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IN EDUCATION

**INSPECTION OF
LUTON
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. The inspection of Luton Local Education Authority was carried out by OFSTED in conjunction with the Audit Commission under Section 38 of the Education Act 1997. The inspection used the *Framework for the Inspection of Local Education Authorities*, which focuses on the effectiveness of local education authority (LEA) work to support school improvement. The inspection also took account of the Local Government Act 1999, insofar as it relates to work undertaken by the LEA on Best Value. The previous inspection took place in May 2000. At the request of the council, this inspection had a particular focus on the support provided for minority ethnic pupils, and on the council's success in promoting good race relations. The relevant sections of the report are therefore longer than is usually the case. In order to achieve a comprehensive view of the provision, inspectors from the Social Services Inspectorate joined the OFSTED and Audit Commission team. Their evidence is incorporated in this report.

2. The inspection was based partly on data, some of which was provided by the LEA, on school inspection information and audit reports, on documentation and discussions with elected members, staff in the lifelong learning directorate and in other council directorates. In addition, a questionnaire seeking views on aspects of the LEA's work was circulated to all its schools. The response rate was 58 per cent. Use was also made of the LEA's own self-evaluation.

3. Group discussions were held with representatives of schools, the LEA's partners, and community representatives. The inspection also involved studies of the effectiveness of particular aspects of the LEA's work through visits to one infant school, one junior school, three primary schools and two high schools. The visits tested the views of governors, headteachers, parents and pupils on the support for minority ethnic pupils. Four of these visits also considered the LEA's support for attendance, behaviour and schools causing concern. Telephone interviews were held with one infant school, one junior school, one primary school and one secondary school. Further telephone interviews were also held with a number of the LEA's partner agencies.

COMMENTARY

4. The LEA was last inspected in May 2000, some three years after it became a unitary authority. It was then described as having 'a level of socio-economic disadvantage above the national average'. This remains the case. The largest single change since the previous inspection has been the arrival of large and increasing numbers of refugees and asylum seekers.

5. The performance of Luton's schools remains generally below national averages. There are some signs that they may be catching up, but these are not consistent. The performance of pupils from the main minority ethnic groups follows national patterns, with some variations. The performance of Bangladeshi and Indian heritage pupils shows signs of improving; that of Black Caribbean pupils, here, as elsewhere, gives cause for concern.

6. The previous inspection revealed a mixed and unsatisfactory picture. Support for primary schools was judged to be 'a balance of strengths and weaknesses', while that for secondary schools was poor. The position is now less mixed. The LEA's strengths now outweigh weaknesses, and progress has been satisfactory overall, though slow in some areas.

7. The following functions are now particular strengths of the LEA:

- the Education Development Plan;
- allocation of resources to priorities;
- the effectiveness of meeting statutory obligations for pupils with special educational needs;
- personnel support to schools;
- the quality of corporate planning; and
- the support for minority ethnic pupils, including Travellers.

8. The following functions are not performed adequately:

- support for literacy;
- payroll services to schools;
- property services;
- support for behaviour; and
- partnerships with secondary schools.

9. Support for school improvement is now mostly satisfactory, though much of the progress has been recent in origin. Elsewhere, there has been improvement in almost all areas of social inclusion, although this was slow to start in some cases.

10. The council is increasingly sensitive to and well informed about the needs of the community it serves. That community is ethnically diverse, but has remained relatively cohesive in the face of increasing tensions, which have faced all similar communities over the past year. The council has contributed to that cohesion and is developing ways of improving that contribution. Its corporate capacity to bring about improvement has grown considerably over the last 12 months with the appointment of a new chief executive and the establishment of a modernised political structure. That change has contributed to the developments and necessary acceleration of the

rate of progress made in the lifelong learning directorate. Consequently, the LEA is now providing satisfactory support to schools, and has the capacity to improve in the future.

SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Context

11. Of the 16 wards within the authority, six are above the national average for multiple deprivation and two of these, Biscot and Dallow, rank in the bottom 10 per cent of wards nationally. Overall, this places Luton above the national average for multiple deprivation. Unemployment is in line with the national figure but is higher than other south east regions

12. Around 23 per cent of the current population are of minority ethnic heritage. Over the next 10 years, the LEA predicts that the total population will fall by approximately 4,000, from the current total of 183,000.

13. There are 83 schools catering for 32,327 pupils. They comprise 12 secondary (one 11-18, and the remainder 11-16), 15 primary, 23 junior, 23 infant, and six nursery schools. There are 245 pupils in the three special schools. There is one pupil referral unit. One secondary school, one junior school and one infant school have beacon status. The LEA makes available free nursery provision for 77 per cent of three year-olds, which is five per cent above its target for 2001/02, and three per cent above its target for 2002/03. At the end of the academic year 2001, around 75 per cent of Year 11 pupils stayed in full-time education. On a pro-rata basis, the highest staying-on rates were in the Indian, Bangladeshi, and Pakistani heritage groups. There were also significant numbers from other Black heritage groups, and others with no specific ethnic designation. White United Kingdom pupils have, in comparison, a relatively lower staying on rate.

14. The percentage of minority ethnic pupils has increased from 37.1 per cent in 1998 to 41.5 per cent in 2002. In primary and secondary schools, the main ethnic groups are white, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Black Caribbean and Indian. At primary level, only white and Indian ethnic groups have decreased proportionately during the period 1998 to 2002. All other ethnic groups have increased, the most significant of which is in the Pakistani heritage group. For the same period, there has been a decrease in the proportions of white, Indian and Bangladeshi pupils in secondary schools. The biggest increase has been in the Black African group. There is a spread of minority ethnic pupils across the primary schools, with the most significant proportions located in the two most deprived wards, Dallow and Biscot. There is generally a similar spread at secondary level. Although there are pupils from most ethnic groups in the three special schools, the largest proportion are of White United Kingdom heritage. Eleven Luton schools have 90 per cent or more pupils from designated minority ethnic groups, 23 schools have 40 per cent or more and six have less than 10 per cent. There has been a significant increase over the last two years in the number of asylum seekers and refugees. In the last year, this amounted to around 60 pupils. The LEA predicts that by 2010, over 50 per cent of pupils will be from minority ethnic groups.

15. The percentage of pupils with a statement of special educational need is well below the national average at primary level, and in line at secondary. The percentage of primary age children in special schools is below the national average; it is in line at secondary level.

16. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals, at 23.5 per cent, is in line with the national average for primary schools. At secondary level, the LEA figure of 27.2 per cent is above that found nationally.

Performance

17. Pupils' current performance in the baseline assessment is below that expected for children of similar age. At Key Stage 1, pupils are performing below the national average in reading and writing. By comparison with statistical neighbours¹, pupils perform in line in reading and below in writing. Pupils of Indian heritage, Black Caribbean and Black pupils from other ethnic groups perform in line with or above the national average in reading. In writing, Indian pupils perform above the national average, with Black African and Black pupils from other ethnic groups performing above the LEA average. Attainment in mathematics is well below the national average, and also below that found in similar LEAs. White pupils, other than those from the United Kingdom and Europe, Indian pupils and pupils from other Black ethnic groups are performing above the national average. With the exception of Kashmiri pupils, girls from all the different ethnic groups generally out-perform boys in reading and writing. Girls also out-perform boys in mathematics, although the differences within the minority non-white groups are slight.

18. At Key Stage 2, pupils' performance is in line with the national average in English, below in science, and well below in mathematics. Compared with statistical neighbours, pupils' performance is above in English and science, and in line in mathematics. Girls out-perform boys in English, but do less well than boys in mathematics. There is no significant difference in science.

19. At Key Stage 3, pupils perform below the national averages in all three core subjects, but are in line with the averages for statistical neighbours. Girls, out-perform boys in English, more so than at Key Stage 2. This applies particularly to girls and boys of Black Caribbean heritage. In mathematics, boys and girls generally perform within a few percentage points of each other, although there is an increasing difference between boys and girls of Black Caribbean heritage. A similar picture emerges for science.

20. At Key Stage 4, pupils perform above the national average for achieving one or more A*-G grades, in line for the average point score, but below for five or more A*-C grades in GCSE examinations. Against statistical neighbours, pupils' performance is well above for one or more A*-G grades, above for the average point score, and in line for five or more A*-C grades. Girls out-perform boys in all areas. There is variation across the different ethnic groups, but pupils of Indian and Bangladeshi heritage perform at least in line with the national average. While most other groups perform close to the LEA average, Black African, Black Caribbean and Black pupils from other ethnic groups perform significantly below the LEA average, with boys performing significantly less well than girls. The average point score of pupils at A level is broadly in line with that found nationally.

¹ The LEA's statistical neighbours are Slough, Blackburn with Darwen, Bradford, Rochdale, City of Derby, Oldham, Southampton, City of Nottingham, Birmingham and Middlesbrough.

21. There is some variation in the rates of improvement since the time of the previous inspection. At Key Stage 1, it is above the national trend in reading and mathematics, and in line for writing. At Key Stage 2, it is in line in all three subjects. At Key Stage 3, it is above the national trend in all three subjects. At Key Stage 4, it is well below in all areas of performance.

22. The most recent OFSTED inspection of schools shows that at primary level, the percentage of good or very good schools is below the national figure, and at secondary level, it is well below. The percentage of primary schools requiring some or much improvement is above the figure found nationally; at secondary level, it is well above.

23. Attendance is below the national figure for primary schools, but in line at secondary. The rate of unauthorised absences are above that found nationally for primary schools, but below for secondary. The exclusion rate is well below the national figure for primary schools, and below at secondary.

Funding

24. The 2001/02 education Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) for primary pupils in Luton, at £2,742 per pupil, was higher than for statistical neighbours (£2,678), unitary authorities (£2,534) and the English average (£2,653). Similarly, at £3,522 per pupil, it was higher for secondary pupils compared with statistical neighbours (£3,469), unitary authorities (£3,264) and the English average (£3,413). The council has spent at, or slightly above, the education SSA for the last 5 years.

	Education SSA (£m)	Expenditure (Budget)	Expenditure as % of SSA
1999/2000	87,622	87,923	100.34%
2000/2001	91,987	92,345	100.39%
2001/2002	96,471	96,477	100.01%

(Source: LEA)

25. Centrally retained funding in 2001/02, at £394 per pupil, was in line with the unitary average of £395 per pupil. The main areas of central spending were:

	Luton £ per pupil	Statistical neighbours £ per pupil	Unitary £ per pupil	England £ per pupil
Strategic management	122	101	98	102
Special education	110	159	147	159
School improvement	29	26	26	29
Access	133	106	123	128

(Source: CIPFA education budget statistics 2001/02)

Within the strategic management category, the authority spent £50 per pupil on statutory /regulatory duties, thus meeting the government target of spending up to £60. The remainder of the spending covers high early retirement costs transferred on local government reorganisation, and insurance and school libraries funding, which have now been delegated to schools.

26. Budget allocations to primary and secondary schools in 2001/02 were above all comparator groups

	Luton £ per pupil	Statistical Neighbours £ per pupil	Unitary £ per pupil	England £ per pupil
Primary individual schools budget (ISB)	2,066	2,025	1,952	1,956
Secondary ISB	2,746	2,736	2,638	2,626

The council took up all its Standards Fund allowance in 2001/02, and has also taken advantage of opportunities for accessing external funding. Luton has been successful in attracting funding for education from such sources as Neighbourhood Renewal, European funding, lottery and sports council grants. The LEA has secured formula capital allocations from the Department for Education and Skills as a result of satisfactory progress on its Asset Management Plan, and is in the process of developing a Private Finance Initiative scheme to help rationalise and improve school and community provision. The corporate budget for capital repair and maintenance allocated to education projects is £11.2 million in 2001/02, compared with expenditure of £4.6 million in 1999/2000.

Council structure

27. Since the previous inspection, Luton has modernised its council, which consists of 48 members; 36 of whom are Labour, 9 Liberal Democrat and 3 Conservative. The executive comprises a leader, deputy leader and eight portfolio holders, one of whom has responsibility for lifelong learning. The four scrutiny committees include one for lifelong learning and social inclusion. There is also a scrutiny board that oversees the scrutiny committee structure, and two scrutiny panels. One of the most recently formed panels has been focusing on community cohesion. There are also six area committees, which focus on cross-cutting, ward related matters for two to three wards each. The council also has a full range of regulatory committees, each of which has a representative sample of elected members.

The LEA strategy for school improvement

28. At the time of the previous inspection, the Education Development Plan had significant weaknesses. The six priorities and their associated activities lacked sufficient detail, and were not linked sufficiently well to robust audit data. The criteria for measuring success and the timescales used were too imprecise, with actions poorly sequenced. These weaknesses no longer exist. An improved audit, informed by much better performance data, underpinned the LEA's new Educational Development Plan, which was approved by the Secretary of State in March 2002. Overall, this is a good plan.

29. The new Education Development Plan has eight priorities, which are as follows:

- early years and primary;
- raising standards of attainment at Key Stage 3;
- raising standards of attainment at Key Stage 4;
- narrowing the achievement gap and tackling under-achievement;
- support for schools causing concern;
- recruitment and retention of staff in Luton;
- support for information and communication technology; and
- support in the management of behaviour.

30. The school improvement programme and action plans are very clear and well linked. The objectives for each priority are supported by concise and clearly written activities, success criteria and a focused audit. Both national and local priorities are well referenced and audited. There are good references to a range of permeating themes, including the provision for pupils with special educational needs.

31. The evaluation of the first Education Development Plan is very detailed in its analysis of strengths and weaknesses, but there is insufficient analysis of the cost-effectiveness of the plan. Senior officers recognise this weakness and are now working towards a more systematic process of measuring the cost-effectiveness of the new Education Development Plan, including the application of the Best Value principles, together with a more thorough analysis of the costs of priorities and activities.

32. The targets identified in the new plan are very challenging. This is particularly so for Key Stage 3, where significant increases are required in pupils' performance in the three core subjects for 2004. These range from 13 per cent in science to 18 per cent in English and 20 per cent in mathematics. However, the LEA is determined to improve, and has been consistent in its identification and use of targets, aligning those in the new Education Development Plan with other initiatives, such as Excellence in Luton (Excellence in Cities equivalent).

33. The LEA's monitoring and evaluation procedures are thorough and coherent. Senior officers are identified to take the lead across the eight priorities, with clear links to a range of stakeholders, for whom the new Education Development Plan is a key document.

The allocation of resources to priorities

34. This function was assessed in the previous report as satisfactory. It is now good. The council's spending is linked well to corporate priorities and statutory requirements. Support for raising attainment is reflected in the protection that school budgets have received from the need to find service savings, and in the shift of resources towards school improvement, through such developments as full-time provision for four year-olds, revision of the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant formula, and the allocation of On Track and Children's Fund resources. In the financial year 2001/02, the council allocated in excess of one million pounds above the education SSA.

35. The authority has ensured that increases in the education SSA are passed on fully to the education budget. The percentage of the local schools' budget delegated to schools in 2001/02 was, at 85.8 per cent, in line with all comparators. It has been increased in 2002/03 to 87.2 per cent in order to meet the new government target of 87 per cent. The LEA has a good record of financial management and all government targets have been met. Procedures for the delegation of financial responsibility to cost centre managers and budget holders are clear and have been implemented fully. Any budget difficulties are recognised promptly and remedial action is initiated. The service is rightly planning that the basis of corporate recharges to education is subject to agreed standards in terms of specification, activity and costs.

36. Consultation with schools has been developed further since the previous inspection. In addition to formal annual Local Management of Schools consultation, the education service consults each year on budget priorities with all headteachers and chairs of governors, as well as through the education partnership group. All schools are consulted on the use of any additional funding, which gives a better match of funding to need. There is also an on-going process of simplifying the school funding formula.

37. Bidding for grants is co-ordinated well at corporate level and education has received a large share of external funding. The LEA is currently, through the appointment of a dedicated member of staff and the production of a guidance booklet, extending its provision to support grant bidding by individual schools. This is a well-conceived initiative.

38. School deficits are acceptably small and controlled, but the balances held by some schools in March 2001 were too large. Despite firm guidance from the LEA and a requirement to identify the reasons for carrying large reserves, school balances have increased significantly in 2000/01. Seventy-one per cent of primary schools, 50 per cent of secondary and all special schools have surpluses in excess of 5 per cent of their delegated budget. The authority continues to develop its approach to encourage schools that have excessive surpluses year-on-year to improve their budget plans, but further work is needed, and schools need to respond more appropriately to the LEA advice.

Promoting continuous improvement, including Best Value

39. It was recommended in the previous inspection that a more rigorous and transparent system of performance management be introduced. A comprehensive framework has been introduced and the structures in place for Best Value and for promoting continuous improvement are satisfactory.

40. The council has learned from the shortcomings of its earlier reviews and now scopes reviews more carefully and focuses more clearly on outcomes. It has streamlined the Best Value process so that the emphasis is on investigating options, which can lead to service improvements. The toolkit for carrying out reviews has recently been updated and is easy to follow, precise and comprehensive.

41. A dedicated corporate performance team has been established and each directorate now has a performance manager. There is a useful performance management handbook and regular performance newsletters are circulated to all staff. The European Quality Foundation Excellence Model is used to evaluate services and provide standardised baseline information. All performance indicators are monitored through scrutiny committees, corporate directors and directorate management teams. These new performance management processes have led, in the lifelong learning directorate, to a more systematic and consistent approach to identifying areas for improvement; setting objectives; action plans; and, monitoring. The quality and detail of team plans are, however, variable and range from some that are comprehensive to a few that are weaker.

42. Although the council now has a strong commitment to Best Value from both members and senior officers, the pace of implementation of Best Value reviews has been slow. No education specific reviews have been inspected, but the LEA has completed reviews on the music service and student awards and is appropriately awaiting the results of this inspection before finalising its review of school improvement. The lifelong learning directorate is also currently part of the cross-cutting review of services to children from birth to 10 years of age, and the one for services to children from 11 to 18 years of age.

43. The Best Value Performance Plan for 2001/02 was given an unqualified opinion by the external auditor. The 2002/03 Best Value Performance Plan has been appropriately combined with the corporate strategy plan and is now the key development document for the council.

SECTION 2: SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Summary of effectiveness of the LEA's support for school improvement

44. The LEA's support for school improvement was judged in the report of May 2000 to be unsatisfactory overall. The LEA's support is now better, though, owing to difficulties in recruiting staff, progress since the last inspection was initially slow and has accelerated only following some relatively recent appointments, notably that of the head of school improvement. More improvement is needed, not least in the implementation of some of the national strategies. There are some promising developments, such as the improved partnership with secondary schools resulting from the Excellence in Luton initiative. Overall, however, the partnership with secondary schools remains weak and much more needs to be done by both schools and the LEA to improve matters.

Monitoring, challenge and intervention

45. At the time of the previous inspection, the LEA's definition of monitoring, challenge and intervention, and schools' understanding of it, was not sufficiently clear. Since then, improvements have been made and the position is now satisfactory, although weaknesses remain. There is still some lack of clarity about the LEA's approach. However, schools must accept some responsibility for developing further their understanding of these areas, and while some have, those that are in categories of concern are more aware of the detail than are the majority.

46. The LEA has devised with schools a differentiated model for monitoring, challenge and intervention, which does not hinder school autonomy. The criteria for intervention and the associated actions are appropriate. Most schools are challenged and the impact is evident in some that have under-performed in the past.

47. In September 2000, a school improvement file was published, which set out the LEA's role in monitoring, challenge and intervention and the criteria for identifying schools causing concern. The implementation of these procedures was reviewed with headteachers in May 2001, and a revised version of the school improvement file is planned for publication in May 2002, following another major review. At the time of the inspection, the proposed revisions had not yet been agreed with headteachers. This process of publication, consultation, clarification and amendment has been important but too slow and tentative in ensuring schools' understanding and involvement.

The focusing of LEA support on areas of greatest need

48. At the time of the previous inspection, the LEA satisfactorily focused its support on areas of greatest need. The provision has improved further and has few major weaknesses. A clear distinction is made between support that is an entitlement and that which is available for purchase. This rationale, which schools understand but do not always agree with, is generally followed and levels of delegation are sufficient to enable schools to purchase appropriate support. The LEA makes good use of performance data to target its support but staffing shortages, for example of literacy consultants, behaviour support teachers and school development advisers,

sometimes hinder implementation. The schools understand that levels of support are differentiated according to identified needs but their awareness of the criteria for differentiation is often limited.

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

49. The previous inspection found that the effectiveness of the LEA's work in monitoring schools and challenging them to improve was unsatisfactory. Since then, there have been improvements, some significant. The provision is now satisfactory, but areas remain where further progress is needed.

50. Since the time of the previous inspection, the number of annual visits to schools by attached school development advisers has been reduced from three to two. They take place in the autumn term and are both concerned with analysis of the school's performance and setting with targets. Sensibly, this pattern is being reviewed and a more productive use of time is being considered in which one visit, for target setting, will take place in the autumn term and the other will be scheduled for later in the school year to focus on broader issues of self-evaluation. The LEA has encouraged school self-evaluation, but it is not yet sufficiently embedded in the practice of all schools for it to make a full contribution to the LEA's monitoring process, and aid the setting of targets for a wider range of the school's work. For some schools, whose performance and management are good, the first visit will rightly be replaced by a desk-based examination of data. However, one annual visit will be retained for all schools so that the LEA can develop its knowledge and understanding and disseminate good practice.

51. In general, the schools value the monitoring and challenge provided by school development advisers although there is insufficient challenge to schools whose performance is good. The degree amount of variability in quality of school development advisers' monitoring and challenge is an issue that the LEA is tackling, appropriately, through a skills audit and training. In the secondary phase, the expertise available is being extended by the use of consultants and seconded headteachers. Visits to schools are recorded in detail and the quality of evaluation is improving, but report writing has been identified by the LEA as an area for development. Records of visit are sent to headteachers, but not to chairs of governing bodies, an omission that hinders their full participation in the school improvement process.

Recommendation

In order to improve the effectiveness of governors' contribution to monitoring and challenging schools:

- ensure that records of visits to schools are copied routinely to chairs of governors.

52. The performance data that the LEA provides to schools have improved considerably in content and presentation since the previous inspection. The data reflect local need, cover relevant groups and are provided at appropriate times to aid

analysis of performance and target setting. Training is available to help schools and advisers interpret and use the data effectively. Schools are agreed that the target-setting process is challenging but many feel, with justification, that the level of challenge is not sufficiently allied to individual circumstances. Currently, the LEA is not in possession of the data on the performance of individual pupils that schools hold and cannot, therefore, discuss targets with specific reference to the prior attainment of individuals, value-added and changes in cohorts. Data on individual pupils will be included in the LEA analysis next year as an aid to improving the target-setting process. A handful of schools have already met their 2003 targets, but too many are well short of their 2002 targets. There is currently a nine per cent gap in literacy and a four per cent gap in numeracy between the aggregated schools' targets and LEA's targets at Key Stage 2 for 2003. The LEA is working with a pilot group of schools in an attempt to narrow the gap. The electronic transfer of data between the LEA and schools is developing but is not yet completely in place. The data on pupils' performance transferred from primary schools are not used effectively by all secondary schools.

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

53. The previous inspection report judged this aspect of the LEA's support to be satisfactory and it continues to be so. There are currently two schools that have been identified as requiring special measures. A secondary school has been in the category for two years and a junior school for roughly 18 months. However, one school visited during the inspection was successfully brought out of special measures in a year. The LEA's intervention and support in schools with serious weaknesses and in special measures are good have included, where necessary, the replacement of headteachers and staff, the strengthening of governing bodies and the withdrawal of delegated budgets. The LEA expects that both schools currently categorised will come out of special measures by the end of 2002, although at the time of the inspection it was having difficulty in appointing suitable permanent headteachers to take the schools forward. The attached school development advisers have been influential and have provided effective links with a range of support from within the LEA and beyond. Senior managers monitor the schools' progress and members receive regular reports. Officers also attend local forum meetings to report on the progress made by special measures schools in their areas.

54. Two schools have been judged to have serious weaknesses, both of which the LEA was unable to prevent from falling into the category in January 2002. Since then, the LEA has provided effective intervention and support in both schools.

55. The LEA has its own system for categorising schools according to the levels of support needed, which was devised in consultation with schools. The approach is generally sound but schools' understanding of the categories, the intervention criteria and the differentiated support associated with them, is insufficiently precise, and the system is currently being reviewed and clarified. The cross-services school improvement group monitors the performance of schools and places them in one of five categories, ranging from 'high level support' to 'no planned support'. Currently, about 60 per cent of the schools are in the latter category and six per cent, including those in special measures and with serious weaknesses, are in the former category. Sensibly, when schools emerge from special measures or serious weaknesses, they

are placed under a 'watching brief' to aid their transition, but the procedure for agreeing exit strategies with schools is not sufficiently consistent.

Recommendation

In order to provide better support for under-performing schools:

- develop and agree tailored exit strategies with those schools emerging from special measures and serious weaknesses.

Support for literacy

56. At the time of the previous inspection, the LEA's support to schools for raising standards in literacy was unsatisfactory, chiefly because of weaknesses in strategic management and planning. Although improvements have been made and the recommendations of the previous report implemented, important weaknesses remain and the provision is still unsatisfactory.

57. The implementation of the literacy strategy has been adversely affected by the LEA's difficulty in appointing a strategy manager two years ago and then, having eventually done so, by ineffective leadership and the extended absences of consultants. The schools' ratings of the quality of support for literacy, although satisfactory, were significantly worse than in the previous pre-inspection survey. This places Luton in the bottom quartile of all LEAs surveyed.

58. The schools have found the quality of training to be inconsistent and the impact of in-school support has been variable. Although all schools have a named literacy consultant, allocations of support according to need have sometimes had to be reduced because of absences. A literacy centre has been established, but attendances at termly co-ordinators' meetings have, reportedly, been poor. Expert literacy teachers have been appointed, but have had little impact.

59. Since the appointment of the head of school improvement in October 2001, closer links have been established between the literacy strategy team and the school improvement service. This has led to better management of the team and the quality of advice and support has improved to a satisfactory level overall. Quality assurance is now more secure, action planning is better, and a steering group and headteachers' forum have been established. Links are being strengthened with numeracy, some other curricular subjects and projects, and the support for minority ethnic pupils. The monitoring of the quality of provision is improving, but there is too little direct observation by managers. Much remains to be done before schools are supported well.

Recommendation

In order to improve the quality of support for literacy:

- achieve greater consistency in the provision of good quality training and support for schools, and ensure that it is monitored rigorously.

60. Attainment is below the national averages but, in spite of the inadequacies in support, the standards of literacy in schools have improved at or above the national rate since the previous inspection. However, in 2001, the proportion of Key Stage 2 pupils attaining Level 4 or above fell from 72 per cent to 71 per cent. This was typical of the national picture, but it leaves Luton with a very challenging 2002 target of 79 per cent. The position is exacerbated by the fact that the aggregated schools' targets fall more than four per cent short of the LEA target. The LEA is rightly providing additional support to those schools whose attainment is 5-15 per cent short of their targets. It has also identified the need to provide more effective support to schools for tracking and assessing attainment and progress as pupils' test results are lower than teacher assessments at all key stages. Writing, especially of boys, has rightly been identified as an area for improvement, and a five-year plan has been introduced for raising standards in speaking and listening.

Support for numeracy

61. The previous inspection found that the LEA's support to schools for raising standards in numeracy was satisfactory. The weaknesses were largely within the management of the strategy. The LEA has implemented the recommendations of the previous report and there are now few major weaknesses in the provision. However, the support cannot be described as good while results in the primary phase remain well below national averages and below those in similar LEAs, and improvement over the last two years remains unsatisfactory. Attainment at Key Stage 2 improved considerably between 1997 and 2000, but there was a dip of two per cent, to 63 per cent, in the proportion of pupils gaining Level 4 or above in 2001. It is, therefore, highly unlikely that the 2002 target of 74 per cent will be achieved. There is a four per cent gap between the aggregated schools' targets and the LEA target for 2003, and the LEA is rightly providing intensive support for schools that fell 10 per cent short of their targets in 2001.

62. The schools' survey judged the support for numeracy to be in line for all LEAs surveyed, and significantly better than at the time of the previous inspection. The provision has benefited from close links with the school improvement service and the appointment of a new strategy manager. Care has been taken to ensure that the quality of staffing is high and the LEA is sensibly holding a current vacancy until an appointment of the right calibre can be made, although this increases the pressure on existing staff. The monitoring of the quality of support is becoming more rigorous and includes direct observation and peer appraisal. The numeracy team works hard to develop good relationships with schools; headteachers and numeracy co-ordinators are well supported and informed. The schools value the flexibility of the training and its focus on specific needs. They find that in-school support is tailored, realistic and balanced.

63. The numeracy action plan for 2002/3 is of good quality, with appropriate priorities. A useful resource centre is being developed jointly with literacy as part of the planned growth in co-operation between the two strategies. A numeracy steering group has been established and headteachers are involved, appropriately, in strategic planning meetings. Although there is funding for 15 leading mathematics teachers in the current year, this part of the support programme is not working well,

because the LEA has had difficulty in making appointments at the right level of competence. Schools are reluctant to release effective teachers, as they are in short supply. Nine of the 38 schools with Key Stage 2 pupils have no numeracy co-ordinator. Sensibly, the LEA has identified teachers' subject knowledge as a key area for development.

64. Mathematics features strongly in the Luton curriculum network, and the numeracy team has increasing involvement with early years and family learning projects. It also co-operates on national training with the teams providing support for minority ethnic groups and for pupils with English as an additional language.

Support for information and communication technology (ICT)

65. In the previous inspection, the LEA's support for raising standards in ICT was judged to be unsatisfactory in virtually all respects. The LEA has implemented the recommendations of the previous report and the support now has strengths and few areas of major weakness. In the pre-inspection survey, schools rated the quality of support as satisfactory. This indicates a significant improvement since the time of the previous inspection.

66. Within the past two years, the LEA has appointed an ICT strategy manager and, following consultation with schools, has published a clear strategic plan that is focused on raising attainment. The plan provides a suitable framework for continued support for both curricular and administrative ICT. Sensibly, ICT is also a local priority within the new Education Development Plan, with appropriate objectives to develop the use of ICT across the curriculum and to use it as a tool for school improvement. Schools have been provided with useful guidance on producing ICT policies, development plans and schemes of work. There are also strong networks of primary and secondary ICT co-ordinators.

67. The LEA is developing its knowledge of schools' use of ICT, but its chief weakness is that it has no accurate assessment of pupils' attainment and progress. It is rightly seeking to remedy this by offering training to help schools identify the levels that pupils achieve in their work. The LEA also has to make up lost ground in relation to New Opportunities Fund training for teachers. The proportions of primary and secondary teachers who have completed the training have been very low in comparison to similar LEAs and the nation as a whole. However, all schools have now signed up for the training and the LEA predicts, with some justification, that the proportion of completions will rise dramatically by the end of 2002. The LEA also provides courses to meet the needs of individual schools and, with other providers, offers the Learning Schools Training Programme; evaluations have been positive.

68. Pupil/computer ratios have met National Grid for Learning baseline targets for secondary schools and are on course to meet those for primary schools. A Luton lifelong learning grid has been launched and is used increasingly. All schools have secure Internet connections and e-mail, for which an appropriate protocol has been established. The provision of broadband links is well in advance of the Government targets, and the ICT strategy manager is advising on hardware and software for use in the planned city learning centre. In response to complaints from some primary schools that their technical support from an external provider was slow and

unreliable, the LEA has arranged an alternative so that schools are able to make a choice on the basis of best value.

Support for raising standards at Key Stage 3

69. This area was not previously inspected. The LEA has begun to implement the national strategy for Key Stage 3, and although the quality of its support is satisfactory, there are areas of weakness. Current Key Stage 3 performance data show that the LEA is below the national averages in English, mathematics and science. Progress, therefore, needs to be made quickly, if the LEA is to achieve the very challenging targets that have been set and reported upon in the new Educational Development Plan, Excellence in Luton and 'Vision 2010'. The performance data and targets for Key Stage 3 are discussed in detail in section one of this report. 'Vision 2010' is reported upon in section five.

70. The detailed analyses provided by the LEA, including pupils from minority ethnic groups and those deemed vulnerable, are good. These are helping secondary schools to pinpoint, more specifically, those pupils requiring additional support.

71. The schools' survey indicated that support for both literacy and numeracy was satisfactory, and in line with that found in other LEAs surveyed. Initial training was satisfactory, but there have been issues relating to the appointment of strategy staff, which have impacted negatively upon support, line management, and evaluation and monitoring of the strategy.

72. The LEA was unable to appoint a Key Stage 3 literacy consultant last summer term, so alternative arrangements were made whereby the LEA literacy manager took responsibility for delivery of the Key Stage 3 training. The strategy consultant for science has only just started in post, and the LEA is going to re-advertise for an ICT consultant. More crucially, the LEA failed to appoint a Key Stage 3 strategy manager and chose, instead, to promote one of its curriculum advisers to manage the strategy temporarily. This has worked satisfactorily, but the line management of consultants, and the evaluation and monitoring strategy are undeveloped. A permanent strategy manager is, however, to be appointed by the end of the summer term, together with a combined strategy consultant for literacy and numeracy. Line management roles are in the process of being redefined but have not yet been finalised. The teaching and learning strand is underway, with the identification of modern foreign languages and design and technology as two focused subjects. However, there is still much work to do to, particularly in co-ordinating this work within the strategy as a whole.

Recommendation

In order to improve the support for the Key Stage 3 strategy:

- define and clarify evaluation and monitoring procedures for individual strands and the strategy as a whole.

Support for minority ethnic groups including Travellers

73. Support for minority ethnic pupils, including Travellers, is good.

74. The previous inspection found this element of the LEA's work to be satisfactory overall, with strengths in strategic planning, improvement in data collection and analysis, and sensible targeting in relation to under-achieving minority ethnic groups. The previous inspection occurred during a period of change, both to the central advisory team, and to the allocation of funding to schools in the light of the new Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMAG) requirements. The LEA was recommended to provide guidance to schools on appropriate ways of deploying the EMAG resources and to improve its monitoring to ensure that schools were using the funding appropriately. Additional advice and training were recommended for schools on setting targets for pupils from minority ethnic groups. The Traveller service was highly praised in the first inspection.

75. The ethnic minority achievement strategy team has responded positively to recommendations in the first inspection report. It has monitored how schools use their EMAG allocations, following the provision of good guidance to schools on multi-ethnic achievement.

76. The ethnic minority achievement strategy team is well led, and the work of the team has improved in many ways. Documentation is detailed and of good quality. Data analysed by ethnicity have been well used to prioritise initiatives and allocate resources. The head of service has a good strategic view of what is needed and has put in place good procedures for ensuring the delivery of the ethnic minority achievement strategy action plan. She has introduced strategies for monitoring what is happening at school level. A formula for devolving 90 per cent of the EMAG funding has been agreed with schools, although this is shortly to be reviewed further to ensure even greater transparency and efficiency in matching resources to need. The LEA continues to show its commitment to this area of work by providing additional funding.

77. Advice and training to schools on setting attainment targets by ethnicity are provided through the central LEA target setting process. The incorporation of this initiative within the school improvement division is a major strength in the LEA, showing real promise for helping to raise the attainment of minority ethnic pupils. Attainment trends for some minority ethnic groups are beginning to improve, particularly for Kashmiri, Pakistani and Bangladeshi pupils (the latter at Key Stage 4). The performance of Black Caribbean pupils remains, however, a cause for concern. After a promising start at primary level, their attainment at secondary level is well below LEA averages, which follows the national trend.

78. The ethnic minority achievement strategy team has visited all schools in Luton to monitor their use of the additional grant funding and to identify strengths and areas for development. An overview of this information, much of which is detailed and of good quality, has yet to be shared with headteachers, although schools have received their individual reports. The central team intends to focus future

development work on a small number of schools whose work is of good quality, and disseminate the information across the LEA.

79. The ethnic minority achievement strategy team has forged good working links with a wide range of council agencies, as well as those LEA advisers and consultants who are leading on initiatives such as the national literacy and numeracy strategies, personal, social and health education, and citizenship. It has also attempted to enhance the status of EMAG co-ordinators in schools, and greater numbers of LEA schools are now addressing minority ethnic attainment issues more thoroughly. It is also attempting to focus more on those ethnic groups most at risk of under-performing.

80. A number of projects of varying quality are carried out under the auspices of the ethnic minority achievement strategy team. Some, such as the development of induction strategies for refugees and asylum seekers, mentoring for Black Caribbean pupils at Key Stage 3, work with early years pupils and their families, and intensive support for pupils with English as an additional language in mainstream are effective. Other projects, such as the Black African history project, have been less successful. The team has yet to develop a system for evaluating its performance and impact on school outcomes.

81. The Traveller education support service goes from strength to strength. It has continued to collect good quality data on the attendance and attainment of Travellers' children and has met 80 per cent of the individual education plan targets set in conjunction with school staff. There have been significant increases in pupils attending pre-school provision and at Key Stage 3. Its work with highly mobile pupils, praised in the previous inspection, has continued and is seen as an example of good practice nationally. It has recently begun to work closely with visiting circus and fairground families. Local fairground families have distance-learning packs.

82. The Traveller education support service has also developed a bank of resources for curriculum support and a programme of events promoting Traveller cultures in all schools. This ensures that they work more on policy with school management, as well as with individual pupils. Some of the curriculum work has been highly successful and greatly appreciated by schools. Examples of this are: St Patrick's day celebrations; story telling assemblies in schools; a play trailer and the development of an exhibition on Traveller culture which features in Luton Central Library. Letters of appreciation from staff and pupils testify to the success of these ventures.

83. A particular strength of the service is its close working relationships with a wide range of agencies such as the education welfare service, social services, family literacy schemes, as well as LEA groups such as the ethnic minority achievement strategy team and the music service.

84. As with the ethnic minority achievement strategy team, the LEA has shown its commitment to this area of work by topping up monies received from central government. The LEA funds a Traveller education liaison officer, whose work in identifying new arrivals in the area. This enables the process of funding school places for Traveller children to start immediately. The aim is to place any newly

arrived child within two days. This service enables the Traveller team to focus on the educational elements of their work. In recognition of its success, the Traveller education support service has just received additional funding, which will enable a post for a pre-school worker to be created. Additional money is also being used effectively to create a toy library.

Support for gifted and talented pupils

85. The LEA's provision for gifted and talented pupils was established in September 2001, as part of the Excellence in Luton initiative. The provision is well managed and a good start has been made. At this early stage of development, the support is satisfactory. However, the emphasis is almost entirely on secondary schools. The officer in charge gives only five per cent of her time to the primary phase and the LEA makes inadequate provision for gifted and talented pupils in primary schools.

Recommendation

In order to improve the support for gifted and talented pupils:

- extend the provision in the primary phase.

86. An initial analysis and evaluation, although not a detailed audit, of existing provision in the secondary schools has been made and an appropriate range of activities is being established. All the secondary schools have appointed co-ordinators, have written action plans and are engaged, at varying pace, in developing policies. Work has begun to identify underachievers at an early stage and learning mentors have been appointed for pupils at risk of disengagement.

87. There is an insufficiently clear distinction in documents between support for the gifted and for the talented. The work in schools is directed mainly at gifted pupils but there are several relevant initiatives that are being developed for talented pupils with the local college of further education and university.

88. Six summer schools were held in 2001. However, these were open only to pupils of the schools where they were held, and Year 6 pupils from their contributory primary schools, so some pupils in the LEA did not have the opportunity to attend. However, evaluations were positive, attendance rates high and the activities largely appropriate.

89. The emphasis of Excellence in Luton is, rightly, on the improvement of teaching and learning and this has been reinforced in the training related to provision for gifted and talented pupils. The training has started with the core subjects, stressing the importance of action plans and schemes of work, and will be extended to the foundation subjects. Sensibly, work has also commenced on helping teachers to develop pupils' thinking skills. As yet, opportunities for the dissemination of good practice have been limited.

90. The officer in charge of the support for gifted and talented pupils is co-operating appropriately with the ethnic minority achievement strategy team to raise the aspirations and attainment of young people from minority ethnic groups.

Support for school management

91. In the previous inspection, the LEA's support for school leadership and management was found to be unsatisfactory. The provision is now satisfactory, although weaknesses remain. The schools are broadly satisfied with the support they receive, but their ratings in the schools' survey were below the average found in other LEAs surveyed. Although secondary ratings were less favourable than primary, they were significantly better than two years previously.

92. In the latest OFSTED inspections of primary schools, the quality of their management and efficiency was broadly in line with the averages for similar LEAs and the nation as a whole. However, the standard in secondary schools was well below that found elsewhere, with about half requiring some or much improvement. Relationships between the LEA and the secondary schools have begun to improve recently, largely through co-operative working in the Excellence in Luton initiative, but are still weak. Sensibly, the LEA is improving its capability to provide rigorous support for management in secondary schools by the use of consultants and seconded headteachers.

93. The strategy for supporting school leadership and management is now clearly linked to the new Education Development Plan, and is beginning to benefit from increased co-operation between the LEA's school improvement, access and resources and performance teams. The school improvement group and the senior education leadership team identify the needs of individual schools. Rightly, the LEA is about to place a renewed emphasis on school autonomy and on self-evaluation as a tool for professional development and school improvement. As a licensed provider of the OFSTED self-evaluation course, it has trained staff from all the secondary schools and three-quarters of the primaries. However, the impact on schools' practice has been inconsistent.

94. The LEA has encouraged participation in the National Professional Qualification for Headship and the Leadership Programme for Serving Headteachers. The take-up has been slow, but is now improving, and links are being established with the National Leadership College to provide additional support for aspiring headteachers and deputies. In response to criticism in the previous inspection report, a sound programme of induction and mentoring has been established for all new headteachers. Acting headteachers and new deputies are also mentored.

95. Support for deputy headteachers and for middle managers is improving and is now satisfactory. For example, primary deputies meet termly with the adviser with designated responsibility for management, and they also attend an annual residential conference. The secondary deputies have been helped to form an influential group that runs the increasingly successful Luton curriculum network for subject co-ordinators. The LEA has co-operated with other providers to provide a higher degree course in subject leadership for middle managers.

96. All headteachers have been offered training in Best Value principles and benchmarking, and the LEA has worked with a representative group of headteachers on Audit Commission self-evaluation procedures. All schools have

been provided with critical questions to ask when evaluating alternative service provision. They are also supplied with a list of quality-assured providers of curriculum support who are able to supplement the LEA's provision. The dissemination of good practice is not fully developed but has some strong features, including the use of effective practitioners on training courses and the establishment of best practice clusters of schools.

Support for governors

97. In the previous inspection, the LEA's support for governors was found to be highly valued and to provide good value for money. Since then, the staffing has been affected by a reduction in numbers and by absence. Although the current provision is satisfactory, the schools do not value the service so highly as they did.

98. At the time of the previous inspection, the LEA had difficulty in recruiting governors, particularly those appointed by the LEA. These problems have continued, especially in relation to parent, co-opted and LEA governors. However, following various initiatives, the number of vacancies has been reduced. For example, the number of vacancies for LEA governors has fallen by a quarter since September 2001, and the proportion is now broadly in line with the average for similar LEAs. Despite this, figures provided by the LEA indicate that over 20 per cent of governor vacancies have remained unfilled since 2000 or earlier, and the LEA is not in a strong position to reach its target of having no unfilled governor vacancies by 2004.

99. Currently, at least 14 per cent of governors are from minority ethnic groups; 29 per cent did not declare their ethnicity in the LEA's audit. Positive efforts are being made to increase the proportion of governors from minority ethnic groups by a quarter, by 2004.

100. The LEA emphasises the importance of an effective link between school governance and management and it has sensibly incorporated governor support within the school improvement service. Governors are supported in the appointment of headteachers and deputies and, in times of crisis, the LEA's response to governing bodies' requests is speedy and appropriate. When necessary, the governing bodies of schools causing concern are strengthened appropriately. Governors are encouraged to take increasing responsibility for the improvement of their schools and representatives of the corporate director for lifelong learning are no longer routinely present at governing body meetings, except in schools causing concern. Training is provided in Best Value principles and in the analysis and use of performance data. However, the LEA's annual analysis of a school's performance, which is used for target-setting discussions, is not copied to chairs of governing bodies.

Recommendation

In order to ensure that chairs of governing bodies are kept well informed by the LEA:

- provide them with a copy of the LEA's annual analysis of their school's performance.

101. A varied and relevant programme of training is provided both centrally and tailored to the needs of individual schools. Although evaluations are largely positive, governors report that the quality of delivery is too variable. There is effective induction for new governors, but not for newly appointed chairs, although weaker ones are mentored. Governors are clear about the training that is provided free, as part of the LEA's statutory role, and that which is available for purchase. The LEA assists with the recruitment of clerks and provides appropriate advice and training for them. Governors are informed and consulted effectively on local and national developments; for example, through termly briefings for chairs and vice-chairs and seminars for individual constituencies of governors. Consultation on the new Education Development Plan was effective.

Support for early years

102. This aspect was not previously inspected. It is, however, now included in the LEA's new Educational Development Plan, as part of its priority one, which covers raising attainment in the early years and primary education in general. Overall, the provision is satisfactory, with some strengths.

103. The LEA currently provides some form of nursery provision for 77 per cent of three year-olds. There are six nursery schools, 13 infant schools, and six primary schools providing full or part-time places for 1603 pupils. Pupils' attainment on entry to statutory education is below that found nationally, with pupils from minority ethnic groups, particularly those of Bangladeshi and Pakistani heritage, attaining below the LEA average.

104. The Early Years Development and Childcare Plan is of a satisfactory standard. It has helped to target work in the areas where the need is greatest, and has brought about a much better provision for three year-olds. The partnership between the LEA and other providers, including the voluntary and private sectors, is working well. There is an appropriate emphasis on involving more parents in the partnership, including access to training.

105. The "flying start" initiative has started well. The family workers and co-ordinator have been active in working with parents and schools with the greatest needs. Sure Start has had some initial problems, particularly in terms of staffing. However, the partnership has now become more actively involved and things are beginning to move in the right direction. The involvement of the portfolio holder for lifelong learning, head of school improvement and early years officer has been essential to the recent improvements.

The effectiveness of services to support school management

106. The marketing information on services to support school management is satisfactory overall, with plans to remedy current weaknesses. The annual 'selling services' booklet includes details of some traded services from the lifelong learning directorate, and other directorates within the council. These are presented in a consistent, attractive and easily accessible format. However, the booklet is not a comprehensive document, as it does not contain details of all the traded services available to schools or details of relevant non-traded services.

107. Contract terms and conditions, although brief, are appropriately contained in service level agreements, and schools are able to terminate contracts within six months. ICT effectively brokers other providers and assists schools in accessing them. However, this is not the case across all services to schools. Many do not provide details on external providers and some services have inappropriately included paragraphs in the 'selling services' booklet, which do not encourage schools to seek provision elsewhere. Therefore, the arrangements for supporting schools in their procurement of services are not yet satisfactory.

Recommendations

In order to improve the effectiveness of services to support school management:

- provide schools with comprehensive information on relevant council services to include details of non-traded provision;
- provide schools with information about alternative providers; and
- provide schools with advice on producing suitable service specifications.

108. The **financial support service** is highly satisfactory. It continues to offer the quality advice and guidance on the management of school budgets identified in the previous inspection report. Staff monitor effectively both the education service and schools' budgets. Inspection visits confirmed that schools justifiably recognise the quality of this service. Financial benchmarking data are made available to schools, and the LEA has encouraged schools to use web-based benchmarking information to widen the comparator groups available. Internal audit continues to work well as an integral part of the financial service.

109. **Personnel support** remains good and highly regarded by schools. Particular strengths are in the exercise of its case-work function and the management and organisational support it offers schools. Its manual of personnel practice and policies is easy to follow, comprehensive and up to date. Contracts of employment are generally processed within the statutory period.

110. The **payroll service** was found unsatisfactory at the time of the previous inspection and it has remained so. Fifty-six per cent of primary schools responding to the schools' survey rated the service as poor or very poor. Specifically, there are too many errors, which take too long to correct, especially when an employee has

more than one contract with the authority. The service has been unacceptably slow in improving this provision.

Recommendation

In order to improve management services to schools:

- establish speedy mechanisms to ensure the payroll service to schools provides a timely and error free service.

111. **Property services** to schools are unsatisfactory. Problems have included weak customer focus and contract management, failure to deliver projects on time and to budget, and technical expertise of variable quality. Building emergencies in schools, however, are dealt with effectively and promptly. In responding to concerns from schools about property related matters, the council now devolves to schools all funds for capital projects up to £250,000 and since April 2001, the majority of schools have chosen to deliver projects under the self help scheme. The corporate head of capital and asset management, who has been in post for less than a year, has restructured the service, is developing its customer focus, and is exploring partnership working. The capacity for improvement in this area is now promising.

112. Support for the use of **ICT for administration** is satisfactory overall. The previous inspection report referred to the lack of a strategic approach, which has now been rectified. The LEA has a clear and comprehensive three-year ICT strategy, which appropriately combines curriculum and administrative developments. An information management system strategy is also in place. All schools have administrative hardware that meets the Department for Education and Skills requirements. Electronic communication with schools is successfully in place, and the authority has established a formal communication protocol. All schools are linked to the council's virtual network, providing filtered Internet and e-mail services. Twelve primary schools and all secondary schools are connected via broadband. The service level agreement with corporate ICT is appropriately reviewed each year. The authority successfully brokers technical and software support, with schools rating it satisfactory or better in the schools' survey.

113. The authority has rated both **grounds maintenance** and **cleaning services** as satisfactory. The opinion was reflected in the schools' survey, although secondary schools were less positive than primary schools. No detailed inspection work was carried out in this area.

114. The **catering service** is satisfactory. Statutory responsibilities are met and the take-up of free school meals is above the national average. There are tight monitoring and evaluation systems in place for contract management. The majority of schools rated the service satisfactory or better.

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

115. This area was not previously inspected. The current provision is at least satisfactory. The main shortage subjects are mathematics, English and technology, although there are some vacancies at senior management level. The percentage of unfilled vacancies currently stands at around 3 per cent, compared with 1 per cent nationally and 1.2 per cent in LEAs with similar characteristics.

116. The LEA has a number of projects to aid the recruitment of new teachers to the authority. Officers have recently attended a small number of job fairs, recruitment fairs, and appointed a pool of newly qualified primary teachers. Support has also been given to local School-Centred Initial Teacher Training Schemes and Graduate Teacher Programmes, together with some taster courses for classroom assistants, particularly those from minority ethnic groups. Recent links have been established with the local housing department to review the provision of flats for new teachers, and the council recently approved a £50 rent subsidy, for six months, for new teachers to the authority. Overall, these represent a good range of activities to encourage new teachers into the authority.

117. Initiatives that support retention are being developed, but further work is needed. The appointment of three recruitment and retention strategy managers since 1998 has not helped in maintaining continuity of personnel to develop a broader and more detailed retention strategy. The LEA has, however, included recruitment and retention as a local priority in its new Education Development Plan. The school improvement programme covers an appropriate range of activities, and makes use of a satisfactory range of audit data.

The effectiveness of services to support school improvement

118. The previous inspection found that the support provided by services for school improvement was unsatisfactory. Satisfactory progress has been made, much of it recent in origin. The effectiveness of services and value for money of the support are now satisfactory, although there are still weaknesses.

119. The major responsibility for supporting schools to raise the levels of their achievement rests with the school improvement service. A new head of service was appointed from September 2001, and the strategy for school improvement is now much clearer and well focused on national and local priorities and requirements. The new EDP and its action plans provide a realistic agenda for school improvement and, in the interests of community cohesion and regeneration, are well linked to other plans. The school improvement service plan contributes to a coherent, corporate approach to improvement. Evaluation of the service is not well developed but has been aided by the new EDP audit. Appropriate consideration is being given to the creation of a more focused and flexible service that works effectively in partnership with other services and providers. The head of service has also audited the skills and competences of staff in order to aid deployment, which is satisfactory within the staffing constraints. Staff have heavy loads, which sensibly are monitored and increasingly prioritised.

120. The school improvement service has a very sound performance management system. Induction is task-focused and is monitored by the personnel department. Personal targets for regular review and annual appraisal are closely linked to the new Education Development Plan. Sound provision is made for professional development of individuals and the team. Staff are appropriately qualified but there are weaknesses and gaps in experience and expertise; for example, in secondary management and in some curricular areas. To compensate, secondments, consultancies and existing expertise in schools are increasingly used. However, it is appropriate that a review has been commissioned of the brokering of such external support so that it can be used more effectively to aid school improvement. With the exception of the education welfare service, performance management has been successfully implemented in other service areas within the lifelong learning directorate.

SECTION 3: SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

Summary of effectiveness of LEA's Special Educational Needs provision

121. At the time of the previous inspection, the LEA's provision for special educational needs met statutory obligations well, and was satisfactory in all other aspects. It remains much the same. However, the LEA has not devised a satisfactory strategy for assessing the effectiveness of the provision it makes in raising pupils' attainment.

The LEA's strategy for Special Educational Needs (SEN)

122. In the previous inspection report, the LEA's strategy was found to be satisfactory. It is still satisfactory, with few areas of major weakness.

123. The LEA has a clear strategy for the management of special educational needs that relates well to the national agenda and the Code of Practice. The development of an increasingly inclusive approach had begun to impact at the time of the previous inspection, evidenced by a reduction in the number of statements, the number of special school placements and the number of placements in independent special schools. All of these trends have continued and the authority's plans are now set out clearly in 'Luton's plan to promote inclusive education', which was adopted as policy in January 2002 following consultation with headteachers, parents, the health authority and social services. The plan outlines satisfactorily the steps the LEA will take to promote further its inclusion agenda, and identifies a range of appropriate tasks to achieve these steps. However, it does not include the setting of targets for pupils with lower attainment, timescales are not clearly identified and, as yet, there are no robust plans, in partnership with schools, to monitor the progress made towards targets.

Recommendations

In order to improve further the LEA's strategic plan for special educational needs:

- clarify, through the use of milestones for each activity, the timescales for implementation; and
- develop a programme, in collaboration with schools, to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy in raising attainment.

124. Financial planning supports appropriately the special educational needs strategy with a year-on-year increase in the resources delegated to schools to support pupils. Savings resulting from the reduction in the number of independent special school placements have supported the special schools' budget during their recent reorganisation into two primary and one secondary special school for children with complex and severe learning difficulties. A thorough analysis of need has resulted in the strengthening of provision for early years, the establishment of the

social and communication difficulties team, and the delegation of the resourced provisions for pupils with hearing and visual impairments.

Statutory obligations

125. At the time of the previous inspection, the LEA was taking all reasonable steps to meet its statutory responsibilities for pupils with special educational needs. This is still the case. Over 97 per cent of statutory assessments are completed within prescribed timescales, officers are appropriately involved in annual reviews, data collection and analyses take full account of ethnicity, and statements, which are of good quality, are appropriately revised. The parent partnership service is valued highly by parents, and a team of independent parental supporters is in place.

School improvement

126. This was judged to be satisfactory in the previous inspection, as before. The provision has retained many of its strengths, but some weaknesses still remain. The allocation of resources to support pupils with special educational needs was found to be transparent and clearly understood by schools in the previous inspection. While this remains the position, schools no longer feel that the criteria for allocation of resources to support high incidence special educational needs, adequately reflect need or support the increasing inclusion agenda.

127. The allocation of resources through statements of special education needs is monitored rigorously, and appropriately involves school-based staff. The LEA has decided to maintain existing statements, while amending the criteria for new statements to reflect schools' access to additional resources for high incidence special educational needs without the need for a statement. This means there are inconsistencies in the treatment of individual pupils arising from an excessively protracted phasing in of a new basis for resource allocation.

Recommendations

In order to improve the allocation of special educational needs resources the LEA should:

- consult with all schools on the criteria for allocation, to more adequately reflect their needs; and
- take steps to minimise any inconsistencies in the provision for pupils with special educational needs.

128. To support special educational needs across the authority, schools are divided into five clusters, each with an allocation of support staff. Allocation of support to individual schools is negotiated through termly multi-agency school consultation meetings. This system has many positive features, not least that it provides for satisfactory joint working between schools and LEA specialist officers. This has had a positive impact on relationships with the LEA, which is particularly welcomed by special educational needs co-ordinators. However, the system is not sufficiently flexible to respond to staff shortages in the support services. The allocation of support is monitored only within individual services, and the school consultation

meetings focus on monitoring individual pupils' needs. This deflects the support service away from identifying and responding to whole school issues, where developments are necessary to support inclusion.

129. The school consultation meetings put forward referrals for statutory assessment. However, the incidence of referrals found to be inappropriate and not resulting in a statement is far higher than in similar LEAs or nationally.

Recommendation

In order to improve the process for statutory assessment referrals:

- reduce the number of inappropriate referrals by developing clearer, more transparent criteria.

Value for money

130. At the time of the previous inspection, the provision for special educational needs provided satisfactory value for money. The LEA still achieves at least satisfactory value for money in its special educational needs provision, but there are some weaknesses.

131. The previous inspection recommended that the LEA should improve the monitoring of provision for pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools, to ensure that funding was used effectively. This has not yet been achieved, despite a projected completion date of March 2001. There are sound procedures for monitoring and controlling the central budget, although these are insufficiently linked to an evaluation of the progress made by pupils with special educational needs. Likewise, despite sound procedures for monitoring the work of the special educational needs support services, there is an inadequate focus on the impact of services in raising attainment by children with special educational needs. Detailed reviews, such as the recent internal review of the psychology service, do not have a clear link with pupil's progress and raising their levels of attainment.

SECTION 4: PROMOTING SOCIAL INCLUSION

Summary of effectiveness in promoting social inclusion

132. Many of the strengths identified in the previous inspection have been maintained. Most of the weaknesses previously identified have been or are being tackled, and progress, although slow to start in some areas, has been made in almost all aspects. Support for behaviour, which was previously judged to be unsatisfactory, remains unsatisfactory despite some improvements. This has been partly caused by problems in the recruitment and retention of LEA staff.

The strategy to promote social inclusion

133. This was judged to be satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection. It is now satisfactory with some good features, but there are some weaker areas. In the period 2000/01, corporate policy development in the social inclusion area slowed down, but recent actions indicate that the pace is now picking up.

134. There is a strong corporate commitment to social inclusion. Developing social inclusion is given a high priority in the council's 'vision 2010' statement and in the corporate plan. The council has very recently adopted an overarching strategy for social inclusion. The strategy has five key strands which are: maximising income; promoting equality; increasing access to services; tackling health inequalities; and promoting sustainability. At the same time, the council approved the appointment of the corporate director for lifelong learning as the council's lead on social inclusion. There is to be an audit of all council services for their contribution to social inclusion, followed by an annual report on progress. Additionally, the council agreed that all existing and new policies should be scrutinised to ensure they contribute to combating poverty.

135. The council has been successful in seeking external funding and targeting this to areas of need. For example, New Deal for Communities and Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy funds have been targeted at particular communities, which are deprived and at risk of social exclusion. Local and national initiatives such as flying start, On Track and the Children's Fund, which are all designed to provide early assistance so that children do not become socially excluded, have also been specifically targeted. The Health Action Zone is also helping to tackle inequalities. The council has been careful to target deprived white areas as well as areas with a high proportion of ethnic minorities. A new group called corporate action schools has been formed to provide a corporate cross-council response to schools that need additional help, and to identify co-ordinated strategies to assist them. An exercise to map which initiatives are in which schools has been undertaken as part of this, to assist with future targeting and to help prevent particular schools from being overloaded. Care is being taken to co-ordinate the management of "flying start", On Track and the Children's Fund. This is being assisted by good co-operation between the lifelong learning, and the housing and social services directorates. All three of these initiatives have placed family workers in schools. Early indications are encouraging, but it is too soon to see the impact.

136. The LEA's monitoring of attainment of different groups is mainly good. There are good data on the attainment of boys and girls, and of different minority ethnic groups, and these have been used to target particular initiatives. For example, Black Caribbean boys' writing is being targeted, as is speaking and listening for young Asian girls. Progress of children in public care is also tracked and particular initiatives have been targeted at this group. The LEA has set sufficiently challenging targets for these children, who currently attain better standards at achieving one or more A*-G grades at GCSE than found nationally. Tracking of the attainment of school-age mothers has just commenced, and shows that this group does not do well.

137. Strategic liaison with social services and health over social inclusion matters is good. Liaison with the police is satisfactory. There are many examples of co-operation, for example via the Luton drug action team, the youth offending team, and the Area Child Protection Committee.

The supply of school places

138. The current provision is satisfactory, although the service has had to respond to recent changes in pupil movements since the previous inspection. Schools close to the town centre are seeing a significant increase in the number of children admitted through occasional transfers and the authority has changed over the past year from being a net exporter of pupils to being a net importer. These changes have resulted in a shortfall of school places in some year groups. This has led to some children in year 9 not being allocated a place in school and the LEA having to direct schools to take them. Some of these children have to attend a specially established tuition centre while the process of direction is completed.

Recommendation

In order to secure the speedy provision of school places for pupils:

- establish a strategy and develop working practices, in partnership with schools, to increase secondary school places and minimise the use of alternative provision.

139. For the primary school sector as a whole, the number of surplus places is expected to increase from 12 per cent in January 2001, to 15.7 per cent in 2006. The LEA is taking appropriate action to address primary surpluses through amalgamation of infant and junior schools and through the extension of community use of schools. In contrast, the small percentage of surplus places in secondary schools is predicted to become an overall shortfall in 2006. The position on places at individual secondary schools varies considerably across the borough. Already, several high schools are over-capacity and the projected increases will bring additional problems. The authority has submitted a basic needs bid to the Department for Education and Skills, and is sensibly working with schools to develop more robust pupil forecasting models. However, the pupil shifts are a symptom of broad pupil population changes over an area wider than the borough boundaries.

140. Luton has a clear School Organisation Plan, which requires minor improvements. For example, there is currently no coverage of provision for pupils out of school and no map is included. The School Organisation Committee functions well and the infant class size plan has been introduced effectively.

Admissions

141. This function was assessed as satisfactory in the previous report, but there was criticism of the arrangements for the admission of four and five year-olds. This has been resolved. The service remains satisfactory overall.

142. The LEA is faced with some challenging circumstances regarding admissions and the supply of school places. There is migration of children out of the borough from schools on the fringes, and migration of children into the inner parts of the town. As a consequence, there has been a drop in the number of parents who receive a place in their first secondary preference school, from 91 per cent in 2001 to 85 per cent in 2002. The authority has also already consulted on the need to review catchment areas and is urgently improving the quality of the data on pupil movements. The LEA is also currently preparing a submission to the adjudicator to challenge one instance of exclusivity and unfairness.

143. Although the number of successful appeals has decreased from previous years, it is still relatively high and the service is exploring the reasons for this. Both primary and secondary schools rate the handling of admissions appeals in the bottom 25 per cent of LEAs surveyed. The authority rightly recognises that more individual contact with schools may help to relieve some misunderstandings and tensions. It has increased staffing and reorganised work patterns to facilitate this.

144. Information for parents is well presented, with most complex issues clearly explained. Helpfully, cassette versions in community languages are available on request. However, it is unsatisfactory that details of the admission criteria for voluntary aided and foundation schools are not included in the 'going to school at 5' booklet. It is also unhelpful to parents that timetables for admission vary between these schools and community schools

Recommendations

In order to improve admission arrangements:

- the LEA should, more accurately, match places to demographic changes and pupil movements;
- the LEA should ensure that details of voluntary aided and foundation schools' admission criteria are included in their information booklets for parents; and
- the Admissions Forum should consider how to bring closer together, the admissions timetables for community, voluntary aided and foundation schools.

Asset management

145. Asset management planning is satisfactory overall. There have been problems with the collection of data on building condition, which was assessed as unreliable

by the Department for Education and Skills. However, information has been shared with schools, as recommended in the previous inspection report, and a programme of school re-surveys is being completed. Building data will be kept up to date by a rolling five-year cycle of surveys. The information is held on a commercially developed database, from which schools receive reports.

146. Consultation with schools takes place through a variety of representative groups including the asset management forum, but schools' understanding of the process, and their own responsibilities within it, remains limited. The service recognises this and is planning to deliver governor training linked to managing asset investment and project management, as well as setting up a support network to advise schools on how to maximise sources of funding. An asset management adviser has been assigned from the corporate service to the lifelong learning directorate to assist, through termly visits to schools, with the co-ordination and monitoring of capital expenditure.

147. In spite of an increase in spending on school property, but Luton still has a substantial backlog of repairs. The council accepts the need to consider partnership projects with schools and others to address these significant investment issues. There are good relations between the education service and the corporate service in developing strategic solutions, such as the framework for a major Private Finance Initiative bid involving a number of schools and community provision.

Provision of education for pupils who have no school place

148. The provision for pupils without a school place was unsatisfactory at the time of the previous inspection. Overall provision lacked cohesion and a recommendation covered the need for a clear policy on admissions to the pupil referral unit, and for clarification of the role of the home tuition service. The LEA has responded to the recommendation and made a number of other improvements. Provision is now satisfactory overall.

149. The LEA's strategy, set out in the behaviour support plan, is clearly based on the principle of inclusion and has a specific objective to improve the availability of educational provision for pupils out of school. Improvements have been made in the provision for the relatively small numbers of pupils who are permanently excluded. The Key Stage 4 pupil referral unit has been brought out of special measures and now plans jointly with a local further education college so pupils can access vocational courses. It has been expanded recently to provide for Key Stage 3 pupils on another site. An inclusive learning provision for Key Stages 1 and 2, based jointly in an infant and junior school, provides for pupils who are excluded and those at risk of exclusion, who have part of their time tables in their own schools. Referral procedures have recently been clarified. Attainment of pupils in the Key Stage 4 pupil referral unit improved in 2000/01, with all except one gaining at least one accreditation.

150. The LEA is committed to providing full-time education for pupils excluded for more than 15 days, and has allocated considerable extra funds to help achieve this. The hours of educational provision have been increased and 11 of the 28 pupils in this position already have 25 hours or more per week. Those with less than 25

hours include some very difficult cases where pupils have been offered full or nearly full programmes, and are gradually being persuaded to access more education. Staff vacancies in the behaviour and tuition team resulted in staff being withdrawn for support in mainstream schools to teach in the off-site centres. Despite this step, the four primary-age pupils, who were all receiving 25 hours last term, now receive less than 15 hours. This is unsatisfactory, although a temporary measure. The LEA's plans for providing 25 hours for all children excluded for more than 15 days by September 2002 are dependent on the recruitment of sufficient staff. A further shortcoming is that, at present, the LEA does not monitor the quality of the courses provided by the further education college.

151. There is an appropriate emphasis on re-integration and a pupil placement panel is used to facilitate this. However, although the LEA considers there is an agreement between secondary headteachers concerning re-integration, this view is not shared by all the headteachers. Secondary headteachers are concerned that support for re-integration is not always forthcoming.

152. There are examples of productive liaison with other services. For example, the Key Stage 1 and 2 provision has dedicated support from family social workers. A pupil co-ordination panel identifies pupils known to all agencies, although social services is not frequently represented, and identifies a key worker.

153. Provision for schoolgirls who are pregnant and teenage mothers has some shortcomings. Such pupils are encouraged to remain within their school, wherever possible. Staff from the tuition team support in the post-natal period and support the pupil's return to school. The LEA's records show that of six school-age mothers last year, two did not return to school and none of those in Year 11 entered for GCSE. Work is planned to engage with individual schools on the inclusion of teenage parents, to consult with the sixth form and FE colleges, and to improve child care provision. However, this has not yet taken place.

154. There are suitable arrangements for monitoring provision for pupils whose parents choose to educate them at home. Parents are also provided with guidance and advice. However, pupils in this category, along with teenage parents and the Year 9 pupils without a school place, are not the responsibility of the head of service responsible for excluded and sick pupils. Thus, no one has an overview of the provision for all pupils without a school place.

Recommendations

In order to improve provision for pupils without a school place:

- place responsibility for the services for all such pupils under the same head of service; and
- make suitable provision for teenage mothers so that more access education.

Attendance

155. In the previous inspection, support for attendance was judged to be good for primary schools, but less effective for secondary schools. There was a specific

recommendation concerning giving clear guidance on removal of children from registers and the tracking of such children. Since then, improvements have been made in support for secondary schools and the recommendation has been implemented. There was, however, a slight dip in support for primary schools, which is now being tackled. Support overall is satisfactory, with good features.

156. Primary attendance for 2000/01 was just below the national average and in line with that of similar authorities. Secondary attendance was in line with national averages and above that of similar authorities. Unauthorised absence levels were below the national average for secondary schools, but just above for primary. Attendance has fluctuated slightly over the last three years, with a slight fall in secondary unauthorised absence but also a slight fall in overall attendance in both phases from 1999 to 2000/01. In the pre-inspection survey, schools rated support for attendance as satisfactory. Whereas secondary schools' views were more favourable compared with the previous inspection, primary schools' views were less so.

157. Appropriately, attendance does not feature strongly in the behaviour support plan, as it is not felt to be a major problem. The LEA's strategy to improve attendance comprises a number of initiatives designed to promote good attendance. The most significant recent initiative was that in 2000/01, when the education welfare service took part in a Department for Education and Skills project to devolve educational welfare service resources to secondary schools. This worked well as far as secondary schools were concerned. However, the education welfare service team supporting primary schools was under pressure, there was a slight dip in attendance and primary schools were less satisfied. The LEA reviewed the scheme and has made changes aimed at improving support for the primary schools. This includes the provision of an additional education welfare officer post, jointly funded with the secondary schools. Individual school data are used to target support according to needs. There has, however, been a weakness in analysis of overall data to spot trends.

158. The main focus of the work of the education welfare service has been on unauthorised absence, although patterns of authorised absence are also picked up as some schools report a problem of some families taking extended holidays in term time. A stricter policy on this has recently been introduced, and written guidance for parents has been provided in community languages. Education welfare officers, who are well regarded by schools, carry out good quality case-work. Forty per cent of education welfare officers and the three community welfare officers are of minority ethnic heritage. The community welfare officers are targeted well at supporting attendance and welfare needs of specific minority ethnic groups. However, the education welfare service currently has staffing problems, with cases of long-term sickness and vacancies. It is, actively recruiting and looking to develop the skills of other staff within the authority.

159. Some satisfactory multi-agency working is being developed. Truancy watch with the police has restarted and is felt by both agencies to be effective. There is joint working with the youth offending team, to which the LEA contributes an education welfare officer. The service also has guidelines for joint working with the Traveller education support service. Individual education welfare officers have been

asked to set up regular meetings with learning mentors in secondary schools, and with Connexions staff.

160. A number of appropriate attendance projects are in operation in different schools. However, the education welfare service is only just moving from being mainly case-work based to focusing more on giving advice to schools on their strategy for promoting attendance. A draft document concerning this has been drawn up and is about to go out to schools for consultation.

Behaviour support

161. Support for behaviour has improved, but remains unsatisfactory overall. In the previous inspection, support for pupils with behavioural difficulties was judged to be often ineffective. A specific recommendation was made concerning planning for behaviour support and providing training for schools.

162. Levels of permanent exclusions from schools remain low. The LEA continues to have a clear policy on the inclusion of pupils with behaviour difficulties in mainstream schools. There is no special school for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties, and few of these pupils are placed out of borough. At present, 66 pupils with statements of special educational need for emotional and behavioural difficulties are being educated in mainstream schools, as well as pupils with lower levels of behavioural difficulties. This places pressure on schools, who consider provision of adequate behaviour support to be a key issue, and makes the LEA's role more challenging than in many other LEAs.

163. Support for the management of behaviour is appropriately a priority within the new Education Development Plan, which includes implementing the revised behaviour support plan as an objective. Together, these set out an adequate strategy, although much is yet to be implemented. The behaviour support plan appropriately incorporates findings taken from an independent review of the behaviour support service.

164. The behaviour strategy is co-ordinated with the overall special educational needs strategy. A new head of behaviour support was appointed in January 2001. In accordance with the strategy, a number of improvements have been made. For example, members of the behaviour support service have been trained and documentation improved. Schools have also recently been provided with a handbook outlining support available within the LEA. Further consultation has taken place with headteachers on a range of proposals to develop behaviour support. A greater range of support for pupils is now available, although more college provision for older, disaffected pupils has been identified as being necessary. Some pilot projects, for example early intervention support to whole class groups in Key Stages 1 and 2, which was offered to five schools, have taken place. Eight primary schools have also received intensive training from an external provider.

165. Schools are also starting to benefit from local and national initiatives such as "flying start", On Track and Excellence in Luton. It is hoped that, in due course, these initiatives will result in far fewer pupils presenting severe behaviour problems. A formula was agreed for the devolution to schools of pupil retention grant money.

Secondary schools have added this to money from Excellence in Luton, and all now have learning support units (or equivalent), as well as learning mentors. These are expected to improve provision for pupils with behaviour problems. The behaviour support service attends meetings of the learning support unit co-ordinators, and there is some sharing of ideas at these meetings. However, the service has not fully considered the implications of the development of the units for overall strategy.

166. Significant shortcomings remain. The quality of behaviour support staff is still too variable and not consistently effective. The approach adopted by some of the support staff when working in schools, which is to focus on working with individual pupils and arranging programmes for them, is not adding sufficient value. There is not sufficient emphasis on giving schools guidance on behaviour management and on dissemination of good practice. Guidance on behaviour management was issued to schools in 2000, but has not been updated and is not well known to schools. From Easter, the behaviour support service, which itself has severe staff shortages, had to withdraw staff from supporting schools in order to teach in the off-site centres for excluded pupils. Schools rate support for improving behaviour as poor.

Recommendations

In order to improve support for behaviour:

- provide schools with up to date written guidance on behaviour management;
- refocus the behaviour support service so there is more emphasis on support for behaviour management and dissemination of good practice and less support for individual pupils; and
- take further steps to improve consistency of quality of behaviour support.

Health, safety, welfare and child protection

167. Support is currently satisfactory. The LEA has complied with the recommendation of the previous report by issuing the health and safety guidance previously found to be lacking. Overall, the LEA takes reasonable steps to meet statutory requirements in health and safety. 'A guide to health and safety management' sets out the corporate statement of safety policy. As new policies are produced, they are circulated to schools for inclusion in their schools' handbooks. The health and safety adviser runs well-attended training on statutory obligations and new policies. Appropriate checks are made to see that all schools adopt the LEA's health and safety policy.

168. The LEA's support for child protection is satisfactory. All schools have designated teachers. Multi-agency training, which is well regarded by schools, is provided. The LEA ensures all new designated teachers are trained and has recently instigated an annual audit to check training needs. Currently, 88.2 per cent of designated teachers have been trained. Social services monitor referrals by ethnicity. The most recent figures show slight over-representation by some minority ethnic groups, but in a quarter of cases the child's ethnicity was unknown. The education welfare service provides schools with a manual of child protection procedures, and with advice. Both are satisfactory.

169. The head of service represents the lifelong learning directorate on the main Area Child Protection Committee. There are good strategic links between lifelong learning and social services, and operational liaison between officers is good. Liaison between schools and social workers remains variable, but is better for those schools that need to refer to social services more often. In order to make improvements, social services has recently started to respond to every contact from a school in writing. A social worker has also started to attend each school's termly consultation meeting, in order to provide more regular contact. Part of the problem is thought to be that schools are not always aware of the requirements on social services for dealing with child protection problems.

170. Initiatives such as On Track and "flying start" are being used to provide better services for children and families. The council expects that in future, fewer children will need to be placed on the child protection register. Schools rated support for child protection as satisfactory in the schools' survey.

Children in public care

171. Support for children in public care is satisfactory. In the previous inspection, the LEA was judged to be working well with the social services directorate to raise the attainment of these pupils. Broadly, this remains the case. Numbers of children in public care are rising; currently there are 357, of whom 260 are of school age.

172. The council has supported improvements in provision for children in public care for some years. This is reflected in above average levels of attainment for this group of children, with 54 per cent of Year 11 pupils attaining one or more A*-G grades in 2000/01. This attainment, as is the case nationally, remains well below the LEA average for all children.

173. The council has taken corporate responsibility to promote the attainment of children in public care. As part of this, a children's panel, comprising elected members and children in public care, was established in 2000. A strength of the panel is that it gives children a voice, which has resulted in some specific improvements such as the provision of housing for care leavers. The executive regularly considers reports on pupils' attainment. However, the children's panel is not in possession of all the relevant data and information concerning the children, and so can only partially fulfil its original function of advising the executive on all matters relating to the council's duties as a corporate parent. A draft policy on children in public care is about to go out for consultation.

174. All schools have designated teachers for children in public care. Training has been offered, and has been taken up by 79 per cent of the designated teachers. All schools with children in public care have been provided with advice. Individual pupils have received short-term support from learning support assistants, for example following being placed in a school or on transfer to another school. Two advisory teachers have also been employed by social services and seconded to education to work with schools, social workers and carers. They offer advice and support on the inclusion and attainment of children in public care.

175. Thirty per cent of pupils in public care are from minority ethnic groups. Some initiatives such as “flying start”, which it is hoped in the long-term will reduce numbers falling into this category, are targeted at areas with significant minority ethnic groups. There are growing numbers of Black Caribbean foster carers, and the social services department has prioritised recruitment of Asian foster parents, who were in short supply. It is nearly up to target. The social services directorate is also aware of a shortage of Asian social workers, and is looking at ways to increase numbers.

176. Social services systematically pass data on to the lifelong learning directorate concerning children in public care. A joint steering group meets half-termly to plan strategies to implement the Department for Education and Skills guidance. A weakness, however, is that so far only 20 per cent of pupils have personal education plans. The steering group has now put forward proposals that the advisory teachers should concentrate on supporting schools in drawing up and implementing personal education plans during the summer term, in order to meet the council’s revised target of 90 per cent completion by autumn 2002. This remains, however, a highly ambitious target.

Recommendation

In order to improve provision for children in public care:

- ensure members of the children’s panel have access to all relevant data and information, so that they can give focused advice to the executive on provision for these children.

Measures to combat racism

177. Measures to combat racism are now satisfactory, with strengths outweighing weaknesses. In the previous inspection, this aspect was judged to be poor. Developments had been slow, with difficulties in recruiting an officer for equal opportunities. The LEA did not monitor racist incidents.

178. Since then, considerable progress has been made corporately, and awareness raised in schools. The chief executive gives a strong lead on equal opportunities, including race relations. ‘Vision 2010’ sets out a clear commitment to equality, and the corporate policy and strategy on equal opportunities has been publicised. The council has appointed a corporate head of equalities at a suitably senior level. A members’ steering group meets quarterly. Each directorate has been asked to assess function and policy in relation to race equality, with the lifelong learning directorate completing its assessment in March. A corporate equalities steering group has also been established to set policy and monitor progress. Targets are being developed and integrated into the equalities action plan. The head of equalities intends to publish the results of monitoring.

179. The council has produced a detailed response to the Report of the Inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence, and has adopted all its recommendations. Training has commenced and will take place for all in the council over a two-year period.

180. The council has set equality targets and is on track to meet those for employment of minority ethnic staff across the council as a whole. Currently, 11.2 per cent of teachers, and a higher proportion of learning support assistants, are from minority ethnic groups. However, as is the case nationally, relatively few of the teachers are in senior positions. The LEA is aware of this, and has now set specific targets and is also looking at the leadership and management-training programme.

181. Procedures for reporting and monitoring racist incidents in schools were introduced in November 2000, and training provided. Figures for racist incidents are relatively low, but it is clear to the LEA that there is considerable under-reporting. After the first year, only nine schools, including one high school, reported incidents. Some schools record all such incidents as bullying and do not distinguish between racist and other incidents. Statistical reports have been sent to the Luton multi-agency racial incident group, which is still in discussion with the council about how much information should be shared.

182. The council has provided guidance and support to schools on implementation of the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000. This includes training for headteachers and governors, provision of a model policy and revised guidelines and forms for recording racist incidents. Racist incident report centres, where any member of the public can report a racist incident, have been set up in public buildings. Trained staff are available to record reported incidents. This is a relatively new initiative, and has not yet been evaluated.

183. The council has set up a race equality forum, which includes representatives of 45 different community groups. This group is independently chaired, and can put items onto the agenda of the executive. Consultation also takes place via ward forums. However, Luton lacks a totally independent forum for race issues, such as a local race equality council. There is a perception by some groups that they are not well consulted with or listened to by the council. Setting up a local commission for race equality would go some way to alleviating these concerns.

184. There is a general view in Luton that community relations are at least reasonable, if not good. However, some dissenting voices pointed to a rise in tension since September 11th, including that between different minority ethnic groups.

Recommendations

In order to improve measures for combating racism:

- review the need for the establishment of a local race equality council; and
- work in partnership with headteachers to enable a better level of recording and reporting of racist incidents.

SECTION 5: CORPORATE ISSUES

Introduction to corporate issues

185. The previous inspection identified a number of significant weaknesses in corporate planning, and weaknesses in the leadership given by elected members and senior officers. There was no corporate plan into which education planning was integrated. This constrained the authority's budget setting process and the development of Best Value. The council was organised on a traditional model, with an education committee that did not facilitate cross-departmental strategic planning or member cross-committee working; rather, it made for a separatist approach to the work of elected members.

186. Since the previous inspection there has been considerable improvement, which is due, primarily, to two key factors. The council has adopted the modernising agenda, set out in the Local Government Act 2000. This change has been pivotal in bringing about a political structure, which now facilitates effective cross-cutting and cross-party working in an open and public way. The appointment, also, of a new chief executive has brought about an increased emphasis on corporate planning, which now underpins a more strategic overview of the council's work. This has brought education into the corporate body of the council, on an equal footing with other directorates. These developments have made a significant contribution to the improvements made in the work of the lifelong learning directorate.

Corporate planning

187. At the time of the previous inspection, education's link with the corporate body was severely affected by the absence of a corporate plan. The resulting recommendation to produce a plan has been fully addressed and, as a result, corporate planning is now good. The recently published Best Value Performance Plan and corporate strategy 2002/03, is a well-written document. A major contributor has been the paper entitled 'vision 2010', which has been shared with all major stakeholders as a basis for agreeing the council's vision over the next eight years. This, in turn, has provided the foundation of an agreed list of council priorities in the short-, medium- and long-term. The new Education Development Plan, which has been well researched and costed, links well to the corporate plan. However, the current education service plan and strategic plan both pre-date these documents and are not, therefore, cross-referenced to them. Whilst they still have relevance to the work of the lifelong learning directorate, they are nearing their end in terms of usefulness and relevance to the overall corporate strategy within the authority. Performance appraisal and team plans, which emanate from the departmental service plan, are inconsistent in their reference to corporate objectives.

188. The number of consultative groups has been reduced since the previous inspection, and there is now a developing communication and consultation structure, which is cementing the links between senior managers, elected members, schools and the public. There are regular meetings for the corporate directors and chief executive, and also meetings for senior managers within the lifelong learning. Both provide appropriate opportunities for discussion and decision-making relating to corporate and education-focused issues. The education partnership group provides

a satisfactory opportunity for school representatives, officers and elected members to discuss education related matters. There are three education advisory groups, which work to the education partnership group. The corporate action schools group is providing appropriate cross-council strategies in response to schools that need additional help. The proposal to widen the membership to include headteacher representatives is not yet in place, but is a move in the right direction. Other measures that are not yet in place, but where planning is well advanced include a scrutiny clinic, comprising the chief executive, leader of the council, portfolio holder, chair of the scrutiny committee, and a chair from one of the six area boards. The intention of this group is to scrutinise service plans to ensure they link with the Best Value Performance Plan and the corporate strategy plan.

Decision making

189. Since the previous inspection, a new council structure has been implemented fully. The portfolio holder for lifelong learning has regular meetings with the corporate director for lifelong learning and other senior managers within the directorate. This provides for a good exchange of information, which is satisfactorily informing the decision making process. The scrutiny committee for lifelong learning and social inclusion has open meetings at different venues around the authority in order to get greater public involvement. This strategy has been very successful, with a recent meeting drawing up to 200 members of the public. This, too, helps to inform the decision making process in terms of information feedback to elected members of the council.

190. Financial decision-making is timely and effective. The LEA has a clear perception of educational needs and has budgeted effectively to support its priorities. The budget setting process runs to an appropriate timetable with opportunities for stakeholder input.

Leadership of officers and elected members

191. The previous inspection judged the quality of leadership given by elected members and officers to be unsatisfactory. It is now satisfactory, with some areas of strength.

192. The authority has acted appropriately to the previous criticism by restructuring across the council and within the lifelong learning directorate. At council level, four directorates have been formed, each led by a corporate director. This has significantly streamlined the organisational structure. Within lifelong learning, there are now five heads of service, each of whom is responsible to the corporate director. Some key appointments, at chief executive and service manager level, have accompanied this. Early indications are that these appointments are improving the quality of senior management.

193. The leadership at corporate level is good. There is genuine collective decision-making, based on the major plans within the authority. Links with the leader, portfolio holder and chair of the scrutiny committee also play an important part in this process. Members of the ruling political party, together with opposition spokespersons, are working satisfactorily to lead the authority towards the objectives

it has set itself in its corporate plan. The distinction between executive and scrutiny functions is generally clear. This includes monitoring the work of schools through their OFSTED inspection reports. Elected members are kept well informed of issues, through a range of sound briefing papers. Appropriate options are given, but elected members have shown their willingness to make decisions independently of officers; for example, the council's recent decision to provide a £50 rent subsidy, for six months, for new teachers to the authority

Partnership

194. The LEA's support for partnership working was satisfactory during the previous inspection. It remains satisfactory overall. As a result of the first inspection, a recommendation was made to improve communication and consultation with schools on strategic matters, including the number and terms of reference of consultative groups. New ways of developing partnerships with secondary schools were also part of this recommendation. The authority has tackled the first part of this recommendation satisfactorily, but relationships with schools, especially at secondary level, remain weak. There has been a reduction in the number of consultative groups, and others have had their roles redefined, as described earlier in this section.

195. The LEA's approach to its partnership links has traditionally been directed towards operational matters, but there is now a more strategic overview to partnership arrangements. The new Educational Development Plan is crucial to this process, as are the recent appointments to senior management positions in the lifelong learning directorate. The improved corporate planning has also contributed significantly to a change in the protocol for partnership links.

196. Communication and consultation with schools have improved since the first inspection, and are better at primary than at secondary level. However, this is an area where the LEA is only too aware that more work needs to be done in order to create a more effective set of relationships. Schools also have a significant part to play in this process. The response from secondary schools in the schools' survey to consultation on the new Education Development Plan, especially its clarity for school improvement, was significantly worse than other LEAs inspected. This is an example of the different perceptions that the LEA and the schools have regarding several important areas. The partnership links formed from the Excellence in Luton initiative, however, exemplify what can be achieved when all parties willingly co-operate in joint policy and decision-making. The majority of headteachers interviewed during the inspection felt that the LEA is achieving a satisfactory balance between leading and working in partnership within the Excellence in Luton initiative. The programme of school visits by the chief executive, leader and portfolio holder for lifelong learning are also being well received by schools.

Recommendation

In order to improve the partnership links with secondary schools:

- the LEA should develop further its consultation and communication structures by engaging in more effective joint action planning and decision making in those areas, which will help raise standards and improve the overall provision for all pupils.

197. The LEA provides good support for the standing advisory council for religious education (SACRE), particularly in terms of specialist officer support and additional funding for initiatives and in-service courses. An outcome of that support is the exhibition of different faiths, which has been based in different parts of the authority over the last five years. The LEA has also actively encouraged the SACRE to become involved with wider groups, including schools and school development advisers. Diocesan representatives are kept satisfactorily informed on issues relating to LEA policy. However, specific information relating to individual schools, as part of the school improvement programme, does not feature as a prominent aspect in this partnership. Union representatives now rate consultation and communication with the authority as very good, both at officer and elected member level. Links with the police force are satisfactory at a strategic level, and are improving. The recently introduced truancy patrol has been appreciated by the police, and is seen as an indication of the willingness of the LEA to support joint initiatives. The youth intervention group, which has been in existence for 18 months, is particularly valued as a multi-agency group comprising social services, police, health authority, housing and education. The exchange of information within this group has been used productively to highlight specific action in relation to the behaviour of young people.

198. Links with the Local Learning and Skills Council are satisfactory, and are continuing to develop as both parties establish, more clearly, the parameters of their roles and responsibilities. There is a good link between senior officers, as part of the 14 - 19 strategic planning group. However, this has yet to develop a more strategic review of post-16 provision. Links with post-16 providers, including the sixth form college, are also satisfactory. Links with the Connexions service have been established and are beginning to develop a greater clarity and understanding of respective roles within the authority. The LEA has been a willing partner in the Luton curriculum network; a group made up of curriculum deputies from the secondary schools and the vice-principal of the sixth form college.

199. Links with social services have been strengthened since the previous inspection, particularly in terms of the Area Child Protection Committee structure and through the joint planning for initiatives. Liaison at school level remains variable but is being improved.

Appendix: Recommendations

This report makes a number of recommendations, which are key to the LEA accelerating the rate of progress. The following are fundamental and work should begin on them immediately. They are:

In order to improve the partnership links with secondary schools:

- the LEA should develop further its consultation and communication structures by engaging in more effective joint action planning and decision making in those areas, which will help raise standards and improve the overall provision for all pupils.

In order to improve the quality of support for literacy:

- achieve greater consistency in the provision of good quality training and support for schools, and ensure that it is monitored rigorously.

In order to improve support for behaviour:

- provide schools with up to date written guidance on behaviour management;
- refocus the behaviour support service so there is more emphasis on support for behaviour management and dissemination of good practice and less support for individual pupils; and
- take further steps to improve consistency of quality of behaviour support.

The following are also essential, in that they affect the LEA's overall capacity for improvement.

In order to improve the effectiveness of governors' contribution to monitoring and challenging schools:

- ensure that records of visits to schools are copied routinely to chairs of governors.

In order to provide better support for under-performing schools:

- develop and agree tailored exit strategies with those schools emerging from special measures and serious weaknesses.

In order to ensure that chairs of governing bodies are kept well informed by the LEA:

- provide them with a copy of the LEA's annual analysis of their school's performance.

We also make the following recommendations.

In order to improve admission arrangements:

- the LEA should, more accurately, match places to demographic changes and pupil movements;
- the LEA should ensure that details of voluntary aided and foundation schools' admission criteria are included in their information booklets for parents; and
- the Admissions Forum should consider how to bring closer together, the admissions timetables for community, voluntary aided and foundation schools.

In order to improve the effectiveness of services to support school management:

- provide schools with comprehensive information on relevant council services to include details of non-traded provision;
- provide schools with information about alternative providers; and
- provide schools with advice on producing suitable service specifications.

In order to secure the speedy provision of school places for pupils:

- establish a strategy and develop working practices, in partnership with schools, to increase secondary school places and minimise the use of alternative provision.

In order to improve provision for pupils without a school place:

- place responsibility for the services for all such pupils under the same head of service; and
- make suitable provision for teenage mothers so that more access education.

In order to improve management services to schools:

- establish speedy mechanisms to ensure the payroll service to schools provides a timely and error free service.

In order to improve further the LEA's strategic plan for special educational needs:

- clarify, through the use of milestones for each activity, the timescales for implementation; and
- develop a programme, in collaboration with schools, to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy in terms of pupils' progress.

In order to improve the allocation of special educational needs resources the LEA should:

- consult with all schools on the criteria for allocation, to more adequately reflect their needs; and

- take steps to minimise any inconsistencies in the provision for pupils with special educational needs.

In order to improve the process for statutory assessment referrals:

- reduce the number of inappropriate referrals by developing clearer, more transparent criteria.

In order to improve provision for children in public care:

- ensure members of the children's panel have access to all relevant data and information, so that they can give focused advice to the executive on provision for these children.

In order to improve measures for combating racism:

- review the need for the establishment of a local race equality council; and
- work in partnership with headteachers to enable a better level of recording and reporting of racist incidents.

In order to improve the support for the Key Stage 3 strategy:

- define and clarify evaluation and monitoring procedures for individual strands and the strategy as a whole.

In order to improve the support for gifted and talented pupils:

- extend the provision to the primary phase.

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