

Merton

Local Education Authority

Inspection Report

Date of Inspection: September 2004

Reporting Inspector: Robert Barr

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Basic information

Name of LEA:	Merton Local Education Authority
LEA number:	315
Address of LEA:	Merton Civic Centre London Road Morden Surrey SM4 5DX
Reporting Inspector:	Robert Barr HMI
Date of Inspection:	September 2004

Summary

Introduction

Merton is a small borough in south west London with moderate levels of deprivation compared to other outer London boroughs, but containing communities with extremes of wealth and deprivation. Almost half of the school population are of minority ethnic heritage. Over a quarter of secondary pupils in Merton schools come from other London boroughs. Since the last inspection, the comprehensive restructuring of schools into a two-tier structure has dominated the council's strategic planning. This is largely complete and the regeneration of disadvantaged communities in east Merton is becoming the council's main strategic focus.

The 2003 results in national tests show that the performance of pupils in primary schools is generally in line with that nationally, but is below national averages in secondary schools. In most key stages, performance of pupils is below that in similar LEAs. Rates of improvement have generally been above that nationally.

The structure of the council's cabinet and associated overview and scrutiny arrangements are broadly unchanged since the last inspection. However, the reduction of the number of education portfolio holders from three to one has simplified relationships between officers and members. The current Director of Education, Leisure and Libraries took up post in 2001. The structure of the Directorate Leisure and Libraries is similar to that at the last inspection, though the team overseeing the school re-organisation has evolved into the school organisation and development service. The new chief executive took up post in 2004 following a year of interim arrangements.

Main findings

Summary: Merton is a highly satisfactory LEA. It has made highly satisfactory progress since previous the inspection during a period of turmoil due to the schools re-organisation. Improvement in support for social inclusion has been particularly good. Both the strategy for school improvement and support for education in schools continue to be good. However, this good progress has not been consistent. Despite steady improvement the attainment of pupils in the LEA's secondary schools remains below national averages. Performance management arrangements at service level are at an early stage of development. The LEA's revised strategy for special educational needs has been implemented too slowly and is not underpinned by sufficiently robust financial planning and budgetary control. Nevertheless, the council has a sound grasp of its strengths and weaknesses. The council leader has a bold vision for the future of education and the strong leadership provided by officers has been further enhanced by the appointment of an effective new chief executive. The council has good capacity for further improvement.

Areas of strength	Areas of weakness/for development
Corporate leadership of education	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership of senior officers • Clear strategic plans that link together well • Support for early years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inconsistent budget management arrangements at service level • Inconsistent leadership by elected members • Under-developed performance management arrangements
Strategy for education and its implementation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategy for school improvement • The LEA's work in monitoring and challenging schools and assessing and supporting those most in need • Asset management and school place planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attainment at Key Stages 3 and 4
Support to improve education in schools	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for school leadership and governance including school self-evaluation • Support to raise standards at Key Stage 3 • The planning and provision of services supporting school improvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for information and communication technology in schools • Planning and provision of information management services
Support for special educational needs	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The effectiveness of SEN support for school improvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget planning and control of SEN in relation to expenditure • Slow progress in developing the SEN strategy and aligning it with that for social inclusion
Support for social inclusion	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education of pupils other than at school • Support for improving attendance and behaviour • Support for health, safety and child protection • Attainment of looked after children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training and support for the promotion of race equality in schools.

Recommendations

Key recommendations

The strategy for SEN: Produce as a matter of urgency, an implementation plan for the revised SEN policy and strategy; bring together strategies and action plans for SEN and social inclusion.

Value for money of SEN functions: Produce a strategic resource plan for SEN and inclusion; improve budgetary control to reduce unplanned expenditure.

Other recommendations

Corporate leadership of education

Allocation of resources to priorities: Ensure all service plans are accurately costed against available budgets and service priorities, identify specific management action to enable budgets to be managed within available resources; undertake robust service and cost comparisons with similar authorities.

Strategies to promote continuous improvement, including Best Value: Extend self-assessment to seek out best practice in effective authorities; ensure all reviews effectively challenge current service delivery and costs.

Leadership provided by elected members: Ensure the programme of training for elected members fully covers their role and responsibilities in relation to children and young people.

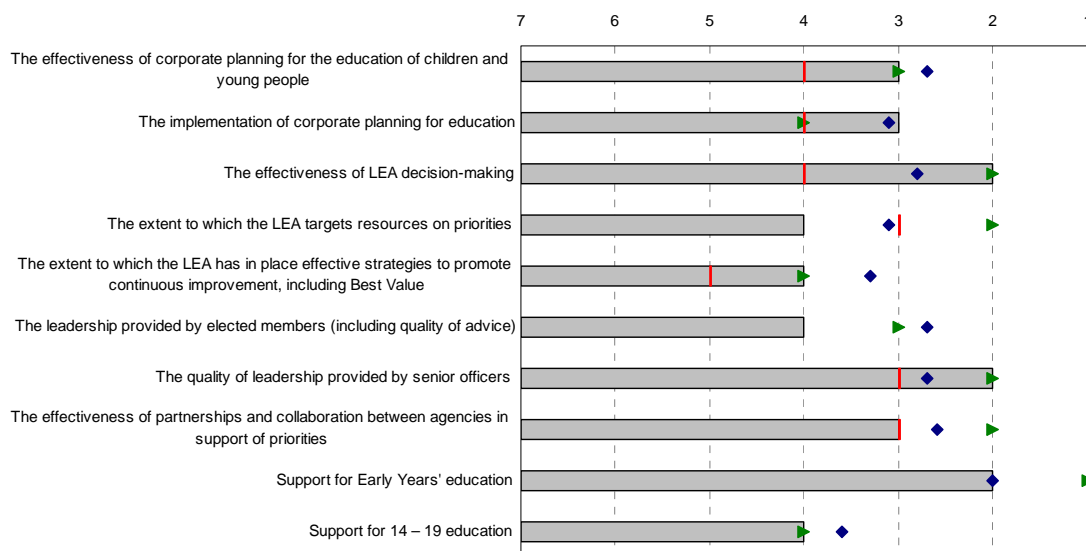
Support to improve education in schools

Support for information and communication technology: Ensure that an ICT strategy is produced which involves all key stakeholders and links clearly with other services across the council; ensure that national computer: pupil ratios are met in all schools.

Effectiveness and value for money of services to support school management: Ensure that all Best Value principles are applied consistently to all traded services ensure that all schools have access to good quality ICT technical support, from a choice of providers offering differentiated packages.

Section 1: Corporate leadership of education

Summary table of judgements



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

Corporate planning for education and its implementation

1. Corporate planning for education is highly satisfactory. Since the last inspection the council has successfully re-organised schools into a two tier structure. Strong leadership by senior officers was critical during this period and continues to be good. The council leader's vision for education and the future role of the council and other partners is ambitious, far sighted and based on a sound understanding of the needs of schools and communities in Merton. However, this vision has yet to be fully articulated within corporate plans and is not consistently understood by other elected members. The new chief executive has quickened the pace of change and sharpened the council's strategic priorities. The LEA's self review processes clearly identify areas for improvement. The council's capacity for further improvement is good.

2. Corporate plans are clear and well sequenced. Strategic priorities and challenging targets for education are appropriately set out within the six cross-cutting corporate themes. The connections between these themes and statutory and service plans are streamlined and transparent, and the accountability for delivering outcomes is well understood by officers and elected members. Planning processes at directorate level are well developed and a comprehensive directorate service plan efficiently pulls together priorities, objectives and targets. The medium term financial strategy has improved the alignment of financial and service planning at corporate level. However, resource and service planning is not well integrated

and budgetary control not always robust. While senior officers and elected members diligently monitor progress against plans, systematic challenge of performance is underdeveloped.

3. There are many examples of good multi-agency work benefiting children and young people in Merton. Systems supporting the planning and co-ordination across different departments are sound. Collaboration between officers in social services and education is particularly well developed and this has contributed to the good support for looked after children and to effective child protection procedures. Multi-agency working between social services, health and education to support very young children is very effective. However, partnership working is not always strategically aligned with corporate strategies. Support for the education of the 14 – 19 age group is satisfactory. The LEA's strategy is clear and well established, and performance and participation rates are improving steadily.

Decision-making

4. The effectiveness of council decision-making in relation to education has improved and is now good. The relative roles of officers and members have been clarified, leading to more efficient and transparent decision-making. Members of overview and scrutiny panels have had success in challenging council policies and performance.

5. Senior officers and elected members have successfully responded to the numerous challenges and difficult decisions encountered during the re-organisation of schools. Important lessons have been learned from this experience and the council's capacity to manage future strategic initiatives has improved. With the exception of the new policy on special educational needs (SEN), important decisions are informed by effective consultation. Headteachers and governors are involved in key strategic decisions at an early stage and are confident in their ability to influence council policies and strategies.

Targeting of resources

6. At the time of the previous inspection the council's targeting of resources to priorities was highly satisfactory. There has been progress in some areas, but weaknesses in budget planning and benchmarking mean that this is now satisfactory.

7. Despite tight corporate financial constraints, the council's recent medium-term financial strategy continues to give education funding, and in particular, school funding a high priority. The council has been successful in securing additional funding from the government to support school re-organisation. Now this has been implemented, funding is being redirected appropriately to support school improvement and social inclusion priorities.

8. Revisions to the school funding formula following the re-organisation of schools are appropriate and changes have been well managed. The Schools Forum

is knowledgeable and works well with the LEA. Around half of all primary schools have budget surpluses linked to contingency planning for re-organisation, but there are satisfactory arrangements that ensure schools use these appropriately.

9. The council is strengthening its management of the budget and has placed more responsibility on services to tackle overspending areas. However, the rigour of financial management across the education service budgets is not consistent. The strategic plan, resource and performance plans, and individual service plans are not linked clearly with budget plans. Budget planning in some key service areas is inaccurate, for example for SEN. There is limited use of service cost comparisons with similar authorities or of sufficient challenge to how some services are delivered. The LEA is taking action to improve budget planning, control and management and has satisfactory capacity to implement this at service level.

Recommendations

- Ensure all service plans are accurately costed against available budgets and service priorities.
- Identify specific management action to enable budgets to be managed within available resources.
- Undertake robust service and cost comparisons with similar authorities.

Strategies to promote continuous improvement, including Best Value

10. The council has satisfactory strategies for delivering continuous improvement. The corporate plan and Best Value Performance Plan set out clear strategic priorities which are reflected throughout the performance management framework. Resources are increasingly and more effectively linked to delivering these priorities. The performance management framework is being consistently implemented, with timely plans to review its impact on outcomes. The Education, Leisure and Libraries department has recently been awarded Investors in People status. Resource and performance plans set out programmes for delivering priorities. However, they lack the necessary financial resource planning, targets and performance measures to be used effectively in monitoring and evaluating performance.

11. There is a regular process of self-review against external criteria, such as Ofsted inspection criteria, which provides useful information on comparative performance. The LEA's self-evaluation for this inspection was thorough and detailed and is largely correct. There are good examples of innovative practice, such as the partnership on advisory services with Kingston upon Thames. Nevertheless, there is too little comparison with best practice in similar authorities and limited challenge to the costs and methods of delivering services. This weakness is reflected in Best Value reviews of education services.

Recommendations

- Extend self-assessment to seek out best practice in effective authorities.
- Ensure all reviews effectively challenge current service delivery and costs.

Leadership by elected members and advice given to them

12. The quality of leadership of elected members has improved since the last inspection and is now satisfactory. Elected members provided firm support to officers during the re-organisation of schools and continue to place improving educational standards at the top of the council's priorities. The council leader has a bold and clear vision for the role of the council in improving education for children and young people in Merton. The overview and scrutiny panels are increasingly effective in holding services and schools to account. In particular, the recent investigation into the disproportionate number of exclusions of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds sharpened the focus of services and schools. The scrutiny function extends to the monitoring of proposed policy initiatives and members of the overview and scrutiny panels play an active and constructive role in policy development. Nevertheless, they continue to receive information which, though comprehensive, is not always well presented for their purposes.

13. The quality of leadership shown by the leader, and increasingly by elected members of the overview and scrutiny panels, is not always demonstrated by other members. Their involvement in the development of strategy or in constructive challenge to services or schools has been limited to date, as has their impact. The responses to the most recent Audit Commission school survey indicate that headteachers continue to have a low opinion of the effectiveness of the leadership by elected members. The council has recognised the need to enhance further the capacity of officers and members in strategic management including, for example, programmes of additional training.

Recommendation

- Ensure the programme of training for elected members fully covers their role and responsibilities in relation to education.

Leadership by senior officers

14. The quality of leadership provided by senior officers has improved and is now good. The current Director of Education, Leisure and Libraries successfully rebuilt the confidence and credibility of the directorate management team following a period of turbulence in management of the LEA. She has embedded effective team working and a disciplined approach to directorate management which have contributed greatly to improvements in service planning. The director and senior officers maintained the confidence of headteachers during the inevitable disruption that accompanied school re-organisation. Leadership of the strategy for school improvement continues to be effective.

Strategic partnerships

15. Support for partnership work and collaboration between agencies is highly satisfactory. There is a good understanding of educational objectives shared by all key stakeholders. The council's corporate plan focuses appropriately on strengthening partnership work. The vision and leadership within the local strategic partnership (LSP) are becoming stronger.

16. The current community plan was written prior to the formation of the LSP. Consequently, the LSP has struggled to take total ownership of the strategy and the monitoring of its impact has been inconsistent. However, effective mechanisms are already in place for producing the new 2005 community strategy, including wide representation from the local community and thorough consultation. The proposed new community plan will include raising standards in schools as a key council and community priority.

17. Procedures for communicating with schools are sound. Many specific initiatives are well targeted, are improving the quality and inclusiveness of educational provision, and are already benefiting children and young people. The creation of vulnerable children and 'chances' teams has impacted significantly on improving non-attendance, exclusions and educational attainment. Combining the services and resources from health, social services, education and employment has led to sustained improvements in the levels of crime and disorder.

Support for Early Years

18. Support for early years is good and is integral to the LEA's strategic planning. The Early Years and Childcare Strategy is well presented with clear strategic aims, operational objectives and performance measures. Implementation is being very well led by the new head of early years who has helped to create a more coherent and vital vision of partnership working. The integration of childcare and early year's education is now being driven forward with purpose. Nevertheless, the interlinked strategy and plans for implementation have not yet been fully shared and understood by all stakeholders.

19. Sure Start and LEA targets for increasing and maintaining the quality and quantity of provision have largely been met and often exceeded. Merton has ensured the provision of a free nursery education place for every three- and four-year-old, partly through the development of nursery provision in every primary school. The authority is successfully balancing need and demand in tandem with strategic targeting of areas of deprivation.

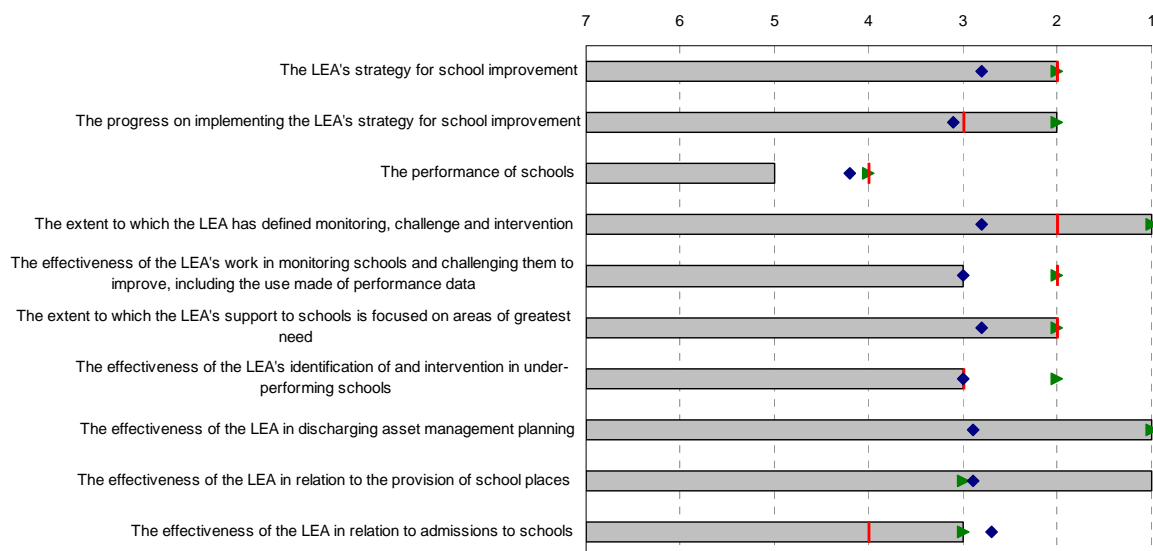
20. The LEA has provided a particularly good level of training, advice and support for both Foundation Stage practitioners and the early years sector. The offer of training bursaries has been influential and the number of staff who are trained to the equivalent of national vocational qualification level 2 and 3 is very high. The LEA provides good support for the use of the Foundation Stage profile and an audit was piloted in 2003 and has subsequently been well implemented. An impressive and innovative learning map is now being used to track individual progress in schools.

21. All private, voluntary and independent settings have been assessed as meeting the National Standards and are generally of a good quality. Additionally, no nursery education setting has been graded as unsatisfactory following an inspection.

22. Good general information is provided for prospective users and providers of childcare services but not all stakeholders are sufficiently aware of both the roles of the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership (EYDCP) and the Children's Information Service (CIS). Merton council has, however, begun to more positively influence the role and development of the EYDCP while also making further progress through having taken over direct control of the CIS.

Section 2: Strategy for education and its implementation

Summary table of judgements



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

The strategy for school improvement and its implementation

23. The strategy for school improvement continues to be good. It centres on the Education Development Plan (EDP) which links well with corporate and service plans to provide a clear and well-presented strategy for the directorate, schools and officers. The strategy reflects both local and national priorities and is based on very good data and performance information. Both school improvement and social inclusion plans are focused on raising the attainment of all pupils. Support is increasingly well targeted on underperformance. The LEA's knowledge of its schools is good.

24. Implementation has also been good, which is particularly creditable in view of the major school re-organisation programme. Asset management planning and the provision of school places are both very good. School admission arrangements have improved and are highly satisfactory. The LEA has also managed the curriculum aspects of re-organisation well, despite the significant challenges of fluctuating school sizes, discontinuity between key stages and changing admissions patterns. Senior officers are clear that the aim of re-organisation was to raise standards and they are shifting their focus from structural matters to the longer term issues of underachievement.

25. The 2003 results show that the performance of pupils in primary schools is generally in line with that nationally. Performance is, however, below national

averages in secondary schools. In most key stages performance is below that in similar LEAs. There is evidence of an adverse effect of migration out of the borough for secondary education. The LEA is optimistic about achieving new targets recently agreed with the DfES, although, even with current rates of improvement, some are too challenging and are unlikely to be met. Individual school targets are appropriately challenging. Progress in raising attainment since the previous inspection has been mixed. Rates of improvement have generally been above that nationally; there has been steady improvement at Key Stage 1 and recent improvement both at Key Stage 3 and GCSE. The weakest area has been Key Stage 2 mathematics, although unvalidated results for 2004 show a significant 6 percentage point improvement both in level 4 and level 5. The systematic monitoring of the impact of re-organisation on school performance by both the LEA and schools is very effective. The LEA is well placed to target its support and challenge to schools in raising standards.

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

26. The LEA performs these functions well. Its definition of monitoring, challenge and intervention has improved and is now very good. Re-organisation has been a major challenge to the LEA's ability to monitor school performance as the new pattern of schools emerged, with radical changes of school age ranges and patterns of admission. The LEA's programme of monitoring and support is highly satisfactory and has been effective for the majority of schools. There is a very clear view of what the LEA is seeking to achieve, using processes developed over several years. However, the LEA has not been consistently effective in challenging underperforming schools.

27. The joint annual review (JAR) process between schools and the LEA provides a very effective framework for planning improvement. It is universally well regarded by schools, governors and officers. Schools increasingly use it for their own self-evaluation and development. The framework has also been broadened to ensure stronger links between school improvement, inclusion and special educational needs. Current work in identifying underperforming groups also draws on the strength of the JAR process as a means by which schools understand their needs.

28. The monitoring programme is very well planned and undertaken, using excellent performance data. The LEA now has an extensive multi-functional database. The Research and Statistics team use a comprehensive set of pupil data for the identification of vulnerable groups and to provide vital information to both schools and the LEA. This dataset includes data on pupils who enter Merton schools from neighbouring authorities. Schools appreciate the quality of the LEA's performance data, have been well engaged in its development, and increasingly use it in their own planning and development. There is an LEA "data guardian" who ensures the coherence of data capture and use.

29. Assigned inspectors are skilled in the use of performance data and are able to challenge schools well in the setting of targets. There is a valuable range of

booklets with interactive spreadsheets to assist schools in this task. Prior to an annual challenge meeting at which targets are agreed, both schools and LEA are able to analyse data from a variety of sources, both national and local. There is a close match between the aggregated targets of schools and those of the LEA. Nevertheless, despite positive developments since the previous inspection, challenge of underperforming schools has not always been sufficiently robust and the number of schools in Ofsted categories of cause for concern has risen. The LEA has taken action to address these issues and made improvements to its programme of monitoring and support.

30. The LEA's ability to focus on areas of greatest need remains good and its determination to do so has strong support from schools. There are clear links between the analyses of performance through the JAR process and action to ensure that schools are placed in appropriate categories of support and monitoring. The LEA brings together all its services to achieve a well co-ordinated approach to support and challenge. Schools receiving this support are particularly positive about this aspect of the LEA's work. In addition, the expertise of serving headteachers is brought to bear through their work with senior officers in identifying the nature of support to be given. The initiative targeting underperforming groups has a very appropriate emphasis on the identification of priorities by the schools themselves. Schools also receive support through a range of other initiatives, such as work to raise attainment in primary schools through the Basic Skills Agency Quality Mark scheme. Links with Kingston upon Thames LEA are increasingly important and widen the capacity of support accessible by schools. A School Improvement Partnership Board has been established recently to bring greater coherence to challenge and support for secondary schools in the Mitcham area.

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

31. Identification of underperforming schools and subsequent intervention remain highly satisfactory. The LEA's comprehensive procedures mean that schools are clear about the areas of concern. Within the authority, there is a very robust process for reviewing the progress of schools causing concern. The phase groups, now chaired personally by the director, review all schools causing concern on a multi-disciplinary basis and determine their category of monitoring, support and intervention. Headteachers are involved alongside senior officers in identifying the nature of support to be provided. Senior members review all Ofsted school inspection reports and also have set up a group which considers the progress of two schools causing particular concern.

32. At school level, action plans are monitored regularly, with appropriate involvement of the governing body. Concerns are identified accurately and the LEA response is well co-ordinated. Headteachers consider that the LEA successfully achieves a balance of support and challenge. The quantity and quality of support are well judged and the LEA listens and responds to local needs. Tightened criteria and greater emphasis on school self-review have improved the process of early identification. There is a falling trend in the LEA's own list of schools causing

concern but recent Ofsted intervention in two schools cannot be attributed solely to the after-effects of re-organisation. As schools settle into their new structure, the capacity for improvement is good.

Asset management planning

33. Asset management planning in Merton is very good. The recent re-organisation reflects the council's commitment to providing a high standard of provision for education. Condition and suitability assessments are comprehensive, accurate and have been prepared in consultation with schools. They are kept up to date and they inform future capital investment. Schools and diocesan partners are fully involved in deciding priorities. Schools are actively supported in managing devolved capital within school development planning.

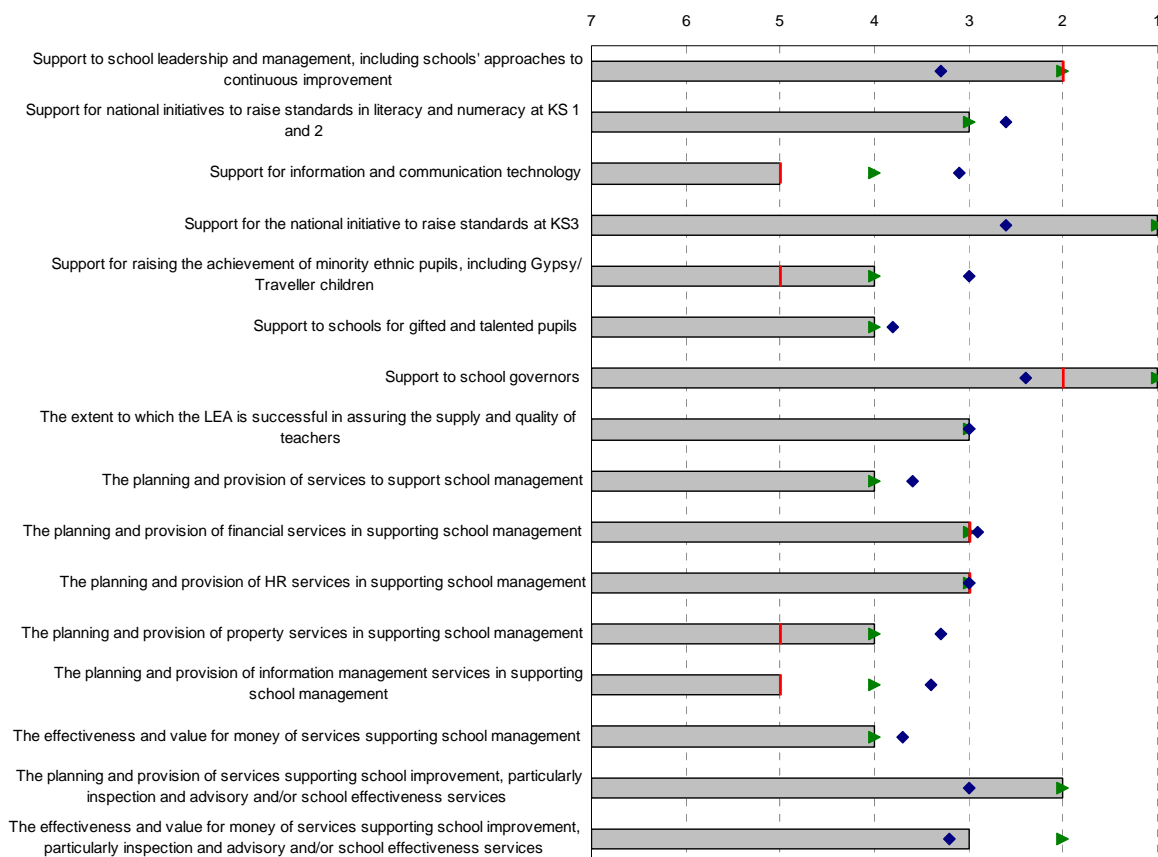
34. The primary re-organisation project was well funded and completed on time and within budget. A well-managed programme of improvements to secondary schools is being funded through a private finance initiative. The council has worked in partnership with five other south London authorities to submit an innovative Building Schools of the Future bid to enhance further its planned improvements to secondary school facilities.

Providing school places

35. The council has very good arrangements for school place planning. The council's strategy is well articulated, soundly based, and is clearly set out in its good School Organisation Plan. The recent re-organisation was well planned and officers and elected members secured substantial commitment from all those involved and affected. Officers are highly knowledgeable and use a comprehensive range of planning, admissions and performance data to support school place planning. They closely monitor trends at individual schools and across areas, and test out the reasons for any changing patterns of preferences with parents and schools.

Section 3: Support to improve education in schools

Summary table of judgements



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

Support for school leadership, management and continuous improvement

36. Support for school leadership, management and improvement in schools remains good. The previous inspection identified the challenge of maintaining standards over the period of the forthcoming school re-organisation. The LEA has managed to do this in most areas and, indeed, has shown some improvement in areas such as Key Stage 1 performance, rates of attendance and the performance of looked after children.

37. The LEA's senior officers and a team of high quality inspectors and consultants provide good support for leadership and management in schools. For example, some aspects of support for the primary strategy are good and support for the national Key Stage 3 strategy is very good. The authority draws well on additional expertise to strengthen the work of the service as required, for example, headteachers act as mentors or support schools in challenging circumstances.

38. Good quality training and support are provided for headteachers and governors on self-evaluation, school improvement and the use of performance data. The support provided for governors is very good. This training links well with the joint annual review process, which involves schools conducting a self-evaluation and validating their findings during the attached inspector visit. Notes of visit, issued after all visits by LEA officers, provide schools with valuable information including reporting the work undertaken and present position in the school, and identifying targets for further improvement. These processes keep schools well informed of their strengths and weaknesses. School inspection data for the previous year show that leadership and management in Merton schools are better than that nationally or in statistical neighbouring authorities.

39. The LEA has been successful in identifying the needs of leadership in schools and supporting those schools where leadership and management are weak. In schools causing concern, headteachers and governors receive good support with regular monitoring reports from the LEA indicating progress against targets and recommendations for further action. Elected members are kept well informed of progress in these schools.

40. The authority is forming good partnerships and networks for sharing and developing good practice. Strong links with other London LEAs and schools exist through the London Challenge, a joint professional development project with Kingston upon Thames, and leading teachers' network, all of which are contributing well to the school improvement agenda.

41. Best practice is well disseminated through several mechanisms including school leadership briefings, newsletters, network groups and Beacon schools. However, the LEA is not yet utilising effectively websites and the local intranet for this purpose.

Support for the national initiatives at Key Stages 1 and 2

42. Support in this area remains highly satisfactory. The council places a high priority on the primary strategy which is becoming well established across the borough. The primary strategy manager works closely with two curriculum managers to ensure that there is a coherent strategy and co-ordinated approach to the leadership programme and other strands.

43. There is an effective support team of consultants which has been strengthened by additional appointments to the literacy and numeracy team and by incorporating the Foundation Stage and ICT consultants into the primary strategy team. The work of this team is highly valued by schools and is beginning to have an impact on standards across the borough. Support is based on an analysis of performance at Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 and is well differentiated and targeted to the needs of each individual school. The LEA offers a comprehensive range of training which not only addresses literacy and numeracy but also wider issues including whole school management and ICT across the curriculum.

44. Standards at Key Stage 1 in literacy and numeracy have shown steady improvement since the last inspection, with some particularly good performance in mathematics in 2003. However, performance at Key Stage 2 has been less consistent with particular concerns in mathematics. The LEA has identified effective strategies to address the falling standards including detailed data analysis, intensive support at Year 5 and support for underachieving groups. Provisional results for 2004 show that good progress has been made. While this is not yet in line with national rates, the gap has been closed considerably. Raising standards at Key Stage 2 remains a priority and major focus for the LEA.

Support for information and communication technology (ICT)

45. Support for curriculum ICT remains unsatisfactory. The LEA has made some progress in addressing the recommendations from the last inspection but there has been insufficient development in monitoring standards at Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 and in the use of ICT within subjects.

46. There is no overarching ICT strategy for education and links with corporate IT are not clearly defined. The recently appointed ICT manager has conducted an effective ICT review across the authority which includes several pertinent recommendations for action. These will provide a useful starting point for the development of an ICT strategy. There is good potential to use the ICT manager as a link between education and corporate services, and taking major role in the development of a coherent strategy for ICT.

47. The ICT consultants provide a good standard of support for teachers in Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 3 and are highly valued by schools. They offer a wide range of training and follow this up with high quality support in school. The LEA is developing work on assessment in ICT which includes a partnership approach with Kingston upon Thames LEA. The Key Stage 3 strategy training in this area has been effective and well received. However, there is still further work to be done on assessment in the primary phase and transition between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3. Dissemination and sharing of good practice are satisfactory. Network groups are convened for co-ordinators, but neither the use of websites nor the council intranet are well developed.

48. The LEA meets its statutory duties on the allocation and retention of Standards Fund monies and effectively monitors spending on areas such as e-learning credits and hands on support. ICT is rightly a priority in the updated EDP. Clear action points are identified with a set of success criteria; however, timescales, costing and responsibilities are less clear. Some of the national targets for ICT have not been met. A significantly large number of schools do not meet the 2004 pupil:computer ratio and Key Stage 3 attainment for 2004 missed the LEA's target by 10%.

Recommendations

- Ensure that an ICT strategy is produced which involves all key stakeholders and links clearly with other services across the council.
- Ensure that national computer: pupil ratios are met in all schools.

Effectiveness and value for money of services to support school management

49. Overall, the effectiveness and value for money of services to support school management are satisfactory. Only one of the contributing services, information management, is less than satisfactory.

50. The booklet on traded services generally provides sufficient information for schools and is available prior to setting their annual budgets. The LEA broadly applies Best Value principles in the procurement and review of services. However, whilst there is sufficient focus on comparisons of performance and customer satisfaction, cost comparisons and competition are not consistently applied, for example in the IT support package. Brokerage and benchmarking are also not well developed.

51. The LEA has provided some effective training to support schools in becoming competent procurers and purchasers of services. It has also established a reference group of officers and headteachers which effectively monitors the delivery of services. A report on the performance of service providers is provided annually to purchasers, providers and members.

52. Only property and information management services were inspected through fieldwork. The council's arrangements for providing property services for schools through its contract with an outsourced provider are satisfactory. Officers have improved project performance from the contractor by using key performance indicators and surveys of schools' satisfaction. Schools have received useful guidance on their responsibilities. The contract is due to be re-tendered shortly and revised specifications will take account of schools' changing requirements.

53. The provision of information management services is unsatisfactory. There is no up to date ICT strategy in paper or electronic form. Schools are not aware of the previous strategy, links between corporate IT and education are not clear, and service plans are not well cross referenced.

54. Broadband was provided last summer to all schools, well ahead of the national target, and all e-mail provision was changed. However, there are still some teething troubles with the reliability of both systems in some areas of the borough and all schools do not yet have an email address book set up. In addition, the quality of technical support through the service level agreement (SLA) is not consistent. Several schools have major concerns about it and the option of one

provider gives schools too little choice. The council intranet has only been available to schools for two weeks and the education section is under-developed.

55. In contrast, hardware and software systems across the council are standardised and compatible with administration systems in schools. Support for these systems has generally been highly satisfactory. The handling and transfer of pupil data and information are effective.

Recommendations

- Ensure that all Best Value principles are applied consistently to all traded services.
- Ensure that all schools have access to a choice of good quality ICT technical support, which conforms to Best Value principles.

Effectiveness and value for money of services to support school improvement

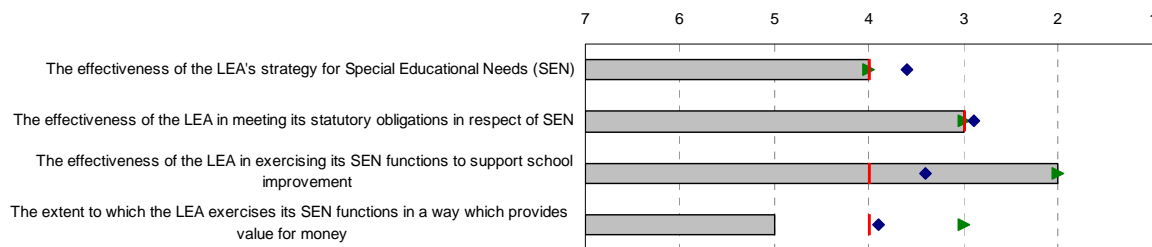
56. The planning and provision of services to support school improvement remain good. Senior officers across the department have gained the trust and confidence of the schools. They have a clear understanding of areas of strength and of areas requiring development in the drive to raise standards across Merton. Corporate priorities and those of the education department and schools are well linked and cross referenced. The priorities for improvement are effectively reflected in a well constructed departmental service plan.

57. The effectiveness and value for money of these services are highly satisfactory. The LEA has effective systems in place for monitoring the work of services and their performance is reported at least annually to schools, senior management and elected members. The majority of individual services supporting school improvement are at least satisfactory and sometimes good. Almost all performance indicators for school improvement are rising at least in line with statistical neighbours and the overall cost of the school improvement services is below London averages. Nevertheless, there is a lack of consistency across the department's individual service plans. Targets, outcomes and success criteria are sufficiently clear but costings, resources and timescales are not.

58. Schools have confidence in the quality of attached inspectors and consultants, who are well deployed and matched to schools' needs. A common performance management system has been introduced across all departments. All officers in the education department are appraised annually with half-termly progress meetings between appraisee and line manager. Individuals are set appropriate targets in line with service priorities. However, the content of appraisal forms is not consistent, particularly in the way training needs are identified and documented.

Section 4: Support for special educational needs (SEN)

Summary table of judgements



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

The strategy for SEN

59. The LEA's special educational needs (SEN) strategy remains satisfactory. Its direction is sound, in line with both national and local priorities. There is also consistency between the SEN draft policy and other plans, principally those for the development of inclusion. There are important individual examples of effective resource planning to achieve improvement. However, there are also some important weaknesses in the slow pace of change to date and the lack of an implementation plan identifying how key changes are to be achieved and funded. Initially consultation on a new SEN policy was initially too limited. It has been extended to obtain a wider range of responses, including those of parents with whom the proposals require careful discussion. Schools have been consulted about the development of the plan and are broadly supportive at headteacher level but SEN co-ordinators (SENCOs) have only been involved at a later stage.

60. The draft document on policy and strategy itself is highly satisfactory as a framework for developing support for SEN and in the response to the Code of Practice. Proposals reflect a thorough analysis of the changes required. However, the pace of development, from the completion of the Best Value review of SEN in Jan 2003 to the draft policy and strategy published in mid 2004, has been too slow. As a result, the development of the new SEN policy has been alongside, rather than integral to the review of inclusion. Nevertheless, considerable progress has been made in developing services in ways which are consistent with the draft policy. They include the provision of school SEN bases and a focus on reducing the cost of out-borough placements. The LEA recognises that it needs to move rapidly from consultation on policy to detailed implementation plans, including the proposed shifts in the pattern of provision and resources.

61. Links with the school improvement agenda are good and improving. The LEA's strong performance monitoring regime extends very effectively to pupils with SEN. There have been positive process changes in the revision of the SEN handbook and improved methods for monitoring SEN effectiveness at school level. Links to

early years provision and partnerships are sound, although pooled funding is at an early stage. The council has shown it has the ability to tackle complex change effectively in other areas. By harnessing those skills across the whole council, prospects for future improvement are highly satisfactory.

Recommendations

- Produce as a matter of urgency, an implementation plan for the revised SEN policy and strategy.
- Bring together strategies and action plans for SEN and social inclusion.

Statutory obligations

62. The performance of statutory functions continues to be highly satisfactory. The LEA has maintained its good record of completing assessments within required timescales. Criteria and systems are clear and processes are carried out efficiently. However, there is too little use of ICT in central processes to ease the administrative burden on schools and especially to SENCOs. Annual reviews are undertaken to time and officers prioritise their attendance at reviews efficiently, particularly transitional reviews.

63. Parents receive satisfactory information and advice. The Parent Partnership officer is very experienced and well known in the community. He works closely with the education directorate but with a strong emphasis on his role as parental advocate. Good quality materials are available to parents and carers, and include a resource base. Currently there are no independent parental supporters but there are other support mechanisms and means of conciliation. Parents are routinely advised of the Parent Partnership service in correspondence about assessment. The LEA's website provides satisfactory information for parents. The LEA has sought to manage assessment processes firmly within the Code of Practice. This has resulted in pressure for tribunal hearings. However the majority of applications have been resolved without a formal hearing and overall numbers were reducing significantly at the time of inspection.

64. The LEA has begun to develop its links with other agencies. Joint resourcing is not yet extensive, although part of current planning. At a local level, there are secure relationships between education and social services. This is important in achieving a further reduction in out-borough placements, which is part of a strategy to make more local cost-effective provision.

SEN functions to support school improvement

65. Use of the LEA's SEN functions to support school improvement was previously satisfactory and is now good. The LEA knows its schools well, has good performance information about individual pupils and vulnerable groups and is working hard to synchronise its work in school improvement, inclusion and SEN. There are particular strengths in the availability of very high quality performance and pupil-level data. The recent extension of the JAR process also takes greater account

of inclusion and SEN and assigned inspectors effectively ensure that outcomes for pupils with SEN feature fully in the process of support and challenge.

66. Procedures for producing Individual Education Plans (IEPs) are particularly strong, and an annual peer review by SENCOs has a significant impact on their quality. The LEA monitors the performance of the lowest 20% of attainers well. There is also evidence that the rigorous application of IEPs is raising standards. The authority's SEN audit in 2004 showed an 80% record of progress against IEP targets, a major improvement on the previous year. There are regular meetings of SENCOs in both phases linked effectively to early years provision. Comprehensive SENCO handbooks exist for both mainstream schools and early years. Over the past four years, there has been an overall reduction in the number of pupils scoring below benchmark levels at all key stages.

67. The LEA has shown good foresight in seizing the opportunity provided by re-organisation to develop ten SEN bases on mainstream sites. A pupil referral unit (PRU) has also been established to extend the range of support for pupils with social emotional and behavioural difficulties. Consultation has taken place on the future role of special schools in order to widen inclusion. All these initiatives, and others, are finding a place in the pattern of provision but would benefit from greater coherence and integration of the SEN and inclusion strategies.

Value for money

68. SEN value for money is unsatisfactory. Criteria for identifying pupils with SEN are sound, and have been developed in a supportive partnership with schools. The LEA also has improved knowledge of the use of SEN resources in schools and is seeking to achieve good value for money at an individual case level. There are now processes for tight management of assessment and resource allocation which are successful in controlling the level of statements. However, weaknesses exist in strategic planning of resources and central budget management.

69. The council has been relatively slow to delegate resources to schools although there is commitment to further delegation next year. Joint funding is at an early stage. At a strategic level there is unsatisfactory budgetary control and limited forward planning of resource allocation. Plans to address the pressure areas reflected in the 11% overspend in 2003/04 were not considered fully until July 2004. The LEA now proposes to begin consultation on transferring to schools the responsibility for supporting SEN statements. Although discussion of these issues has begun at the Schools' forum the budgetary implications for the council and schools of the proposed changes remain unclear. Medium-term financial planning has yet to reconcile the SEN spending pressures with the commitment to the funding guarantee for schools. The consultation is underway with schools and the Schools Forum to increase the amount kept centrally to fund out of borough SEN placements. Furthermore, a 25% increase in the cost of the SLA for SEN transport, recommended by a 2003/04 review of transport, has yet to be addressed in budget plans. Weaknesses in SEN budgetary control have not yet been tackled satisfactorily

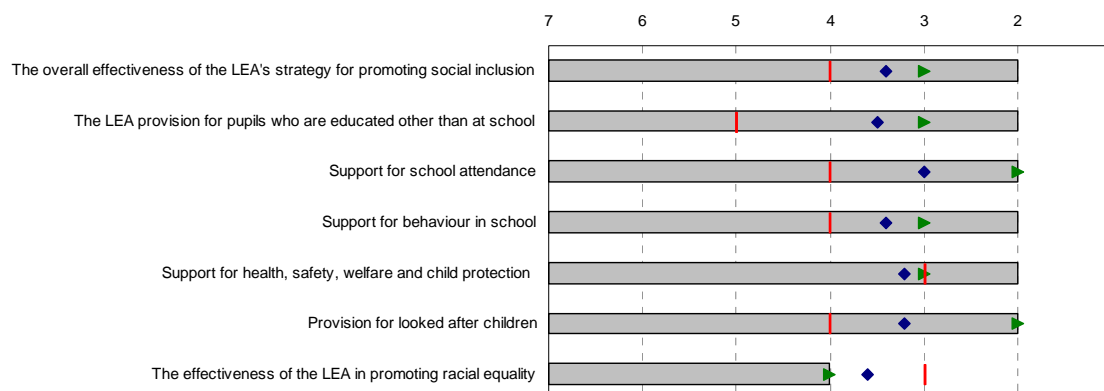
and, unless action is taken urgently, these are likely to have profound implications for the future shape of SEN expenditure.

Recommendations

- Produce a strategic resource plan for SEN and inclusion.
- Improve budgetary control to reduce unplanned expenditure.

Section 5: Support for social inclusion

Summary table of judgements



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

The strategy for social inclusion

70. The LEA's strategy to promote social inclusion was previously satisfactory. Progress since then has been good, all weaknesses have been addressed, and the council's performance in this area is now good. More effective support for vulnerable groups has led to improvements in almost all relevant performance indicators and at a faster rate than that found nationally. The leadership shown by officers is good and they have completed much of the ground work needed to implement the practical implications of the government's Children Bill. The council and other key partners have just begun to set out their strategic vision for integrated working and intended outcomes for children and young people in Merton. Officers and elected members are working to a realistic, but tight draft timetable for the development of its strategy over the next few months and the council's capacity to make further progress is good.

71. The commitment of elected members and senior officers to promoting social inclusion is clearly reflected in the priorities and targets within the community plan and corporate business plan as well as the directorate service plan. The draft neighbourhood renewal strategy reflects a sharpening of strategic vision and more clearly aligns strategies for promoting social inclusion to the regeneration of disadvantaged East Merton communities. Planning is supported by a detailed, accurate and incisive audit of needs and performance, particularly in relation to behaviour, attendance and the performance of minority ethnic groups. However, the council has been slow to integrate its developing strategy for pupils with SEN fully into its wider inclusion strategy.

72. Vulnerable children, families and schools benefit from a broad range of good quality support services. Gaps in service provision, for example the previous lack of

a pupil referral unit, have been filled. Services to support improved attendance and behaviour have been brought together and better use of data has enabled the LEA to focus support more accurately on the specific needs of children and schools. The council's education welfare service is used by the DfES and National Audit Office to provide training on the use of data to improve attendance. Close working between social inclusion staff and assigned inspectors has improved the effectiveness of monitoring and challenge to schools' performance in promoting social inclusion. The LEA is resourceful and has tapped into relevant project funding streams to secure additional funding from three European Social Funds to support a range of alternative education programmes. The LEA satisfactorily promotes race equality. Monitoring of racist incidents in school is effective and results are reported to elected members annually. The LEA has recognised that it needs to improve its effectiveness in this area by ensuring that training focuses more on the link between race equality and pupil attainment and by better supporting the work of minority ethnic teachers.

73. There is effective co-operation between the social services department and education departments. There are also productive partnerships between the council and a range of other agencies, for example with the police and youth services. A considerable amount of work has been undertaken to prepare for more integrated multi-agency working. Databases have been mapped and protocols and guidance for joint working have been agreed but there has been limited progress in pooling budgets and co-ordinating funding streams across agencies. The Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership is currently not appropriately constituted to oversee more integrated working and its large membership makes it unwieldy as a decision-making body. However, proposals to establish a multi-agency children's board during the autumn term are sound.

Provision for pupils educated other than at school

74. Support for the education of pupils other than at school was unsatisfactory. There has been substantial improvement and it is now good. The LEA has a clear strategy for further improvement which is being implemented effectively.

75. Officers and elected members responded to the criticisms of the previous inspection with determination and confidence and the development of a more balanced and coherent pattern of provision was well planned and implemented. The existing provision for pupils at Key Stages 3 and 4 has been complemented by a range of options using alternative providers. The establishment of a PRU has been a crucial improvement. The new PRU has been developed in partnership with schools and it provides an appropriately balanced curriculum and full time education for all pupils excluded or otherwise out of school. Monitoring of attainment and attendance is systematic and members and senior officers receive regular reports on performance and progress. The monitoring of the PRU and alternative provision has recently been incorporated into the JAR process.

76. The LEA has improved upon its already effective performance and current re-integration rates are twice the national average. Systems for monitoring children

out of school or at risk of exclusion are much improved. The school placement panel, involving headteachers, has been particularly effective in providing imaginative early response where children are at risk of exclusion. There are well established procedures to monitor the welfare and education of home educated children. Support for pupils out of school for medical reasons, including pregnancy, is well organised and sensitive to the specific needs of individual pupils.

Support for behaviour

77. Support for behaviour has improved and is good. Improvements since the last inspection have led to reductions in permanent exclusions and the length of fixed-term exclusions. Levels of exclusion from Merton primary and secondary schools are broadly in line with those found nationally. Leadership of the service by the social inclusion manager is very good and capacity for further improvement is good.

78. The current Behaviour Support Plan (BSP) is based on a detailed and incisive audit of a broad range of data. The BSP directory includes a comprehensive description of services and strategies available to assist school in tackling challenging behaviour. The amalgamation of the disparate services supporting behaviour into a single service, along with the delegation of funding for behaviour support to schools, has led to more strategically focused and coherent support for schools. However, schools continue to have limited access to clinical psychologists. Close working between assigned inspectors and staff involved in social inclusion, along with an increasing focus on behaviour within the JAR process, ensures monitoring and challenge of school practice is effective. The council has been successful in bidding for external funding for this work and Merton has been selected to pilot a government-funded primary behaviour strategy

Support for health, safety, welfare and child protection

79. The LEA's support for health, safety, welfare and child protection is good. Schools have clear and up to date policies and comprehensive procedure manuals on health and safety and emergency procedures. There is a regular cycle of health and safety inspections and concerns are followed up assiduously by council officers.

80. Council officers are actively and constructively involved in the work of the Area Child Protection committee (ACPC) and sub committees. Their work through this committee has been effective in improving the consistency and quality of child protection work within the council and in other key agencies. Forward planning for the change to local protection committees is well developed. In particular, the ACPC issues the All London Child Protection procedures to schools and this has provided the core for a comprehensive and effective programme of training for school staff and governors. Regular monitoring ensures that all schools have an appropriately trained designated teacher. Schools' staff are aware of referral procedures and thresholds and the appointment of a qualified social worker to manage the vulnerable children's team has led to improvements in the quality of referral.

Provision for looked after children

81. This aspect of the LEA's work has improved and is now good. There is a strong commitment to providing a good level of provision for looked after children. Elected members and senior officers receive regular reports on the progress of looked after children and are actively involved in meeting their responsibilities as corporate parent. There are many useful initiatives, including the annual celebration event for looked after children.

82. The looked after children team forms a valuable focal point for the work and helps to ensure a positive link with social services. Protocols are being implemented for the sharing of information with other agencies, though there is still further action needed to ensure this happens at all levels and in all agencies. All looked after children have a personal education plan and these are kept up to date.

83. The attainment of looked after children is given a high profile. Targets for attainment, attendance and behaviour are clear and well monitored. Support is given, where appropriate, to individual pupils and includes the flying tutor scheme and attendance at out of borough revision classes. As a result, attainment is higher than national standards. This is particularly apparent at GCSE level where the performance of looked after children attaining 5 A* - C grades is twice the national average. This has been maintained over a long period.

Appendix A

Record of Judgement Recording Statements

Name of LEA :	Merton Local Education Authority
LEA number:	315
Reporting Inspector:	Robert Barr
Date of Inspection:	September 2004

No	Required Inspection Judgement	Grade	Fieldwork*
Context of the LEA			
1	The socio-economic context of the LEA	4	NF
Overall judgements			
0.1	The progress made by the LEA overall	3	
0.2	Overall effectiveness of the LEA	3	
0.3	The LEA's capacity for further improvement and to address the recommendations of the inspection	2	
Section 1: Corporate strategy and LEA leadership			
1.1	The effectiveness of corporate planning for the education of children and young people	3	
1.2	The implementation of corporate planning for education	3	
1.3	The effectiveness of LEA decision-making	2	
1.4	The extent to which the LEA targets resources on priorities	4	
1.5	The extent to which the LEA has in place effective strategies to promote continuous improvement, including Best Value	4	
1.6	The leadership provided by elected members (including quality of advice)	4	

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

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

4.3	The effectiveness of the LEA in exercising its SEN functions to support school improvement	2	
4.4	The extent to which the LEA exercises its SEN functions in a way which provides value for money	5	
Section 5: Support for social inclusion			
5.1	The overall effectiveness of the LEA's strategy for promoting social inclusion	2	
5.2	The LEA provision for pupils who have no school place	2	
5.3	Support for school attendance	2	NF
5.4	Support for behaviour in schools	2	
5.5	Support for health, safety, welfare and child protection	2	
5.6	Provision for looked after children	2	
5.7	The effectiveness of the LEA in promoting racial equality	4	NF

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

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

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

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

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

Appendix B

Context of the inspection

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

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

- the progress the LEA has made since the time of its previous inspection in 2000;
- the overall effectiveness of the LEA and its capacity to improve further;
- the LEA's performance in major aspects of its work;
- recommendations on areas for improvement.

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

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

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

- | |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• support for 14-19 education;• the effectiveness of the LEA in relation to admissions to schools;• support for the national initiative to raise standards at Key Stage 3;• support for raising achievement of minority ethnic pupils, including Gypsy/Traveller children;• support to schools for gifted and talented pupils;• support for school governors; |
|--|

- the extent to which the LEA is successful in assuring the supply and quality of teachers;
- the planning and provision of financial services in supporting school management;
- the planning and provision of human resources services in supporting school management;
- support for school attendance;
- the effectiveness of the LEA in promoting racial equality.

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

Context of the LEA

Merton is a small borough in south west London with a population of approximately 188,000. While the level of deprivation is moderate compared to other outer London boroughs, it contains communities with extremes of wealth and deprivation. The level of affluence in Wimbledon is in the highest 10% in the country, while levels of deprivation in four wards in east Merton are in the top 25% nationally. The school age population is 21,015 and some 48.2% of the school population have an ethnic minority heritage, with Black African and Caribbean being the largest minority group.

The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals in 2003 in maintained primary (13.6%) and secondary (16.2%) is in line with that found nationally and for similar authorities. The percentage of primary age pupils with a statement of special educational needs in 2003, (2.8 %) was in line with the national figure and that for secondary school age pupils (4.9%) was higher than found nationally.

There has been a comprehensive restructuring of schools in Merton since the last inspection with a two tier system replacing the previous three-tier system. There are now 43 primary schools and, currently, 80% of three and four year olds are on the roll of primary schools. There are eight secondary schools, two with sixth forms, three special schools and a pupil referral unit. One secondary and two primary schools have Beacon status. In 2003, 27% of pupils attending Merton secondary schools were from outside the borough with 17% from inner London boroughs.

The performance of schools

Key Stage 1 results in 2003 were mostly in line with the national average and with those in similar LEAs with rates of improvement well above both. Key Stage 2

results were generally in line with national averages but below those of statistical neighbours. Results in mathematics were well below other averages, but unvalidated results for 2004 show a significant 6% improvement in mathematics.

In the secondary phase, results are below the national averages. However, the rates of improvement in English and mathematics at Key Stage 3 have been better than those nationally and statistical neighbours. At GCSE, improvement rates are in line with the trend nationally and in statistical neighbours. There was significant improvement in 2003, especially in respect of 5 A*-C. Boys perform less well than girls, but the gap is narrowing.

Progress of pupils between Key Stages 2 and 3 and Key Stages 3 and 4 is in line with that found nationally. The LEA did not achieve any of its key stage targets in 2003 except in Key Stage 2 level 5+ English. It was close to its targets in Key Stage 3 mathematics and GCSE APS. Floor targets look challenging with the possible exception of Key Stage 2 mathematics.

The attendance of primary school pupils has improved significantly and is now in line with the national average and with statistical neighbours. At secondary level, attendance is still below the national average, but has also improved significantly and is in line with statistical neighbours. Unauthorised absence is in line with national averages and in primary schools is below that in similar LEAs.

One secondary and two primary schools are in special measures. There were no schools requiring special measures at the time of the previous inspection. School Ofsted inspections show the proportion of good and very good primary and secondary schools to be in line with national averages and statistical neighbours.

Funding data for the LEA

SCHOOLS BUDGET	Merton	Statistical neighbours average	Outer London Average	ENGLAND AVERAGE
	£ per pupil	£ per pupil	£ per pupil	£ per pupil
Individual schools budget	3,087	3,064	3,152	2,900
Standards fund delegated	68	58	64	63
Excellence in Cities	0	19	36	35
Schools in financial difficulty	0	5	4	4
Education for under fives (non-ISB)	61	88	75	85
Strategic management	33	27	28	30
Special educational needs	191	177	165	126
Grants	1	12	19	26
Access	38	47	59	60
Capital expenditure from revenue	19	17	23	24
TOTAL SCHOOLS BUDGET	3,498	3,513	3,624	3,354
Schools formula spending share	3,449	3,370	3,485	3,197

Source: DfES Comparative Tables 2004-05

LEA BUDGET	Merton	Statistical neighbours average	Outer London Average	ENGLAND AVERAGE
	£ per pupil	£ per pupil	£ per pupil	£ per pupil
Strategic management	181	86	98	99
Specific Grants	27	14	13	14
Special educational needs	49	44	42	36
School improvement	21	35	40	38
Access	128	133	132	142
Capital expenditure from revenue	0	3	2	2
Youth and Community	28	68	66	75
TOTAL LEA BUDGET	434	382	393	406

Source: DfES Comparative Tables 2004-05

Notes:

All figures are net.

Funding for schools in financial difficulties excludes transitional funding.

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

Notes