designated child protection teachers. The LEA has responded appropriately to the

---

---

recommendation to monitor the uptake of training, but training records are not always monitored with sufficient frequency to ensure training is fully up to date.

92. Training for designated teachers has been reviewed and it now includes some multi-agency child protection training. School have clear guidance on referrals to social services. Officer support to individual schools is good and good progress has been made on the development of a safeguarding strategy, which bodes well for the joint directorate. Safeguarding work has also included guidance for newly-qualified and overseas teachers. The LEA has recognised its responsibilities from the Area Child Protection Committee (ACPC) review of serious cases and, as a result, key changes have been implemented.

93. The LEA's policy and guidance to schools on health and safety is reviewed regularly. Officer support to safeguarding work is strong and both risk assessment and health and safety audits are valued by schools. However, there are no agreed timescales for the review of schools' action plans. Although Reading has satisfactory health and safety training for all school staff, it is not sufficiently tailored to schools' needs. The current health and safety service plan identifies this as a priority.

#### **Provision for looked after children**

94. The provision for looked after children is unsatisfactory. Performance targets for looked after children have not been met and pupils' performance at GCSE is below that found nationally and in similar authorities. The number of children involved is small, with consequent fluctuations in data, but standards remain low. Case work files demonstrate some good support for individual children, but only 87% of pupils have completed personal education plans (PEPs) and details are missing from PEPs, including timescales and success criteria. Systems to monitor pupils' progress, including electronic data systems are underdeveloped.

95. The LEA has implemented the recommendation of the previous inspection, to improve guidance for designated staff, and has developed a satisfactory training programme. Additional staff have been appointed to support an increasing number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. There are clear success criteria to focus the work of the multi agency support team for looked after children, but plans have too few milestones by which to monitor progress. Elected members take their corporate parenting role seriously, but the quality of feedback to them lacks detail and does not enable adequate challenge to the service. Training for elected members is too sporadic.

#### ***Recommendation***

- Ensure that all looked after children have high quality PEPs, with clear outcomes.

**Promoting racial equality**

96. The promotion of racial equality has improved and is now highly satisfactory. This represents good progress and, given the level of commitment and achievements to date, there is good capacity for further improvement. There is a commitment to equality issues among senior officers and within schools. Partnership work, for example through the black communities forum and SACRE, is a strength. It has led to clear protocols for teacher and pupil visits to centres of worship and contributions to training on multi-faith understanding.

97. There is a good race equalities scheme in place and a satisfactory action plan, although the timescales are insufficiently detailed. The rate of reporting on racial incidents is good, but officers acknowledge that 100% returns conceal some unreported incidents. Action is being taken to improve the quality of reporting systems. Members receive regular reports and demonstrate good understanding of race equality issues. Specific LEA-funded projects are undertaken with schools to combat racism. Training is provided for school staff and governors, but participation by governors in training is low. The LEA has taken constructive action to increase numbers of minority ethnic governors and this has led to a recent increase in their number.

## Appendix A

### Record of Judgement Recording Statements

Name of LEA :	Reading Local Education Authority
LEA number:	870
Reporting Inspector:	Heather Richardson HMI
Date of Inspection:	January 2005

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

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

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



	in a way which provides value for money		
<b>Section 5: Support for social inclusion</b>			
5.1	The overall effectiveness of the LEA's strategy for promoting social inclusion	4	
5.2	The LEA provision for pupils who have no school place	5	
5.3	Support for school attendance	3	
5.4	Support for behaviour in schools	4	
5.5	Support for health, safety, welfare and child protection	3	
5.6	Provision for looked after children	5	
5.7	The effectiveness of the LEA in promoting racial equality	3	

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

***JRS numerical judgements are allocated on a 7-point scale:***

Grade 1: Very good; Grade 2: Good; Grade 3: Highly satisfactory; Grade 4: Satisfactory; Grade 5: Unsatisfactory; Grade 6: Poor; Grade 7: Very poor

***Note: in the case of JRS 1: socio-economic context of the LEA and JRS 2.3: performance of schools, grades relate to comparisons against national averages:***

Grades 1-2: Well above; Grade 3: Above; Grade 4: In line; Grade 5: Below; Grades 6-7: Well below.

## Appendix B

### Context of the inspection

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

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

- the progress the LEA has made since the time of its previous inspection in 2001;
- the overall effectiveness of the LEA and its capacity to improve further;
- the LEA's performance in major aspects of its work;
- recommendations on areas for improvement.

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

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

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

- |  |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• support for information and communication technology;</li><li>• support for school governors;</li><li>• the planning and provision of information management services in supporting school management.</li></ul> |
|--|

Inspection judgements are made against criteria that can be found on the Ofsted website. For each inspected function of the LEA an inspection team agrees a numerical grade. The numerical grades awarded for the judgements made in this inspection are to be found in Appendix A. These numerical grades must be

---

considered in the light of the full report. Some of the grades are used in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment profile for the education service.

### **Context of the LEA**

Reading LEA has many economic advantages, including its strategic location, excellent transport and communication links and skilled labour force. As a result, its economy is thriving and unemployment, at 2%, is very low. Nevertheless, there are pockets of deprivation where unemployment rates are higher. One of the authority's 15 wards fall within the 5% most deprived wards nationally for child poverty and Reading is ranked 153 out of 354 authorities on the 2004 ODPM Index of Multiple Deprivation. Moreover, the high cost of living has resulted in difficulties in recruiting and retaining public sector workers, including teachers and LEA officers.

The population of Reading is 144,000, similar to that at the time of the previous inspection, with a proportion of adults with higher educational qualifications which is greater than the national average. The school age population is just below 26,000 and represents a similar proportion of the total population as nationally. Approximately 13% of the population is of minority ethnic heritage, but the proportion of pupils of minority ethnic heritage in Reading schools, 32%, is above the national averages. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals in primary and secondary schools is in line with the national averages. The percentage of pupils in primary schools with statements of special educational need is in line with the national averages; it is above average in secondary schools.

The LEA maintains 5 nursery schools, 3 infant schools, 2 junior schools, 32 primary schools, 7 secondary schools, 3 special schools and 3 pupil referral units. Of the secondary schools, two are selective grammar schools. There is some inward mobility of pupils, but 40% of secondary-age pupils do not attend Reading schools; borough boundaries are not aligned with the conurbation or with established school catchments.

There have been some modifications to political structures since the previous inspection. One of the five overview and scrutiny panels is dedicated to education and children's services. Of the eight cabinet members who share collective responsibility, one acts as lead member for Education and Lifelong Learning and one as lead member for children's services. The council is in the process of restructuring the education directorate and, from April 2005, it will be amalgamated with children's social services to create a new directorate of education and children's services.

### **The performance of schools**

Pupils' attainment on entry to school is below the national average and it remains below the national average and that of similar authorities at Key Stage 1. At Key Stage 2 attainment is in line with similar authorities. It is below national averages at Level 4, but is in line with national averages at Level 5. Pupils make average progress between these key stages. Rates of improvement at Key Stages 1 are

---

generally better than those found nationally and in similar authorities, but are variable at Key Stage 2.

Attainment at Key Stage 3, based on 2003 data, is in line with the national average in English and mathematics but below average in science. Unvalidated data indicates a decline in performance in most measures at Key Stage 3 in 2004. Pupils make progress which is well above average between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3. These outcomes are influenced by the significant amount of pupil mobility between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3. Rates of improvement at Key Stage 3 are in line with national averages in mathematics, but are below in English and well below in science. They are below that of similar authorities in English and mathematics, and well below in science.

Attainment at GCSE is at best in line with the national average, as demonstrated by the average points score, but it is below the national average for 5 or more A\*-C grades and well below for both 1 and 5 or more A\*-G grades. The gap between the performance of the LEA's schools and of schools nationally for 5 or more A\*-C grades has widened significantly from 1.2% in 2001 to 6.2% in 2004. Attainment at 5 or more A\*-C grades is in line with similar authorities and the average points score is above their average, but attainment at one or more A\*-G grades is below the average of similar authorities and that at 5 or more A\*-G grades is well below. The progress which pupils make between Key Stages 3 and 4 is well below average. Rates of improvement at GCSE vary and are at best in line with the national trend and that in similar LEAs, but the rate of improvement for 5 or more A\*-C grades is well below average.

The LEA did not meet any of its 2004 targets, although it came within 0.5 percentage points of its Key Stage 2 Level 5 mathematics target. The match between performance and schools' aggregated targets was closer. All Key Stage 2 schools' aggregated targets were exceeded except mathematics at Level 4, as was the Key Stage 3 target for mathematics at Level 5. GCSE performance in 2004 was significantly adrift from schools' aggregated targets. Given current rates of improvement, the LEA's targets for 2005 are unlikely to be met. Most primary schools' aggregated targets for 2005 are feasible, but the gap between performance and schools' targets at Key Stage 3 and GCSE is substantial.

The findings of recent school inspections show that the percentage of primary schools found to be good or very good is below that found nationally and in similar LEAs. The percentage of good or very good secondary schools is below the national average and in line with that in similar authorities, but the number of schools in the sample is small.

Attendance in primary schools is in line with the national average, as are unauthorised absences. Permanent exclusions for 2002-03 are below the national average. In secondary schools, attendance is well below the national average and unauthorised absences are well above. Permanent exclusions for 2002/03 are below average, but there was a steep rise in 2003/04.

---

**Funding data for the LEA**

Schools budget	Reading	Statistical neighbours average	Unitary Average	England Average
	£ per pupil	£ per pupil	£ per pupil	£ per pupil
Individual schools budget	2886	2984	2795	2900
Standards fund delegated	72	64	56	63
Education for under fives	134	87	87	85
Strategic management	12	<b>37</b>	31	30
Special educational needs	179	127	116	126
Grants	4	19	26	26
Access	82	62	63	60
Capital expenditure from revenue	0	16	19	24
<b>Total schools budget</b>	<b>3369</b>	<b>3428</b>	<b>3224</b>	<b>3354</b>
Schools formula spending share	3267	<b>3270</b>	3057	3197

Source: DfES Comparative Tables 2004-05

LEA budget	Reading	Statistical neighbours average	Unitary average	England average
	£ per pupil	£ per pupil	£ per pupil	£ per pupil
Strategic management	91	106	89	99
Specific Grants	23	17	18	14
Special educational needs	53	40	36	36
School improvement	20	35	35	38
Access	123	119	137	142
Capital expenditure from revenue	10	1	2	2
Youth and Community	150	61	70	75
<b>Total LEA budget</b>	<b>470</b>	<b>378</b>	<b>387</b>	<b>406</b>

Source: DfES Comparative Tables 2004-05

All figures are net. Average quoted are mean averages; the original DfES Comparative Tables quote median average figures, not the mean average

**Notes**