**OFFICE FOR STANDARDS
IN EDUCATION**

INSPECTION OF

MILTON KEYNES

LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY

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

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INTRODUCTION

1. This inspection was carried out by OFSTED in conjunction with the Audit Commission under the Local Government Act 1997. The inspection used the *Framework for the Inspection of Local Education Authorities*, which focuses on the effectiveness of local education authority (LEA) work to support school improvement.

2. The inspection was partly based on data, some of which was provided by the LEA, on school inspection information and audit reports, on documentation and discussion with LEA members, staff in the directorate for learning and development and in other Council directorates and representatives of the LEA's partners. In addition a questionnaire seeking views on aspects of the LEA's work was circulated to 77 schools. The response rate was 74 per cent.

3. The inspection involved studies of the effectiveness of particular aspects of the LEA's work through visits to three first schools, three combined schools, six middle schools, four secondary schools, one special school and the pupil referral unit (PRU). The visits tested the views of governors, headteachers and other staff on key aspects of the LEA's strategy. The visits considered whether support provided by the LEA contributes, where appropriate, to the discharge of the LEA's statutory duties, is effective in contributing to improvements in the school, and provides value for money. Evidence from other Her Majesty's Inspectors visits to schools within the LEA was also considered.

COMMENTARY

4. Milton Keynes was established as a new unitary authority in 1997. Overall, it serves a relatively affluent population. However, this masks the fact that 18 of the authority's first, combined and middle deemed primary schools and three of the secondary schools are situated within four wards which, in 1999, were in the top 30 per cent of most deprived wards in England. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is just below the national average.

5. On incorporation, the new authority faced considerable challenges. Standards in schools were low, services to schools under the previous authority had been limited, and the authority was faced with the fastest population growth and the highest proportion of children and young people in the United Kingdom.

6. In too many areas progress has been unsatisfactory. This is particularly the case in provision for special educational needs, strategic management and aspects of access. Overall, there are considerably more weaknesses than strengths.

7. Standards have risen at slightly above the national rate at Key Stage 1 and 2. Nevertheless, they remain below the national averages. Standards in secondary schools have improved at Key Stage 3 and are close to the national average. The average points score at GCSE is close to the national average, the proportion of pupils achieving five or more A*-C grades at GCSE, is below national figures.

8. The Education Development Plan (EDP), which is the main strategic plan for raising achievement, is clear and appropriate. Schools are signed up to its priorities and have been well consulted on them. Generally, the plan is being well implemented. The LEA's approach to monitoring and challenge is clearly understood by schools and support and intervention is effectively targeted at the weakest First, Combined, Middle and Special schools. However, the LEA has not been effective in raising standards in the weakest secondary schools.

9. In addition to monitoring, challenge, support and intervention, the following functions are carried out well:

- the collection and use of data to set targets with schools;
- support for literacy;
- support for numeracy;
- support for first, combined and middle schools causing concern;
- support for early years;
- support for newly qualified teachers (NQTs) and the induction of headteachers;
- liaison with other agencies; and
- support for special educational needs (SEN) by the educational psychology service.

10. The following functions are carried out inadequately:

- special educational needs;
- provision for pupils who have no school place;

- support for behaviour in schools;
- liaison with other Council services;
- support for children in public care;
- support for information and communication technology (ICT), both in the curriculum and in administration;
- measures to combat racism;
- support for secondary schools causing concern;
- property services and asset management planning; and
- performance management and the introduction of Best Value.

11. There are clear links between corporate policies, directorate policies and plans for education. However, there are significant weaknesses in strategic planning in some key areas, most notably SEN, and other aspects of social inclusion. These weaknesses, and a lack of common purpose, aims and objectives across services have constrained the development of a coherent approach to service delivery to schools. Some progress has been made in realigning resources to priorities, but there is no medium-term financial planning, and funding for social inclusion has not been aligned to a coherent strategy.

12. There is an unacceptable level of variation in the management of services. Overall, service standards, service specifications and comparative data against which performance can be measured are not well developed. Advisory, school support and early years services are well managed. However, management services are too varied in their effectiveness to be satisfactory. Pupil services are poorly managed and some services are under-resourced for the tasks they have to carry out. Where progress has been made it is due to the hard work of individuals, often operating in a strategic vacuum.

13. The low spending on education by elected members has convinced schools that there is a lack of commitment to education. Members have taken too little action to ensure that the learning and development directorate operates in an integrated way and that services for education make appropriate progress. The strategic director provides a clear, and appropriate, vision for the directorate, but has not been sufficiently proactive in its implementation.

14. In the view of the inspection team, the LEA has the capacity to carry out the recommendations within this report for school improvement, but does not have the strategic or operational capacity to carry out the improvements necessary in SEN, and those aspects of access which are unsatisfactory. A further inspection will be carried out within 18 months.

SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Context

15. Milton Keynes was established as a new unitary authority in 1997. On incorporation the Council inherited a number of difficulties. Standards of achievement were low in schools, funding levels and resources were poor, as was support for special educational needs (SEN). There was little data on care planning, educational placement and achievement. This, along with the fastest population growth and the highest proportion of children and young people in the United Kingdom, presented the new authority with a significant challenge.

16. In January 2000, there were 34,679 pupils in maintained schools; nine per cent of the pupil population were from a minority ethnic group. In July 1998, 4.9 per cent of pupils had English as an additional language (EAL).

17. In 1999, 12.9 per cent of primary pupils and 15.1 per cent of secondary pupils were entitled to a school meal; this was slightly below the national average. Overall, Milton Keynes serves a relatively affluent population. However, this masks the fact that 18 of the authority's primary schools and three of the secondary schools are situated within four wards which, in 1999, were in the top 30 per cent of the most deprived wards in England. In addition pupil mobility, particularly in the primary sector, is high.

18. In January 2000, around 69 per cent of four-year-old children were educated in reception classes in primary schools; the remainder was catered for by the private and voluntary sector.

19. In January 2000, 3.2 per cent of pupils in Milton Keynes' primary schools had a statement of SEN; this is above the national average. In the secondary schools 5.2 per cent had a statement, well above the national average.

20. The present organisation of schools is complex as the table below illustrates.

Type of School	Number
Nursery Schools	2
Nursery classes attached to first/combined schools.	12
First Schools (aged 5-8)	38 (five which are Church of England VC schools)
Combined Schools (aged 8-12)	28 (four which are Roman Catholic VA and one which is Church of England VC)
Middle Schools (aged 8-12)	18 (one which is a Church of England VA school and one which is a foundation school)
Secondary Schools (Aged 12-19)	10 (one which is a Roman Catholic VA school and four which are foundation schools)
Special Schools	6
Departments for Pupils with SEN (attached to mainstream)	25 (12 primary, 13 secondary)
Pupil Referral Unit (secondary)	1

The figures above include the Stantonbury Campus as one secondary school, although formally there are two schools established.

21. As a result of the rapid population growth in the area, the local authority is committed to the biggest school building programme in the country. Three new schools, one secondary and two primary, opened in 1999. Statutory notices have been determined for three new primary schools to open in September 2001. A further nine schools are planned to meet growth in the future.

Performance of schools

22. OFSTED inspection data indicates that pupils' attainment on entry to schools in Milton Keynes is lower than attained nationally. Comparisons between Milton Keynes and other LEAs are difficult due to the rapidly changing context of the authority. The LEA's own information, based on baseline assessment, confirms this judgement.

23. At Key Stage 1 in 1999, the proportion of pupils achieving level two or above in reading and writing in the National Curriculum (NC) tests was below national figures and figures in those LEAs which were most similar to Milton Keynes. In mathematics the proportion of pupils achieving level two was broadly in line with the national figures, but below similar LEAs. Since 1997 standards in reading, writing and mathematics have risen slightly faster than the national rate. The LEA's analysis of results for the Year 2000 indicates that this upward trend has continued, and that the rate of improvement has been particularly good in reading, writing and mathematics.

24. At Key Stage 2 in 1999, the proportion of pupils achieving level four or above in the NC tests in English and mathematics was below national figures and figures in those LEAs which were similar to Milton Keynes. In science, the proportion was in line with national figures but below similar LEAs. Since 1997, standards in English and science have improved slightly faster than the national rate. There was a substantial improvement in mathematics in 1999. Results for the Year 2000 show an upward trend in English and science but a slight drop in mathematics.

25. At Key Stage 3 in 1999, the proportion of pupils achieving level five or above was broadly in line with national figures in English and mathematics, but below for science. The proportion was below similar LEAs for mathematics and science. Since 1997, standards have improved at a rate slightly above the national average. OFSTED's analysis of data indicates that pupils at Key Stage 3 perform better than the national average based on their performance at Key Stage 2. Results for the Year 2000 have improved in mathematics and science; in English there has been less improvement.

26. At Key Stage 4 in 1999, the percentage of pupils achieving one A*-G grade at GCSE was in line with the national average, but below that of similar LEAs. The percentage of pupils achieving five or more A*-G grades was in line with the national average but below average for similar LEAs. The percentage of pupils achieving five or more A*-C was below the national average and the average for similar LEAs. The average points score was close to the national average. Since 1997, the average points score for GCSE has improved faster than the national average. Results in the Year 2000 have improved in the five or more A*-C, and five or more A*-G categories although the average points score has remained broadly the same as 1999 due to a very slight reduction in the one or more A*-G category.

27. These figures mask considerable differences in secondary schools across the

authority. In 1999 four of the eight secondary schools achieved results at GCSE which were well above those achieved by similar schools nationally, and this pattern has been replicated in 2000.

28. At post-16 the average points score for pupils entered for two or more Advanced Levels in the GCE was below the national average and the average for similar LEAs.

29. In 1999 in the Key Stage 1 and 2 test, boys out performed girls. In Key Stage 3 tests, boys' and girls' attainment was broadly the same in English and science, but boys outperformed girls in mathematics. At GCSE girls outperformed boys.

30. OFSTED data indicates that the percentage of Milton Keynes primary schools graded good or very good is below the national average and the average for similar LEAs. Overall, five per cent of primary schools require substantial improvement compared to four per cent of schools nationally and three per cent in similar LEAs. Two of these schools are middle deemed primary. Evidence from the second cycle of OFSTED inspections indicates improvements to the climate and management of schools. Under the new *Framework for Inspection* the average grade for teaching was not as good as the national average, and up to January 2000 improvement in teaching between the first and second cycle inspections was less than the national average. One of the LEA's priorities is to improve the quality of teaching, and a detailed analysis of the second cycle inspections has been carried out. This demonstrates clearly that the quality of teaching in the 14 schools receiving a second inspection since January 2000 has improved at a rate which exceeds the national average.

31. The percentage of secondary schools graded by inspectors as good or very good is above the national average and the average for similar LEAs. Overall, there are no schools that require substantial improvement, compared to six percent nationally, and five percent in similar LEAs. Only a small number of schools have received a second cycle inspection and the evidence base is too small to make a judgement on improvement between cycles. Inspectors graded teaching in secondary schools below the national average. Milton Keynes has one Beacon secondary school.

32. In 1999 attendance in primary schools, at 93.9 percent was broadly in line with the national average. Attendance in secondary schools improved slightly in 1999, but was below the national average.

33. Permanent exclusions in both the primary and secondary phases have increased between 1997/1998 and 1999/2000. In secondary schools, they moved from below to above the national average.

Funding

34. Expenditure per pupil on many education services is significantly below the national average and there is evidence that some services are not adequately funded. Elected members have stated that education is a high priority. However, this is not reflected in resource allocation where funding for education has fallen far short of the Standard Spending Assessment (SSA), unlike that for most other Council services.

35. The SSA per pupil is close to the national average. However, since 1997/98, education has been funded at a level significantly below its Education SSA. The

difference between the budget for 2000/2001 and SSA blocks for under-5s, the primary and secondary sector is between six and thirteen per cent. Expenditure on post-16 education is 23 per cent above SSA.

Phase	Under 5s	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
2000/2001 *	87%	93%	94%	123%

* Budget as a percentage of SSA

36. Annual increases in Education SSA have been passed to education, but the Local Schools Budget (LSB) in 2000/2001 is three per cent below the national average. The LEA points to Government imposed spending limits of £5 million less than the cost of inherited services in order to meet the need at Local Government Review. In its first year, reductions of £6 million were made to Council expenditure. The Council also drew on £6.7 million of reserves. This enabled the Council to increase school budgets by £2 million in real terms.

37. Central funding patterns within the LSB are generally low although there are exceptions. Funding for Access in 2000/2001 at £53 per pupil is lower than the national figure of £63. Expenditure per pupil in 1999/2000 on PRU's is well below the national figure, as is expenditure on education otherwise than at school. Overall expenditure on SEN, as a percentage of the LSB, was 3.5 per cent below national levels in 1999/2000 although the proportion of pupils with a statement of SEN was well above the national average. Central administrative costs per pupil in 2000/2001 are at national levels and well within the government's target of £65. Strategic management costs are above the national average, but within the lowest quartile of unitary authorities. Spending on the education development plan (EDP) is below the lowest quartile for unitary authorities.

38. Overall, delegation within the LSB is below the national average of 84.2 per cent at 83.6 per cent. The 2000/2001 increase in delegation was 7.9 per cent below the national figure of 9.8 per cent. The individual schools budget per pupil in 1999/2000 included:

- primary schools funding at 7.4 percent below the national average;
- special schools funding at 11.8 percent below national levels;
- secondary schools funding at four percent above the national average (an outcome related to the LEA's foundation schools and the Common Funding Formula).

39. The LEA aim to raise primary school funding to secondary school levels within four years. However, funding held at the centre for SEN provision in 2000/2001 is 12.7 percent higher than national levels. One obstacle to greater delegation is the amount the LEA spends on SEN placements in schools outside the authority, which has risen this year and is now double the unitary average.

40. The LEA has high capital expenditure, which relates to the provision of new school places (£9.3 million) and to planned replacement and repair (£2.1 million). Despite constraints on the revenue budget as a whole, in 2000/2001 £567K of capital funding for repairs and maintenance, and to provide temporary classrooms primarily in growth areas, has been met from revenue. There are pockets of deprivation that have attracted funding from the Single Regeneration Budget although these are not closely aligned to

education.

Council structure

41. The present structure of the Council was established in 1998 following incorporation as a unitary authority. The structure is based around families of committees, which mirror the operational directorates of the Council. Education is part of the operational directorate for learning and development. A community learning committee performs a strategic role, sets policy and service objectives and monitors outcomes for the directorate. An education committee deals with operational matters for education. Community, children and youth, economy and lifelong-learning form part of the directorate and each have separate committees in the same family as education. As of May 2000, the breakdown of the Council is 22 Labour, 20 Liberal Democrats, eight Conservative and one Independent. There is currently a Labour minority administration. Plans were well developed to respond to the Modernising Government agenda, however, following the May elections arrangements were put on hold while a further review could be undertaken in light of experiences in other authorities. Schools, and the LEA's partners interviewed as part of this inspection, were unclear about the status of the Council's plans for modernisation and their potential impact on the decision making process.

42. The learning and development directorate, which incorporates education, is large and complex. Members' original intention was to encourage better service co-operation. A strategic director manages learning and development, and is also the director for education. School effectiveness and the early years, education planning and business services have managers who report directly to the strategic director. Social services children's responsibilities are part of the learning and development directorate.

The Education Development Plan (EDP)

43. The EDP is a clear and appropriate plan, which defines the LEA's strategic intentions with regard to school improvement. The initial plan, and the revision which took place in 2000, was based on a detailed audit of need. The priorities within the plan, and within the revision for 2000/2001, are appropriate. This was confirmed by visits made to schools as part of this inspection.

44. The Department of Education and Employment (DfEE) have approved the EDP for three years. National priorities are reflected within it. The revision of the plan has taken account of the progress made over the first year of its implementation. Activities have been re-focused but the priorities remain unchanged. They are to:

- raise standards of literacy;
- raise standards of numeracy;
- improve the quality of teaching and standards of achievement through the effective use of ICT;
- improve quality and raise standards in the early years;
- raise standards of underachieving groups of pupils;
- support and develop teachers and learning support staff;
- develop leadership and management; and
- Identify, challenge and support schools causing concern.

45. Actions within the revised plan are clear. They define the purpose of activities, the target group at which they are directed, responsibilities, success criteria, monitoring and evaluation and resources. Success criteria are not, however, based on clearly defined and measurable outcomes and the milestones for implementing activities are vague. As a result actions are insufficiently sequenced. This is rectified in service plans for the advisory and school support service, and in other services which provide detailed plans for action, timescales for implementation and monitoring of progress.

46. Progress on implementing the EDP has been sound. The LEA has data which indicates that the quality of teaching is improving. Literacy and numeracy in 1999 and literacy in 2000 improved in line with the targets set, and there is evidence that the work undertaken to support schools causing concern is having a positive impact. At Key Stage 4 in 2000, secondary schools met the LEA's GCSE targets for five or more grades at A*-C and the average points score. Actions have been put in place in the early years in line with those identified in the plan. However, the LEA has failed to meet its target to reduce exclusions, which have increased this year, and there has been slippage in implementing the priority for ICT. These and other issues are discussed in more detail in later sections of this report.

47. A number of mechanisms have been used to review progress on the EDP and to formulate the revision for year two. Schools and headteachers have been surveyed and their views taken into account. A summary of the progress made in the first year of implementation has informed the priorities for year two. The summary is underpinned by detailed criteria against which progress has been evaluated, and is closely related to detailed planning within service plans.

48. Consultation on the EDP has been good, both on the original and on the revision. Elected members are well informed about the progress being made on the EDP; reports are clear and link to the performance indicators within the strategic plan of the community learning committee, the 'Learning Vision', and the corporate Best Value Performance Plan.

Targeting of resources on priorities and Best Value

49. The LEA has made too little progress in targeting its resources strategically. There is no medium-term financial planning and strategic and corporate plans do not bring services together sufficiently. Funding for social inclusion has not been aligned to a coherent strategy. Resources for SEN have been used to fund placements outside the authority, with insufficient emphasis given to the development of local provision in both mainstream and special sectors. Criteria for the allocation of non-delegated services to need are, in many instances, not clear to schools, and service planning too often does not include the cost of activities.

50. There has, nevertheless, been some progress. The Secretary of State's funding targets for 2000/2001 have been met, and the cost of central re-charges to education have been substantially reduced. Funding has increased to improve administrative support for SEN in order that statutory obligations can be carried out more effectively. Work with headteachers has led to improvements to the Local Management of Schools (LMS) formula, improved targeting of SEN in the secondary sector, and funding for disadvantage in the primary sector. The allocation of funding to the EDP priorities is appropriate. Service level agreements and specifications give emphasis to choice and

differentiated levels of service.

51. Despite some good practice in individual services, preparation for Best Value is limited. Service standards are not well developed, and performance management overall is insufficiently embedded across all education services. Comparative data against which service standards can be measured is not well developed in most services. The Council's policy and resources committee in July 2000 agreed that officers should explore alternative models of working to achieve efficiency savings. In this context there are plans to embrace competition and to outsource ICT systems and other management services. However, at the time of the inspection there has been too little consultation with schools about these plans. The LEA has plans to draw up detailed service specifications that set out standards of performance required of external contractors, but it has not yet required these of its own services.

Recommendations

In order to improve the targeting of resources to need and Best Value:

- put in place medium term financial planning; and

- in consultation with schools, draw up detailed standards for all functions for education against which service specifications can be defined, the performance of services challenged, and competition judged. This should be undertaken as a matter of urgency for the services identified in this report which are currently unsatisfactory.

SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Links with other functions

52. Senior officers within the LEA provide clear and effective leadership to school improvement. Services directly responsible for school improvement are well managed. However, the lack of strategic direction in special educational needs (SEN), for pupils educated out of school, behaviour support and attendance constrain progress overall. These services are poorly managed, and overall the LEA has not clarified sufficiently service standards. Elected members and senior managers have taken insufficient action to remedy these deficiencies.

53. Financial and personnel services provide senior managers in schools with satisfactory advice, although their capacity has been reduced by recruitment and retention difficulties. However, administrative ICT and property services, although improving, fail to meet the needs of schools.

54. The LEA has failed to establish clear arrangements to help mainstream schools cope with pupils with increasingly complex needs. This constrains the production of a coherent and meaningful package of support and training for schools. Nevertheless, first, combined and middle schools obtain limited but good support from the education support service and training from the educational psychology service. In addition, a significant number of special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs) have taken advantage of the training run by the LEA in conjunction with an institute of higher education.

55. Support for pupils educated out of school, and for behaviour in school, are poor. Schools are unlikely to make progress if provision for the most challenging pupils is inadequate. Support for attendance is sound. There are signs of improvement in the support provided to pupils with EAL, which is now satisfactory.

Monitoring, challenge, support, intervention

56. The LEA's approach to monitoring, challenge, intervention and support is well understood by schools. These functions are generally well performed in first, combined and middle schools, where they are helping the weakest schools to make progress. Monitoring and challenge are more variable in the secondary sector, and intervention and support have not led to improvement in the weaker schools.

57. Schools are classified, following negotiation with headteachers and the governing body, into one of four levels. Criteria for categorisation are clear to schools, and have become more explicit over the last year. Level one and two schools purchase support from the LEA if they need it. Level three schools are categorised as causing concern and receive enhanced support and monitoring. Level four schools are those identified by OFSTED and the LEA as having serious weaknesses or requiring special measures. They receive substantial support and intervention. Timescales for the removal of schools from levels three and four are set in line with DfEE guidelines, and support is coordinated across service areas. Monitoring, support and intervention for these schools is based on an agreed action plan and targets. The level of support provided varies according to need. The schools visited had a clear understanding of their, and the LEA's, responsibilities within the process.

58. An attached adviser monitors and challenges schools. First, combined and middle schools report that this is generally well and rigorously undertaken. However, schools are not always clear about their entitlement and some schools, not causing concern, report that monitoring and challenge includes visits by subject advisers, which they receive free of charge. The advisory and school support service recognise that, overall, this is more than is recommended in the Code-of Practice for school and LEA relations and have plans to reduce the visits accordingly. In four secondary schools visited, two not identified as causing concern regarded monitoring and challenge as satisfactory. In both schools it was 'light touch', focused on the performance of the school and the target setting process. The expertise of the attached adviser in these schools was sufficient to make the process productive and challenging.

59. Advisers are appropriately qualified and experienced, the gaps in secondary management and some subjects of the curriculum are covered appropriately by consultants. Schools across phases have been brought together in geographically organised liaison groups to share good practice and help transition from one phase to another. This works well for most schools, and there are examples of informal partnerships across schools. The EDP identifies the dissemination of good practice as an activity for action. This is appropriate, as the schools visited believe that expertise within the LEA's schools is not sufficiently exploited and the brokerage role of the LEA is under developed.

60. A small school support team carry out statutory work and management activity within the EDP. They have expertise in personnel and finance which complements the expertise of the advisers. They also manage governor support and training, teacher recruitment, teacher supply, support to governors on senior appointments, secretarial/bursar meetings and insurance.

61. The advisory and school support service is well led, and schools have a clear understanding of the priorities which inform its work. Operational planning is good and performance management is developing well. There are clear structures and systems for the deployment of staff related to the activities within the EDP.

62. Spending on the EDP, its preparation, implementation and review is below the lowest quartile for unitary LEAs. The monitoring, challenge, intervention and support given to first, combined and middle schools provide good value for money.

Collection and analysis of data

63. The LEA's provision of data and approach to target setting are good and improving. The EDP sets appropriate activities for action. They include improving the quality of performance data provided to schools, monitoring and tracking all pupils in order to identify underachieving groups, continuing to develop data analysis, benchmarking and value added.

64. All first and combined schools undertake the LEA's recommended baseline assessment arrangements. The outcomes are subject to analysis and will inform progress made from the foundation years to Key Stage 1 next year. End of Key Stage data are analysed by gender, relative age and ethnicity. Each school receives a summary of comparative data at each Key Stage. Secondary schools receive a

comparative analysis of performance by subject at GCSE and A level. In addition, every school receives a range of other benchmarked indicators including expenditure, pupil characteristics, staffing ratios, attendance, exclusions and pupil projections. The LEA coordinates the analysis of CAT data for pupils at the start of Year 8.

65. Schools value the data provided by the LEA. In the school survey, primary and secondary schools rate the quality of performance data near to good, average, and above average respectively when compared to other LEAs surveyed so far. First, combined and middle schools generally use the information provided by the LEA to make comparisons with schools locally. With only two exceptions, the schools visited were developing a good understanding of the use of data to set targets. All four of the secondary schools visited found the LEA's analysis of data useful in setting whole school targets, and targets for subjects. They welcomed the recent move by the LEA to provide Key Stage 2 data electronically.

66. Support for the special school visited and for the pupil referral unit (PRU) is unsatisfactory. These schools are setting targets but have received little help or guidance from the LEA.

Support for literacy

67. Support for the teaching of literacy is generally good, although there are some inconsistencies. Targets in the national curriculum tests for 1999 and 2000 were met. The target for 2001 of 77 per cent is challenging but achievable.

68. The LEA got off to a slow start with the implementation of the national literacy strategy (NLS), but began to gather momentum in September 1999 with the appointment of a new English adviser. A second literacy consultant has recently been appointed and a commitment to visit all schools can now be met. Support is allocated on the basis of clear criteria, including analysis of results and specific concerns raised by attached advisers who monitor the literacy hour. All visits to schools are recorded and action to be taken is noted. An intensive programme to improve writing has been developed and very good guidance about the teaching and learning of writing has been published. Eight literacy summer schools ran this summer and all combined and middle schools have been offered Year 7 training for the NLS.

69. Literacy support is rated as good in the school survey and almost all the school visits confirmed this view. Schools receiving intensive support have received targeted training, including training for learning support assistants, observation of teaching, clear and helpful advice on teaching writing and visits to observe good practice in other schools. This has led to improved planning and teaching and better results, including improvements in the performance of boys. In 2000 schools that received intensive literacy support made greater gains in standards overall than those that did not. Guidance on writing published by the LEA has been a useful source of advice for a number of schools, including secondary schools. The secondary schools visited spoke highly of the expertise of the English adviser, and value the recent inputs on the NLS in Key Stage 3. Two schools receiving intensive support had made limited progress. There has been too little training on the teaching of English as an additional language in the NLS. However, a new adviser, with a brief for minority ethnic support, has already begun to rectify the situation.

Support for numeracy

70. Support for numeracy is good, and the National Numeracy Strategy (NNS) has been well introduced. Key Stage 1 results rose by three per cent in 2000, but progress in the Key Stage 2 results from 1999 to 2000 was poor. Following an increase of 13 per cent in the 1999 Key Stage 2 NC tests, results fell slightly in 2000 to 64.6 per cent and the LEA target was not met. Eleven schools missed their 2000 targets by more than 10 per cent. The Key Stage 2 results have been subject to detailed analysis and appropriate measures are being taken in response to the findings. A newly appointed adviser will be working with those schools that failed to achieve their targets. In addition, the LEA has issued all schools with an amended numeracy audit, organised additional training, established a 'catch up programme' for most middle and combined schools, and offered advice and assistance to schools in analysing weaknesses in pupils' learning. The view of schools is that the LEA has provided good leadership in this area and has raised their expectations. Nevertheless, the target for Key Stage 2 in 2001 of 73 per cent is challenging.

71. The numeracy team of two consultants, and three secondees from schools, is well managed by a substantive senior adviser. Progress is monitored through weekly meetings with consultants, half-termly review meetings with attached advisers, and visits to schools. The performance objectives of the numeracy team are closely linked to the activities for numeracy within the EDP. A progress report goes to committee bi-annually.

72. In 1999, 17 schools received intensive support. This year it increased to 30. Without exception, schools visited were enthusiastic about the LEA's support for numeracy. Intensive schools had had audits, or these were planned, followed by training, tailored to their needs. Visits had been organised to observe leading mathematics teachers and demonstration lessons had been provided along with lesson observations. Planning had improved in a number of schools as had teacher confidence. Key Stage 2 results for mathematics in 2000 show that, overall, schools which received intensive support had maintained their results from 1999, while results in other LEA schools fell by 0.86 percent overall. Booster classes in some schools had a positive impact on NC test results. Secondary schools found training on the NNS informative and effective and have a high regard for the specialist expertise of the adviser.

Support for ICT (curriculum and administrative)

73. The LEA support for ICT is unsatisfactory. The Council lacks a coherent corporate ICT strategy, and that for education is weak. Too little is being done to integrate administrative and curriculum infrastructure and support. The support for ICT in the curriculum, until recently, has been too narrowly focused on the delivery and implementation of the hardware and software that accompanies the National Grid for Learning (NGfL).

74. OFSTED data indicate that ICT is weak in first, combined and middle schools but is stronger in the secondary schools. The 1999 EDP included commitments to complete the connection of all schools to the NGfL and to provide training and support on the use of ICT in schools. There was slippage in achieving the first target and, until the

appointment of the ICT consultant, very limited progress was made in the second.

75. The Council has commissioned an ICT strategy to provide the necessary information to enable outsourcing to take place. The education strategy provides insufficient detail on the impact of ICT on teaching and learning. There is too little cross-referencing to other priorities within the EDP, for example to literacy or numeracy. The implications of outsourcing for schools have not been considered.

76. The LEA provides a range of centrally managed training, and since the appointment of a consultant in January 2000 support has been targeted at those first, combined and middle schools with weaknesses.

77. Service planning for administrative ICT is unsatisfactory. The service is reactive and performance management is underdeveloped. Funding for the service was delegated in April 2000, and the service specification, developed in close consultation with schools, is clear, accessible and well presented.

78. The school survey, and visits to schools, indicate a low level of satisfaction for support for ICT in the curriculum. Three-quarters of schools rate support for ICT in school administration satisfactory or better. Reasons for dissatisfaction are inconsistent service standards, and the lack of clear strategy for the use of electronic information transfer between the LEA in schools, including protocols for e-mail use. There are concerns that the inability of the service to recruit and retain staff has undermined effectiveness.

Support for schools causing concern

79. Four schools in Milton Keynes have been judged to require special measures since 1993; one special, one combined and two middle schools deemed primary. All four were identified when Milton Keynes was part of Buckinghamshire. These schools have made good progress and no longer remain in special measures. Two schools have been identified since 1997 as having serious weaknesses. One has made sufficient progress and is no longer deemed by OFSTED to have serious weaknesses. One school, a secondary, has been declared by OFSTED to have serious weaknesses since April 1998.

80. The LEA has identified nineteen schools which cause concern. Three are schools that were in special measures and two had serious weaknesses. Overall, this constitutes around 15 per cent of the schools in the LEA.

81. The identification and support for schools causing concern, including those in special measures and with serious weaknesses, is good. When a school has been identified as causing concern, an action plan is devised with support from the attached adviser. Judgements are made on the level of support required and the capacity of the school to improve leadership and management, quality and standards. Targets are set for improvement and strategies put in place to ensure they are met. A contingency fund supports schools in these categories, and additional support is negotiated through the attached adviser and advisory school support manager and sanctioned by the director of education. Schools are very clear how additional support is allocated and what it entails. A range of services across the learning and development directorate provide support, and the attached adviser monitors its impact.

82. Schools visited had received help in the production of a post inspection action plan from the attached adviser and the school support team. Headteachers have been replaced where they have not had the capacity to make improvements. Experienced headteachers have been seconded to schools where necessary. Governing body training has been beneficial and the LEA has used its powers appropriately to place additional governors on governing bodies. Teaching has been improved in these schools through additional training, and through intensive support for literacy and numeracy. Targets are set for schools, and senior managers within the school receive training in lesson observation and pupil tracking to help them monitor progress.

83. In the two secondary schools causing concern, the LEA had been too slow to take action. There are signs of an improved approach following a new senior appointment in the LEA, and substantial resources have now been targeted at the two schools. However, it is too early to judge the impact of these initiatives. There has been insufficient support to the PRU and progress had been limited. The lack of an overall LEA strategy for emotional and behavioural difficulty (EBD) has further constrained progress.

Support for governors

84. Support for governing bodies is satisfactory overall, although some weaknesses were noted in the school visits. The LEA has undertaken extensive training for governors in primary schools, particularly on target setting and performance management. A recruitment group made up of governors and officers have agreed a strategy, the implementation of which, has had a positive impact on recruitment overall. Governing bodies are generally well briefed and kept up-to-date on relevant changes in legislation. Consultation with governing bodies is sound.

85. The EDP appropriately prioritises training governors to undertake their role in school improvement. There had been some slippage on this activity in order to accommodate the new demand for training governors for performance management. The level of governor vacancies reduced from 13.3 per cent in March 2000 to 11.66 per cent in September.

86. Almost all schools buy governor support and training. Training is well regarded by governors, and the governing body role in school improvement is appropriately targeted at those schools causing concern where it is a weakness. The LEA is in the early stages of piloting governor self review as a basis for identifying training needs. Governors who had received training on school self-evaluation were enthusiastic about the impact it was having on their monitoring of the school.

87. Governor support was inspected in 11 schools and was judged to be less than satisfactory in six. Governors of secondary schools viewed the support provided by the LEA as too primary focused. Schools visited in disadvantaged areas had some difficulty recruiting governors from the local community, and in one school, operating in a challenging social environment, a large number of vacancies reduced the effectiveness of the governing body.

Support for school management

88. OFSTED inspection data, and the LEAs own analysis, identify weaknesses in the quality of teaching and in the management and efficiency of schools. Consequently, improvement to teaching and management form priorities within the EDP and the LEA has put in place support for NQTs, and is developing its support for experienced teachers, middle managers and serving head teachers.

89. NQT's are offered a coherent and well-resourced induction programme which meets statutory requirements. Support for new and serving headteachers is well structured around national qualifications. New headteachers are allocated an experienced mentor and receive a supportive programme of induction. This support is systematically monitored and evaluated. Support for middle managers in schools causing concern is strong.

90. The school survey and school visits indicate a high level of satisfaction for NQT and headteacher training in the first, combined and middle schools. The majority of these schools buy into the LEA programme of continuing professional development (CPD) although, overall, the effectiveness of the CPD programme is thought by schools to be variable. There is less satisfaction in the secondary schools where support is perceived to be primary focused and where schools use a wide range of providers from outside the LEA.

91. Mechanisms to identify and analyse the needs of the majority of schools have been under-developed in the past. The LEA has recently put in place appropriate guidance and training for schools on self-evaluation. Take up by the first, combined and middle schools has been good, although the secondary schools have got systems in place of their own. The implication of this on the way the LEA organises and targets its support has yet to be determined. The CPD programme is matched to priorities within the EDP. Needs are well identified through the analysis of OFSTED inspection reports and school development plans, information from attached advisors, headteacher groups and the evaluation of training courses. A range of training partnerships is developing with other LEAs and institutes of higher education. Schools value support to managers provided by the attached advisers. Education support officers have been effective in co-ordinating support to schools from human resources and, increasingly, finance.

92. LEA support was found to be most effective in the weakest schools and in those schools where self-evaluation is well developed and where the school has been able to target the support effectively. The LEA was judged to be having a limited impact in two of the four secondary schools visited.

Early years

93. The early years and childcare division was established in April 1999 as part of the Council's commitment to raising standards. Since that time good progress has been made. The DfEE has accepted the Early Years Childcare Development Plan (EYCDP). The Early Years Partnership is well established, baseline assessment has been put in place in all schools and the LEA has a clear view of strengths and weaknesses in provision and is implementing plans to improve quality and raise standards.

94. A useful framework for evaluating provision has been developed, an effective early learning project is operating in 26 settings, and training has been established to

introduce the Foundation Curriculum, which has included attached advisers, SEN support staff and the EMAS team. Training for learning support assistants is in place and an early intervention project has been piloted and is to be disseminated.

95. The early years team has a remit to deliver the targets within the EYDCP and the EDP. The team is well led, deployment is sound and is targeted at the priorities within EDP, literacy and numeracy, schools causing concern and teaching and learning. Performance management is at an early stage of development; staff are appraised against targets in the service plan and the EDP, but there are no benchmarks against which progress can be measured. Consultation and evaluation of progress is undertaken by the Early Years Partnership and by inspections, which are undertaken of early years settings.

Support for gifted and talented pupils

96. Support for gifted and talented pupils is at an early stage of development. Year two of the EDP commits the LEA to publishing a policy document in 2000/01. This is to be accompanied by examples of good practice and specific guidance on literacy. Three of the schools visited had developed pupil assessment systems to identify gifted and talented pupils, but only one had plans for a separate programme of support for these pupils and this did not involve the LEA.

Recommendations

To improve the quality of monitoring, challenge, intervention and support:

- clarify the number and purpose of visits made by officers to schools to bring them in line with the Code of Practice; and

- discuss, agree and implement with all secondary schools, a range of strategies to help raise standards in the weakest schools.

In order to improve the quality and use of data:

- improve the support and guidance given to special schools in data analysis and target-setting; and

- put in place a common database, which brings together information held by all services on schools and individual pupils.

To improve curriculum and administrative ICT, urgently put in place standards against which specifications can be written, which ensure that:

- there are effective means for monitoring and evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of school ICT curricular capacity;

- support is targeted at those schools which need it most; and

- the aims within the ICT development plan to integrate curriculum and administrative support are taken into account.

To improve the effectiveness of school management:

- ensure secondary schools are securing the management support they need.

To ensure governing bodies have the capacity to effectively fulfil their role in school management and school improvement:

- work closely with local communities to encourage and develop an understanding that they can contribute to the governance of schools.

SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Corporate Planning

97. There are good links at a policy level between directorate priorities and wider corporate priorities, and some links between the many education plans, but at an operational level mechanisms for translating policies into action are underdeveloped. In addition, the LEA has paid too little attention to directing its resources to its identified priorities.

98. The strategic plan for the learning and development directorate, 'Learning Vision', relates to the Council's overall strategic aims and priorities on the one hand and individual plans for education on the other. It has four key success outcomes of which raising achievement is one, and social inclusion is another. Issues relating to school improvement, broadly defined, feature in all four. The "Learning Vision" also lays out six operational intentions, including the promotion of an integrated approach to service delivery, working in partnership, the better management of resources and the introduction of Best Value. An Education and Early Years Service Plan puts the 'Learning Vision' into targets which relate, in turn, to individual education plans, for example the EDP. While these priorities are appropriate, there has been too little progress in the implementation of social inclusion and in putting in place operational intentions.

99. Strategies and plans which cross the learning and development directorate, and link to education, are insufficiently cross-referenced and aligned. This failure, and the gaps that exist in strategic planning for social inclusion, in particular special educational needs (SEN), pupils educated otherwise than at school, behaviour, racial equality and attendance make it difficult for an integrated approach to be achieved. The Best Value Performance Plan and associated guidance set out a clear framework for service improvement. However, in aspects of education, planning targets are insufficiently objective and therefore difficult to monitor, and service standards are insufficiently developed within and across services. These deficiencies, and the inconsistent management of services, have resulted in the slow progress made. The position is exacerbated by a lack of resources in key service areas. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the school survey and visits to schools confirm that services perform inconsistently; there has been limited integration between school improvement and pupil services, and between pupil services, children's services and social services.

100. Satisfactory progress has been made in implementing some of the priorities within the 'Learning Vision'. Appropriate planning has taken place to ensure the provision of school places, services co-operate to support schools causing concern and child protection, and an appropriate early years and childcare strategy has been put in place. There are productive links with external agencies which have had a positive impact in schools. The EDP is an effective plan, which is generally being implemented.

101. Elected members and the chief executive maintain that education is a high priority, and plans are in place to bring education funding in line with the SSA. However, schools are not convinced of their commitment. Members have been aware for some time that an integrated approach to service delivery has not been working effectively, and of slippage in planning and strategic direction for SEN, but they have taken too little

action to improve matters. Members receive regular reports on the progress being made to implement the LEA's plans, and in meeting the performance indicators in the Best Value Performance Plan. Reports are clear and detailed. In the area of school improvement, members are well informed about the progress made. The chief executive has recently established a social inclusion project which draws together the work being undertaken across all the directorates in the most deprived areas of the authority. This is potentially valuable if it provides a mechanism for ensuring prompt action from the education services.

102. There is considerable inconsistency in the quality of leadership across the services for education. School improvement is well led, as is early years and aspects of education planning, but pupil services are not. The strategic director provides a clear vision for the directorate, but has not been sufficiently proactive in tackling deficiencies where they have been noted at an operational level. Understandably, many schools question whether education has benefited from being part of such a large and complex directorate.

Partnership arrangements

103. Overall, partnership with external agencies is very good. It is central to the Council's vision. There is a city partnership plan and a strategy that commits the Council to work in partnership with external agencies and to work closely with other services across the Council. Mechanisms for liaison and for translating the commitment into multi-agency action on the ground are effective. There are many examples of effective partnerships with external agencies and some of close working with other Council services which is of benefit to schools.

104. Particularly notable are the good links with the police at both strategic and operational levels. Effective partnership is underpinned by joint thinking around prevention, the causes of crime and the protection of victims. Good partnerships with voluntary organisations such as the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) and Rathbone are exemplified by the useful preventative work done in schools with disaffected or excluded children. There are effective links with business and good partnerships with the careers service and Milton Keynes college of further education. The early years partnership works well and good links with health underpin the healthy schools programme.

105. There are some examples of effective internal partnerships, most notably with the youth service through the preventative 'Close to Home' project and the sports support work in schools. Family Literacy and Numeracy support the NLS and the NNS work in schools, and the Milton Keynes Arts Education Forum supports arts education in schools. Liaison with children's services is good on child protection, but limited elsewhere.

Management infrastructure

106. Services, which support headteachers and governing bodies in the management of schools, are too varied in their effectiveness to be satisfactory. A pilot Best Value review in early 2000 concluded that management services were high cost, although not

excessively. Since that review the funding for many of these services has been delegated. This process was hurried and neither schools nor the services were sufficiently prepared for delivery on a trading basis.

107.   Overall, there are weaknesses in service management. For example, service plans are insubstantial and make little or no reference to resources and staff development. Service specifications lack standards and mechanisms for service evaluation are underdeveloped. The services are scattered across the Council and are insufficiently coordinated.

108.   An additional problem faced by all the management support services, but finance and information technology in particular, has been the recent loss of key members of staff to the private sector. This has undermined their capacity. The LEA's response has been to begin a process of outsourcing, but there has been inadequate consultation with schools.

109.   During the pilot Best Value review schools expressed a high level of satisfaction for the management services, but views expressed in the survey for this inspection and during school visits indicate that satisfaction has declined since then. The high level of buy-back for these services reflects the limited choice that most schools had during the first year of delegation. In the secondary phase most schools have opted out of LEA provision.

110.   Financial support services have ensured that schools' financial management is generally sound. However, there are weaknesses in the service's management arrangements, and the recent loss of staff has affected the capacity of the service to improve. The service has been effective in identifying schools in difficulties and providing support. Schools causing concern have benefited from the support of the service and improved coordination.

111.   The service specification is well structured and offers a considerable level of choice, particularly in comparison with other LEA services. However, these are not accompanied by clear service standards.

112.   Personnel support to schools is generally sound, although there are a number of weaknesses. Personnel support is part of corporate human resources. Around half the time of officers is taken up by individual casework with schools. By working closely with the school support team, the service has provided effective support to headteachers and senior managers.

113.   There has been too little differentiation in the service level agreement with schools. The corporate service failed to understand the complexities associated with changes in the terms and conditions of school based staff. The recent creation of a dedicated section to support schools has ensured a clearer focus for the service. The routine processing of contracts is inefficient and will remain so until a new payroll and personnel system is implemented.

114.   The school survey and school visits indicate that personnel support is held in high regard. Over 90 per cent of primary and middle schools and 80 per cent of secondary schools buy back services from the LEA.

115.   Property services are unsatisfactory, although systems have been put in place which should lead to improvement. The LEA repairs and maintenance service is poorly rated in the school survey, although there is a polarisation of views. The service offers provision of an emergency response and advisory role at three levels. Revenue repairs and maintenance budgets were delegated at the start of 1999/00 and 79 per cent of first, combined and middle schools buy the service. Only two secondary schools buy back. The pilot best value review concluded that schools' dissatisfaction with services was due to poor contractor performance and the failure of the service to 'grasp the culture of meeting clients needs'. The service has implemented a series of measures to respond to these deficiencies. The 2000/01 service specification includes performance standards, and their monitoring has recently begun.

Recommendations

In order to improve strategic management:

- put in place a plan for the implementation of performance management across the directorate to ensure consistency in the management and accountability of services;

- elected members should set clearer timescales for the implementation of education priorities, and hold services more accountable;

- create mechanisms for ensuring that plans are implemented and the allocation of resources reflect policy commitments; and

- align plans, within education, for education and the children's service, and ensure they inform the targets and success criteria within service plans.

To improve the co-ordination, effectiveness and consistency of management support services for schools, the service standards and the specifications produced should ensure that:

- schools have access to objective and accurate advice on alternatives to LEA provision of management support services; and

- fragmentation is reduced and service delivery is well coordinated.

SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATION PROVISION

Strategy

116.   The LEA policy and strategy have proved to be ineffectual and under-developed. There is a lack of leadership and an absence of a clear and coherent vision. The special educational needs (SEN) policy of 1997 did not give schools and parents a clear view of the LEA 's strengths and weaknesses, or of its priorities for action. Neither this policy, nor the policy for inclusion that followed, was translated into a comprehensive action plan. Although the LEA identifies action points in its EDP and in its SEN review of 1999, these are too narrow in scope. The new action plan approved by the education committee in September 2000 is based on insufficient analysis of needs and resources, and its targets are too general. Implementation of action plans generally has proved to be too slow and exacerbated by inadequate performance monitoring. The LEA has taken too long to initiate a full review of SEN and, without a comprehensive strategy, its response has been piece-meal.

117.   There are a number of weaknesses in the emerging strategy so far. The LEA has a high proportion of pupils with a statement of SEN. In 1999, figures were well in excess of the national average. The LEA has responded by controlling the process of statutory assessment and reducing the number of statements issued. These have dropped from 242 in 1998/99 to 104 in 1999/2000.

118.   However, greater inclusion to mainstream schools has not been accompanied by an appropriate re-distribution of resources, thus limiting opportunities for early intervention. Resources have been re-allocated to demand at stage two/three of the Code of Practice. This is not clear to schools, and additional support is allocated termly and does not promote stable staffing in schools. The targeting of resources for SEN in secondary schools has improved, but the LEA does not have a well-developed system for monitoring pupil outcomes. The six special schools are meeting a wider range of needs, but there is no long-term plan that sets out their future role in a continuum of provision. The LEA is concerned about its expenditure on out-of-LEA schools, which in 1999/2000 was double the unitary average, but does not have a clear plan to re-distribute resources from this sector to its own mainstream and special schools.

Statutory obligations

119.   The LEA does not meet its statutory obligations satisfactorily. Statutory assessment has not been well managed, and has in the past suffered from under-investment, recruitment and retention difficulties, and under-developed data systems. The proportion of draft statements completed within 18 weeks has been low. In 1999/2000, 42 per cent of the statements completed met the deadline, rising to 56 per cent in the April to August 2000 period. Nine per cent of the 56 per cent were allowable exceptions. The LEA does not chase sources of late advice actively enough and it has not agreed acceptable performance standards with advice-giving agencies. Much improvement is needed and existing targets are insufficiently challenging.

120.   Statements of SEN are of variable quality. Some are good while others are not specific enough about the provision required. The LEA's management of the annual review process does not result in timely amendments to statements or to a systematic

and thorough evaluation of pupils' progress. Provision is not consistently re-adjusted in line with changing needs. Transitional plans are not written for all pupils that require them, leaving, in some cases, difficulties in accessing funding for post-school education.

121.   The LEA is, however, having some success in keeping appeals to the SEN tribunal low. The low level of appeals is, in part, a tribute to the work of the parent partnership service, which has proved to be increasingly effective in improving the LEA's relationship with parents. However, until the LEA improves the transparency of its funding to schools and can demonstrate that its policy and strategy are yielding positive outcomes for pupils, it is still vulnerable to Tribunal appeals.

Improvement, value for money and Best Value

122.   Schools in Milton Keynes are concerned about funding and about access to provision to meet increasingly complex needs. There is not enough transparency about resources, and schools do not know if resource allocation is equitable. A panel is used to review decisions about funding for statements but schools are insufficiently involved. Criteria used to decide the allocation of resources at earlier stages are not available to schools. These issues must be resolved if the advice, support and training to schools are to have sustained impact.

123.   The education support service (ESS) is providing effective, if limited, advice and support for first, combined and middle schools although there are some issues that need attention. The service is non-delegated and provides support to primary schools for general learning difficulties, behaviour and low incidence SEN. Schools value the advice and support it gives. Staff have been trained in the national literary strategy (NLS) and the national numeracy strategy (NNS) and two full time posts support early intervention. The impact of the service is undermined because support is not adequately deployed to needs and service planning is weak.

124.   Overall, schools get good quality advice on assessment, teaching, and learning strategies from the LEA's educational psychology service. This service is well managed. Service planning is good. There are clear operational objectives, estimates of the costs of activities, and appropriate performance indicators. Support is closely aligned to needs in schools. A priority has been given to early intervention and activities are well balanced between training, research, and developing professional expertise. The service has moved appropriately to a 'consultancy' model from one based on referrals. Recruitment difficulties have resulted in some disrupted or reduced levels of service.

125.   There are a number of projects which are improving expertise and confidence in schools. An effective SENCO training programme is well established. Training programmes for special needs support assistants in conjunction with an institute of higher education lead to accreditation and take up has been high. Schools report a direct link between training and improved classroom support. The early intervention project started in April 1997 with the aim of reducing the number of reception and year one pupils on SEN registers. Each year 16 schools are targeted for school-based support, professional development and additional funding. Key Stage 1 results for 1997/98 indicate that pupils involved in the project have better than anticipated outcomes in English, mathematics and science, and a significant proportion have come

off the register.

126. Services to support SEN currently provide poor value for money. Strategic planning and the day to day management of resources both fall short of what is required. Schools have not been issued with detailed guidelines on the use of resources for SEN from their own budgets. Forecasting for SEN budgets and financial advice and support to SEN managers has been inadequate. Delegated funding to secondary schools is not adequately monitored to ensure that provision for pupils with statements is secure.

127. Eight per cent of all pupils with statements receive their education in schools outside the LEA. This is a very high figure. Although some pupils will always need a placement in special provision outside the LEA, it is clearly not the best use of resources. Three of the LEA's special schools have surplus places with an overall place value of £241k. The LEA has not clarified arrangements for special school outreach, and this represents a wasted resource. The concentration of resources on out-of-LEA placements also diverts resources away from the management and administration of statutory functions.

Recommendations

Improve the quality of leadership and strategic management of SEN by:

- putting in place a comprehensive strategy for SEN which defines the LEA's intentions for inclusion, the distribution of resources and provision to support that intention, including out of LEA placements, and clarifies the role and expectations of special schools within that strategy;

- **urgently putting in place, in consultation with schools, standards against which service specifications can be written, which:**

    - ensure that statutory duties are promptly met by:

    - providing more challenging targets for the production of draft statements prepared within 18 weeks;

    - ensuring that annual reviews are timely and focus on helping pupils' progress;

    - ensuring that transitional plans are in place for all pupils who need them;

    - ensure that the allocation of resources, and provision to SEN are clear and transparent to schools and parents;

    - ensure that learning support is deployed to those schools which need it most;

- **monitoring provision for pupils in mainstream schools where funds have been delegated to schools.**

SECTION 5: ACCESS

The supply of school places

128. A satisfactory start has been made to the management and organisation of school places, although there are weaknesses that need to be addressed which are central both to raising standards and to the LEA's duty to make efficient use of resources.

129. School place planning in Milton Keynes is challenging. New housing is being added at a rate of 1775 homes per year, with 14,000 houses to be built on the west and east sides of the city. The level of surplus places is high. In January 2000 net surplus places in primary schools were 15.7 per cent, with an average of 8.8 per cent for secondary schools. The demand for primary school places is estimated to rise by five per cent by 2002/2004, and is still likely to result in a high level of surplus places. The demand in the secondary sector could outstrip supply by 2004/5.

130. Seventeen primary schools have more than 25 per cent surplus places, a problem shared with three of the ten secondary schools. Action by the LEA is planned, which, along with growth in the number on roll of a new primary school, will reduce surplus places in the primary sector by 600 places. Pupil movement from the centre, where there are higher surplus places, out to the western and eastern flanks of the town, is high. The overall turnover rate in primary schools is also high, at 18 per cent. Twenty-eight schools have a turnover rate greater than 25 per cent. One contributory factor is the age of transfer in Milton Keynes, which takes place at year three and year eight, in contrast with that of its neighbours.

131. The LEA has one of the largest new schools' building programmes in the country. Three schools (two primaries and one secondary) opened in September 1999, and three new primary schools open in September 2001. Proposals are at the consultation and feasibility stage for the further development of two existing secondary schools, and the LEA has amalgamated three sets of first and middle schools. Eight double and two single temporary classrooms have been removed and projects in hand will result in a further three double and one single, temporary buildings being removed in September 2001. A competent Class Size Plan is in place and targets for September 2001 are likely to be met. Good progress has been made on the revision of the School Organisation Plan and strategic links are being made between surplus places, raising pupil attainment, and the ability of the middle schools to deliver the national curriculum adequately across two key stages. A sophisticated approach to pupil forecasting has been developed, and pupil movement within and across the authority is being tracked.

132. Two key issues face the LEA. The first relates to the age of transfer. The LEA has recognised the need to take decisions about the organisation of school provision and the pattern of pupil transfer and its impact on standards. A research project has been established and funded, due to report in a year, which will take this work further. The second issue relates to the reduction of surplus places in the secondary sector. There are three schools that currently have the bulk of the surplus places, and unless pupil attainment improves significantly in these schools, along with the public perception of them, the LEA is likely to face increasing difficulties managing school places in the secondary sector. The evidence in other areas of this report indicates that this is an issue which the LEA has not resolved.

Admissions

133. Admissions are satisfactorily undertaken by the LEA. The external auditor reviewed the management arrangements for admissions in 1999. There were two criticisms: that admissions documentation lacked clarity and that parental views on the appeals process had not been sought. The LEA has addressed these criticisms. There is clear and concise documentation for parents on secondary admissions. However, the proportion of parents securing their first preference at secondary level has fallen from 96 per cent to 92 per cent over the past four years. There has been a corresponding increase in the number of appeals in the same period. This is attributed to an emerging shortage of places at secondary level, the increasing propensity of parents to express a preference for the more successful secondary schools, the age of secondary transfer, and pupil mobility.

134. The Schools Organisation Committee and Schools Organisation Plan provide an improved strategic context within which the main problems affecting parental preferences are beginning to be addressed. The Admissions Forum has been established and has raised the profile of admissions. Parents are not represented on the forum, but the Council is dealing with this omission.

Asset Management Planning

135. The LEA has met the DfEE deadlines for the Asset Management Plan. In executing the plan the LEA has focused too narrowly on increasing the level of provision of school places and insufficiently on tackling the maintenance backlog.

136. Condition surveys have been completed and shared with schools. They have revealed a maintenance backlog of some £21m, which far exceeds the capital and revenue resources available for planned maintenance. The Council has been successful in obtaining £3m New Deal for Schools funding for 2000/01- 2001/02, and is looking to public private partnership as a way of procuring further necessary maintenance works. Current arrangements are effective in relation to capital works where the role, responsibilities and relationships are clear and well established. However, the relative responsibilities of schools and the LEA for the maintenance and development of school premises are not clear. There has been too little training and guidance provided for heads and governors on their new responsibilities. The current arrangements do not ensure schools have adequate advice and guidance on identifying and prioritising work, or procuring services from providers other than the LEA.

137. The school survey indicates a general dissatisfaction within first, combined and middle schools in relation to asset management planning and this was confirmed in the school visits. The most frequent complaints were of unclear communication from the LEA, lack of clarity in roles and responsibilities and inadequate preparation of schools for taking on additional responsibilities. Furthermore, schools do not see the process for identifying priorities for capital investment as open and transparent. Nevertheless, the LEA has completed suitability assessments of most schools, and seconded a primary headteacher to work alongside the headteacher in the school to complete the assessment.

Provision for pupils who have no school place

138.   Education otherwise than at school (EOTAS) is unsatisfactory. The policy commitment to 'improve education outcomes for pupils who are EOTAS, including the excluded', is not reflected in practice. Many aspects of the arrangements lack clarity and the LEA itself lacks clear strategic direction. There is an uncoordinated collection of provision, which is not monitored or evaluated in any systematic way. Resources in 1999/2000 were inadequate to fund an acceptable level of provision

139.   Current arrangements cover 49 children educated at home, whose learning plans are checked regularly, 68 year eight to eleven pupils who are educated at the PRU and about 60 children who are placed in a range of provision provided by the voluntary sector and Milton Keynes College. There is no provision for primary aged pupils. The LEA has designated the PRU as causing concern, but it is making insufficient progress. A recent internal audit identified a number of significant and longstanding weaknesses.

140.   Schools refer pupils to the multi-agency access panel that arranges placements. There are no specifications for this work. Nevertheless, there are some strengths in provision. The college of further education monitors its programmes carefully and is able to show satisfactory retention, encouraging progression and positive outcomes for some students. PRU students who are on the roll of mainstream schools can access GCSE courses (28 last year), but others cannot. Curricular provision in the PRU is inadequate. It is as little as three hours a week in the worst cases and only 15 hours in years 10 and 11. Funding, admissions criteria and exit arrangements are unclear.

141.   The school survey rated EOTAS for non-excluded pupils as just satisfactory, whilst arrangements for those excluded were rated unsatisfactory. Headteachers, frustrated by the lack of action, pooled some Standards Fund money in 1999 to create a coordinator post for this area of work, the flexible learning coordinator. The appointee has made some progress. A forum now brings all the providers together; a monitoring framework has been written and piloted. Attendance is now reported and some preventative work has been initiated. A re-integration worker has been appointed by the LEA and is working on criteria for reintegration; 12 pupils were re-integrated last year. The coordinator now wants, rightly, to ensure that all providers are monitored and that all pupils receive 25 hours tuition. However, with no detailed action plan, and the current resourcing levels, it is not easy to see how 25 hours will be achieved.

Attendance

142.   Support for improving school attendance is satisfactory, with some strengths. In some schools staffing difficulties have resulted in a variable service.   Rates of attendance have improved steadily over the last three years, with the exception of unauthorised absence in primary schools. EDP targets have been met in primary schools and exceeded in secondary schools.

143.   The LEA strategy is to "help schools to improve preventative strategies… to improve attendance". There is, however, no LEA attendance policy and no clear practical guidelines for schools. The education welfare service has played the key role in the first day contact project, funded through the Standards Fund, which has effectively improved attendance in a number of schools. It also works closely with other school-

based projects designed to improve attendance. Individual education welfare officers (EWOs) are attached to a group of schools on a long-term basis, and are able to deploy themselves where the needs are greatest. This is effective in ensuring that officers know families well and are seen by schools either as close partners or as part of their staff. The service is fortunate to have recruited and retained long serving staff of high calibre whose work is rated highly by schools.

144.   However, LEA arrangements do not always support their efforts fully. The co-operation of social services is not always easily secured for work with families, often those well known to the service, who condone absence. The service held 189 pre-court interviews, issues 400 formal warnings last year and took 53 cases to court. Lengthy delays in these processes result from the requirement for each case to be passed through LEA officers centrally and approved by the chair of the education committee. The abrupt termination of the first day contact project left schools struggling to continue the arrangements out of their own resources. The lack of clear LEA direction on attendance is a constraint on the good work being undertaken by individual officers at a school level.

Behaviour support

145.   Support for behaviour is poor. Permanent exclusions have risen from 26 in 1997-98 to 39 in 1999-2000. Twenty-four of these are in the primary sector. The LEA has not met its target in the EDP and does not have a credible strategy for tackling this issue. The Behaviour Support Plan (BSP) is currently being re-written and there is no LEA policy, no standard practices and no detailed action plans, although the original BSP promised all of these. Lacking leadership, services operate reactively.

146.   The LEA recognises the need to work with schools in a preventative way, but is only just beginning to do so, and then in a piecemeal manner. A very small team within education support services is running a social inclusion project in four primary schools and providing limited behaviour support in schools. Projects run by the youth service in secondary schools and the NSPCC in primary schools are also targeted at improving behaviour. Preliminary evaluation of these projects identifies gains for schools.

147.   Some schools report considerable LEA support for behaviour, including a pilot early intervention project in a first school, training for lunchtime supervisors in several schools and some useful training for teachers and learning support assistants. However, the overwhelming view is that there is too little support, that it is too difficult to access and that it lacks flexibility. On quality, views are divided. Some schools say it is sound, whilst two judged their own staff more able to handle difficult behaviour than those provided by the LEA. There is a lack of provision for pupils with educational and behavioural difficulties (EBD), no support aimed at preventing exclusions of primary aged children and little, if any, provision for them if they are excluded. Links with social services are reported to be poor and schools find it difficult to tackle problems where they are rooted in families.

Health, safety, welfare, child protection

148.   The LEA provides satisfactory support for the health, safety and welfare of children. Health and safety policies are in place and are familiar to schools. There is a multi-agency policy, and guidelines for child protection which are currently being revised

to include specific guidance for schools and education staff. Education and the children's services have worked closely together on child protection from the inception of the unitary authority. The pupil services manager is the nominated LEA officer. She is also a member of the area child protection team. Pupil services, children's services and the NSPCC are working jointly to reduce the number of children on the register and a joint working group is developing procedures to identify and support children in need. In the school survey child protection was rated satisfactory in both phases.

Children in public care

149.   Arrangements for tracking and improving the education of children in public care are currently unsatisfactory, although there have been significant improvements in the last few months. The LEA is not yet fulfilling its statutory obligations in this area, although it is moving in the right direction.

150.   The number of children in public care has reduced from 343 in 1997/98 to 272. Thirty are in residential care and 20 are fostered out of borough. A database shared with children's services has been in existence for the last six months but does not include educational information for all children outside the authority.

151.   Some schools have a designated teacher and some of these have had training. No children in public care have been excluded.

152.   The Quality Protects Management Action Plan is in place and appropriate links have been made with other LEA plans. Targets have been set at GCSE/GNVQ. However, they are not based on previous educational achievement. An officer has been appointed to track and monitor attendance and achievement, and following the recommendations of a New Start report into arrangements for these children, a joint education/children's services steering group is developing a strategy for improving attainment. This group organised a training conference for schools and an information pack is being prepared. In addition, a panel of members has been set up to improve corporate parenting. The steering group will report to the panel in future.

Ethnic minority children

153.   Support for ethnic minority children is satisfactory overall with some strengths, but a number of weaknesses. The current strengths are recent and date from devolution of provision from Buckinghamshire in 1997 and following restructuring in April 2000. A new adviser with a half time brief for support for minority ethnic achievement took up post in September 2000 and has already made an impact. The ethnic minority achievement support service (EMASS) is moving away from a historically based language support service to one that is more sharply targeted on under achieving groups. The focus is not yet as sharp as it needs to be, but there has been progress.

154.   EMASS has data on achievement by ethnic group and targets have been set. It does not have EAL pupil level data. Under achievement by Afro-Caribbean, Bangladeshi and Pakistani origin children has been identified and has been targeted with differentiated strategies. In addition, the service supports 2371 pupils with English as an additional language (EAL). Resources for this work are slender and are deployed

according to a formula devised together with a headteachers' steering group. Community and aided schools all purchase support from the LEA. It will be important for the LEA to monitor provision at those foundation schools that do not.

155.   The service consists of 10.1 full time equivalent (FTE) teachers, including the co-ordinator, and five language assistants. Just over eight of the teachers are deployed in schools whilst the remaining time is deployed to dispersed needs. A small amount of time is spent on coordination, including monitoring and training, Afro-Caribbean achievement and asylum seekers. Central resources are minimal and insufficient to allow regular and effective monitoring of the work done in schools. The new adviser recognised this and has already produced a credible action plan for monitoring the work.

156.   First, combined and middle schools, in the school survey, rate provision as satisfactory, and secondary schools rate it rather better. Although EMASS staff have been trained in the NLS, there is only limited evidence of effective joint working on the ground. Two of the schools visited, both with sizeable minority ethnic populations, observed that the new formula had brought them a better level of support. Liaison with families, done by both LSAs and teachers, is effective and valued by schools as is the support and advice given by EMASS staff to mainstream teachers. The individual support given to pupils in schools with very small numbers of minority ethnic pupils is effective. Current arrangements are clearly transitional; the service is now well placed to become less reactive and is moving towards the principles of Best Value.

Support for Traveller children

157.   The support provided for the education of Traveller children is good. However, the very limited resources make it impossible to cater adequately for all those children who could benefit, and the authority is in breach of its statutory obligations with regard to the children on unauthorised sites, for whom there is no provision. Currently one full time teacher and a part time LSA support 16 schools and 37 children. Support is split between one to one work to enable full integration and in-class support. Support was rated as good in the school survey and visits confirmed that it was effective both in supporting the integration of Traveller children and in helping schools to establish productive relationships with Traveller families.

Social exclusion and action to address racism

158.   The 'Learning Vision' recognises that there are issues about the social exclusion of black and ethnic minority groups and notes that the Council needs to 'make services responsive to their needs' and have in place a systematic approach to responding to racial incidents. In response to the Macpherson report, an equalities workshop for the Council, including members and some external organisations was held in September 1999. Responsibility for the directorate's response rests with pupil services. A multi-agency steering group including the Directorate, the police and the Commission for Racial Equality has come together to produce a policy and support schools. Copies of 'Learning for All' have been circulated to schools and the group is now discussing implementation.

159.   However, both the Commission for Racial Equality and schools report a not inconsiderable number of racist incidents ranging from name calling to violent assaults.

A series of racially motivated incidents around one secondary school have led to active and effective joint intervention by the police, the Commission for Racial Equality and the youth service. Other than the youth service there has been no support to schools from the LEA, which has clearly failed to get to grips with these issues. There is no LEA policy on racist incidents, nor guidelines on reporting such incidents. This is now in hand but needs to be completed as a matter of urgency.

Recommendations

To improve asset management planning :

- urgently put in place, in consultation with schools, standards against which specifications can be written, which ensure that the relative responsibilities of schools, education planning and property services in asset management planning and the maintenance of school buildings are clear and comprehensive;

- provide comprehensive guidance to schools on school property management and maintenance;

- ensure schools have access to accurate and impartial advice on the identification, prioritisation, procurement and contract management   of repairs and maintenance services; and

- put in place light-touch monitoring to ensure LEA assets are properly maintained by schools.

In order to improve provision for education otherwise than at school, urgently put in place, in consultation with schools, standards against which service specifications can be written, which ensure that:

- all EOTAS pupils receive 25 hours of tuition;
- regular monitoring of all EOTAS provision is carried out;
- educational outcomes of existing provision are evaluated in order to ensure improved achievement;
- all pupils have access to accreditation;
- the weaknesses at the PRU are urgently rectified; and
- arrangements with external providers are clarified.

In order to improve support for attendance:

- produce an attendance policy and standard guidelines; and
- involve all relevant agencies in devising a multi-agency strategy for working with families to convince them of the importance of regular school attendance.
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In order to improve support to behaviour, urgently put in place, in consultation with schools, standards against which service specifications can be written, which ensure that:

- a behaviour support policy and agreed procedures for accessing support are defined;
- data on exclusions is analysed and action is targeted to reduce them;
- resources are more effectively targeted to:

- intermediate support aimed at preventing exclusions of primary aged children;
- arrangements for excluded primary aged pupils; and
- working links with social services are established.

In order to improve support to raise the attainment of pupils with English as an additional language:

- establish effective arrangements for joint working with schools on the NLS including guidelines for them on EAL issues;
- disseminate data on minority ethnic achievement in schools and work in partnership with schools to target under achievement; and
- ensure that EMASS work in schools is monitored and evaluated.

Urgently put in place a policy and guidance for schools in response to the Macpherson report on the inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence.

APPENDIX: RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to improve the targeting of resources to need and Best Value:

- put in place medium term financial planning; and

- in consultation with schools, draw up detailed standards for all functions for education against which service specifications can be defined, the performance of services challenged, and competition judged. This should be undertaken as a matter of urgency for the services identified in this report which are currently unsatisfactory.

To improve the quality of monitoring, challenge, intervention and support:

- clarify the number and purpose of visits made by officers to schools to bring them in line with the Code of Practice; and

- discuss, agree and implement with all secondary schools, a range of strategies to help raise standards in the weakest schools.

In order to improve the quality and use of data:

- improve the support and guidance given to special schools in data analysis and target-setting; and

- put in place a common database, which brings together information held by all services on schools and individual pupils.

To improve curriculum and administrative ICT, urgently put in place standards against which specifications can be written, which ensure that:

- there are effective means for monitoring and evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of school ICT curricular capacity;

- support is targeted at those schools which need it most; and

- the aims within the ICT development plan to integrate curriculum and administrative support are taken into account.

To improve the effectiveness of school management:

- ensure secondary schools are securing the management support they need.

To ensure governing bodies have the capacity to effectively fulfil their role in school management and school improvement:

- work closely with local communities to encourage and develop an understanding that they can contribute to the governance of schools.

In order to improve strategic management:

- put in place a plan for the implementation of performance management across the directorate to ensure consistency in the management and accountability of services;

- elected members should set clearer timescales for the implementation of education priorities, and hold services more accountable;

- create mechanisms for ensuring that plans are implemented and the allocation of resources reflect policy commitments; and

- align plans, within education, for education and the children's service, and ensure they inform the targets and success criteria within service plans.

To improve the co-ordination, effectiveness and consistency of management support services for schools, the service standards and the specifications produced should ensure that:

- schools have access to objective and accurate advice on alternatives to LEA provision of management support services; and

- fragmentation is reduced and service delivery is well coordinated.

Improve the quality of leadership and strategic management of SEN by:

- putting in place a comprehensive strategy for SEN which defines the LEA's intentions for inclusion, the distribution of resources and provision to support that intention, including out of LEA placements, and clarifies the role and expectations of special schools within that strategy;

- **urgently putting in place, in consultation with schools, standards against which service specifications can be written, which:**

    - ensure that statutory duties are promptly met by:

    - providing more challenging targets for the production of draft statements prepared within 18 weeks;

    - ensuring that annual reviews are timely and focus on helping pupils' progress;

    - ensuring that transitional plans are in place for all pupils who need them;

    - ensure that the allocation of resources, and provision to SEN are clear and transparent to schools and parents;

    - ensure that learning support is deployed to those schools which need it most;

- **monitoring provision for pupils in mainstream schools where funds have been delegated to schools.**

To improve asset management planning :

- urgently put in place, in consultation with schools, standards against which specifications can be written, which ensure that the relative responsibilities of schools, education planning and property services in asset management planning

and the maintenance of school buildings are clear and comprehensive;

- provide comprehensive guidance to schools on school property management and maintenance;
- ensure schools have access to accurate and impartial advice on the identification, prioritisation, procurement and contract management of repairs and maintenance services; and
- put in place light-touch monitoring to ensure LEA assets are properly maintained by schools.

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