



OFFICE FOR STANDARDS
IN EDUCATION

**INSPECTION OF
HOUNSLOW
LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY**

June 2001

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



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INTRODUCTION

1. This inspection was carried out by OFSTED in conjunction with the Audit Commission under Section 38 of the Education Act 1997. The inspection used the *Framework for the Inspection of Local Education Authorities* (September 2000) 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 the work undertaken by the local education authority (LEA) on Best Value.

2. The inspection involved the analysis of data and scrutiny of documentation from the LEA, information from school inspections and audit reports. Discussions were held with LEA members, staff in the education department and in other council departments and representatives of the LEA's partners. In addition, a questionnaire seeking views on aspects of the LEA's work was circulated to all schools and the pupil referral unit. The response rate was 76 per cent.

3. The inspection sought to establish the effectiveness of particular aspects of the LEA's work through visits to 18 schools. The visits tested the views of governors, headteachers and other staff on the key aspects of the LEA's strategy. The visits also considered whether the support which is provided by the LEA contributes, where appropriate, to the discharge of the LEA's statutory duties, is effective in contributing to improvements in the school, and provides value for money.

COMMENTARY

4. Hounslow is an outer London borough serving an area of West London close to Heathrow airport. The borough is made up of six discrete regions which are diverse in terms of the social and ethnic characteristics of the local population. Economically the area is active with relatively high levels of employment. However, there are parts of the borough which have significant levels of deprivation and disadvantage. There are high levels of pupil mobility and significant cross-borough movement between Hounslow and the five Local Education Authorities (LEAs) that surround it. There is a steady and growing inflow of asylum seekers and refugees.

5. The council, the LEA and schools share a clear commitment to raising achievement, to equal opportunities and to social inclusion. Standards of attainment are broadly in line with national averages, apart from those for seven-year-olds which remain below national averages. Standards in both primary and secondary schools are continuing to rise at rates matching or above that found nationally, with the exception of the percentage of five or more GCSE grades A*-C where improvement is below the national rate. There is wide variation in the performance of schools, but the vast majority, over 80 per cent, are making at least steady progress when compared to like schools. Efforts and resources are targeted where they are most needed, and improvement has been most marked in those schools which have received intensive support. As elsewhere, recruitment and retention of teachers and headteachers is a problem that poses an increasing threat to development.

6. Considerable progress has been made in the past three years. Senior officers provide clear leadership. The strategy for identifying and supporting schools in difficulty has greatly improved, and the LEA has rightly increased the level of challenge to schools. Tough issues, such as the removal of senior managers, teachers and officers who could not fulfil the role required of them, have been tackled with resolve. Levels of consultation are strong and the LEA involves schools fully in developing policies and strategies to raise standards and improve access to education. Advisory staff and those staff supporting the social inclusion agenda are highly regarded by schools for the good quality and consistency with which they carry out their roles. Stability of staffing within the department has contributed to good relationships with schools forged over time. This, however, has also led to a familiarity within which communication is not always as sharp as it might be. The LEA and its schools have not questioned sufficiently whether better value could be obtained through alternative provision or through brokered services.

7. Elected members provide stable leadership. There is cross-party agreement on the main priorities for education. All statutory plans have been produced on time and revised on a regular basis. Important strides have been made over the last five years in improving planning. There is a good relationship between a

hierarchy of plans, and the LEA is well placed to build the current structure into a sharper performance management system. The council is committed to structures that are open, transparent and responsive, but more could be done to open up lines of direct communication and consultation between members and schools. Revenue expenditure on education has been below Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) for at least five years. The council has made strides to reduce the SSA gap and is committed to maintaining the increase in expenditure.

8. The LEA performs almost all of its functions at least satisfactorily and many of them well. Particular strengths of the LEA include:

- support to schools for raising standards of literacy and numeracy;
- support for schools with serious weaknesses or requiring special measures;
- personnel support;
- the exercise of special educational needs functions in a way that supports school improvement;
- support for behaviour and the work of the pupil referral unit; and
- support for pupils with English as an additional language.

9. There are weaknesses but they are few in number and are outweighed by the overall strengths of the LEA. Weaknesses are:

- information and communication technology (ICT) in administration;
- support to schools for raising the standards of ICT in the curriculum;
- the time taken to produce statements of special educational needs;
- asset management planning; and
- property services.

10. On the whole the LEA is aware of its weaknesses, and improvements are already planned. The inspection team is confident that the LEA is capable of responding to the recommendations in this report, and of continuing to make progress.

SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Context

11. Hounslow is an outer London borough serving an area of west London stretching from Hammersmith and Fulham in the east to Surrey in the west. Being close to Heathrow airport and its surrounding industries, it is an economically active area, with relatively high levels of employment. Forty-eight percent of pupils are of ethnic minority heritage from a range of established ethnic heritage communities mainly from the Indian sub-continent, the Caribbean and Africa. This is a significantly higher proportion than nationally. In 1998, the local authority was ranked the 59th most deprived local authority district in the DETR Deprivation Index List (out of 354).

12. The borough is made up of six regions which are relatively discrete with their own individual identities and characteristics. There are localities with significant poverty and low educational attainment. Three areas, Isleworth, Brentford and Feltham, are the focus for Single Regeneration programming or Capital Challenge funding, which among other things have been designed to involve parents more, raise expectations, and increase educational attainment.

13. The school population is nearly 36,000, of whom around 2,300 are in nursery classes. There are high levels of pupil mobility and significant cross-borough movement between Hounslow and the five LEAs which surround it. There is a steady and growing inflow of asylum seekers and refugees. Close proximity to the airport results in the authority admitting to schools not only its own allocation of new arrivals from overseas but also those of other London boroughs which house families in accommodation within Hounslow. There are also a significant number of Travellers who move in and out of the borough. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is approximately seven percent above the national average (20 per cent) in primary and four percent above the national average (17 per cent) in secondary. The percentage of pupils with statements of special educational needs is in line with national averages for primary aged pupils, but lower than the national average for secondary aged pupils. Transfer to secondary schools is at the age of 11. The staying-on rate into the sixth form is about 60 per cent.

14. Hounslow provides 64 mainstream primary schools; 19 of which are junior phase only. All of the other 45 schools, both infant and all-through primary, have nursery classes.

15. All children can have access to free part-time nursery education in a primary school from the September after they are three. There are 14 secondary schools all with sixth forms, five special schools and one pupil referral unit (PRU). Nine primary schools and four of the secondary schools are voluntary aided. One other secondary school is voluntary controlled. Fifteen of the mainstream

schools have official centres for specified special educational needs and one of the primary schools has a workshop for early years non-statemented pupils with behavioural difficulties.

Performance

16. The LEA's baseline data and OFSTED inspection data indicate that attainment on entry is much less favourable than in similar authorities¹ and nationally.

17. Attainment in the 2000 national tests for seven-year-olds was below the national average, and in reading and mathematics, below standards achieved in similar authorities. Attainment in the 2000 national tests for 11 and 14-year-olds was broadly in line with that achieved in similar authorities and nationally. In English for 14-year-olds attainment was higher than national and statistical neighbour averages.

18. GCSE examination results in 2000 were in line with similar authorities and the national average in terms of pupils achieving five or more grades A*-C. The percentage gaining A*-G grades was below similar authorities and national figures. However, when GNVQ equivalence was added to the GCSE grades, the percentages gaining one grade A* - G and those achieving five or more passes at grades A*-G matched national averages. The average points score of pupils at A-level was below the national average and the average for similar authorities.

19. Since 1997, test results for 7 year olds in reading and mathematics have improved at rates above the national trend. Improvement in test results for 11 year olds and those for 7 year olds in writing has been well above the national trend. Results for 14 year olds and A-level students have improved at a similar rate to that found nationally. Improvement for pupils gaining 5 or more GCSE grades A*-C is at a slower rate than found nationally and within similar authorities.

20. There is evidence of under-performance within specific groups such as boys and black Caribbean and African heritage pupils, broadly reflecting national findings. There is a wide variation in the performance of schools: for example, in 2000 the proportion of pupils attaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A*-C ranged from just over 20 per cent to just under 70 per cent. About half of the secondary schools have improved at rates matching or above the national rate.

21. The most recent OFSTED inspection data indicates that the percentage of primary schools judged to be good or very good is similar to the national picture. The rate of progress made by primary schools between the first and second cycle of inspections is greater than progress nationally. The percentage of

¹ * the borough's closest statistical neighbours are: Ealing, Redbridge, Hillingdon, Enfield, Bolton, Merton, City of Derby, City of Bristol, Southampton, Waltham Forest

secondary schools judged to be good or very good by OFSTED inspections is above proportions in similar authorities and nationally. The rate of progress made by secondary schools between the first and second cycle of inspections is in line with or greater than progress nationally. OFSTED inspections also indicate that progress for under fives and Key Stage 1 pupils is not as good as nationally or in similar authorities. At the time of the inspection two schools were subject to special measures.

22. In primary schools, attendance rates are below the national figures and authorised and unauthorised absences are higher than national. In secondary schools attendance rates, authorised and unauthorised absence are broadly in line with national figures.

23. The rate of permanent exclusion is broadly in line with the national figures for primary but above the national rates for secondary schools.

Funding

24. In 2000/01 Hounslow council's spending as a whole is above its Standard Spending Assessment (SSA), at a level of 105 per cent, up from 104 per cent in 1999/00. Within these overall figures, budgets are above SSA on personal social services (110 per cent in 2000/01), the other services block (114 per cent) and capital financing (128 per cent) and below on highways (79 per cent). Budgeted spending on education is just below its SSA, at 99 per cent.

25. The LEA's education SSA is high, 14 per cent above the national average for primary and secondary education and among the top half of outer London boroughs, as would be expected, given its level of need. Within the overall education budget, allocation varies in relation to SSA. Spending on children under five is 30 per cent higher than the SSA, whereas funding for primary pupils is in line with SSA. Secondary aged pupils in 11-15 age group and post-16 are funded at a rate around five per cent lower than SSA. A comparison of individual school budgets per pupil shows the effect of this pattern of spend: Hounslow funds £2,153 for each primary pupil compared with £2,024 in outer London and £1,869 in England; and £2,789 for each secondary pupil compared with £ 2,746 in outer London and £2,559 in England.

26. The level of delegation to schools has been consistently higher than average: just above 85 per cent in 2000/01 compared with an English average of just below 84 per cent.

27. Hounslow's Standards Funding per pupil is £208 as opposed to £197 in outer London and compared with £210 in England. Spending on statutory and regulatory duties are comparatively high, as is that for school meals.

28. Spending on special educational needs amounts to about 17.5 per cent of

the local schools budget, about the average for outer London boroughs.

29. The council has maximised funding available for building work so that total education capital expenditure has amounted to almost £32m over the last six years, much enhancing the building stock. Valuable resources have also been acquired via external funding, particularly from the Single Regeneration Budget.

Council structure

30. The borough council has 60 elected members: 43 Labour, 11 Conservative, five Liberal Democrat and one Independent. There has been political stability over a number of years with a Labour majority. In September 1999 the council revised its decision-making structures in line with the Government's guidance for modernising local government. The procedures will be run as a pilot scheme until May 2001 when they will be reviewed. Under the pilot arrangements, all elected members, meeting in the full committee of the council, decide council policy. An executive of nine leading councillors is responsible for bringing forward proposals to be considered by the council and ensuring agreed policies are carried out. An education sub-committee has been established to deal with key educational decisions or matters of urgency.

31. A cross-party scrutiny and overview committee examines and reviews council services and decisions taken by the council, and makes recommendations to either the executive or to the committee of the council. At the time of the inspection there were seven scrutiny panels including an education standards scrutiny panel (ESSP) and a Best Value scrutiny panel.

32. The new structure has been designed to make the council open, democratic and responsive and to encourage more corporate working across departments. A sound start has been made. The ESSP discharges its brief to scrutinise OFSTED section 10 reports and to monitor standards of attainment. In other areas of scrutiny the ESSP is still finding its role. Its proactive work, in areas such as the scrutiny of information and communication technology, has resulted in limited improvement and it is unclear what influence the panel is having. Headteachers interviewed as part of focus groups and nearly half of schools visited see the new arrangements as closing down instead of opening up lines of communication, consultation and responsiveness. School staff see limited opportunity to make contact with members, other than when they act as school governors. The council recognises that it will take time for a new system to work smoothly and members are committed to a thorough review of the strengths and weaknesses in the system at the end of the pilot phase.

33. The education department is one of five main council departments. The council has a new chief executive who at the time of the inspection had been in post for less than a month. The education department has a director and three assistant directors (advice and support, planning and operational management

and community learning and special needs).

The Education Development Plan

34. The Education Development Plan (EDP) is feasible and provides a sound basis for the school improvement strategy. The strengths of the plan outweigh weaknesses. A major strength of the EDP is its location within a planning context that is well-established and understood by schools. There are good links between the EDP and other statutory plans.

35. The first EDP was approved by the DfEE for three years in April 1999 on the condition that activities were removed which should be funded through delegation to schools. This has been achieved. At the time of the inspection, year two of the EDP was in place and there were draft action plans for year three. The priorities have remained the same:

- A Raise attainment in literacy.
- B Raise attainment in numeracy.
- C Raise attainment in ICT.
- D Improve the quality of provision and standards of attainment for pupils with SEN and more able pupils.
- E Improve the quality of provision and standards of attainment for disadvantaged and disaffected pupils.
- F Improve the quality of school management and governance.
- G Improve the quality of teaching and learning to raise standards within a broad and balanced curriculum.
- H Raise standards through the enhancement of learning opportunities outside of formal school provision.

36. The audit carried out for the first EDP was thorough. The priorities take account of the national agenda and to an extent reflect local needs. A good case is made for the priorities and appropriate references are made to the variations in performance by gender, ethnicity and levels of disadvantage. The draft action plan for year three gives prominence to improvements in the early years and post-16 which is highly appropriate, as both have been rightly targeted for further development. There are some shortcomings. The section on Special Education Need is insufficiently related to the SEN strategic and development plans. There is scope to make the plan more differentiated with less aimed at all schools and to be more specific about which underachieving groups are the focus of attention.

37. There were too many actions underpinning the priorities in the first EDP and these have been sensibly reduced. Year two of the EDP and the draft for a third year have actions and activities that are set out in sufficient detail to clarify what is intended. These generally constitute programmes which, if successfully implemented, are likely to advance the priorities. Responsibilities for implementing the actions and resource implications are identified clearly. There

remains some variation in the quality of success criteria and, although the majority of these are sound, a significant number lack precision. The success criteria for ICT are insufficiently challenging given the pace of change that is being achieved nationally.

38. Most performance targets in the EDP represent satisfactory challenge and, overall, sound progress has been made towards meeting them. In particular, the LEA has responded appropriately to the progress that schools have made in numeracy by raising the Key Stage 2 mathematics target for 2002 by two percentage points. The targets for five or more A*-C passes at GCSE assume improvement in line with that expected nationally. However, in 2000 attainment was 3.5 per cent below target, suggesting that significant improvement will be needed to ensure that targets are met in future. Targets for children in public care are insufficiently robust and are in the process of being reviewed. The EDP does not contain performance targets for ethnic minority pupils, although these have been set.

39. Consultation on the EDP has been widespread and thorough. The school survey and visits to schools confirm that there is a good understanding of the EDP and a strong support for its priorities. The vast majority of schools felt the plan was directly relevant to their own priorities.

40. Arrangements for monitoring the progress of the EDP are appropriate. Each priority is the responsibility of a senior officer who reports progress to the department's management team twice a year. Headteachers and governors are included in ongoing monitoring and evaluation through involvement on steering groups and through regular meetings. Elected members receive reports on progress towards meeting the success criteria. Progress on implementing the EDP has been at least satisfactory in most areas and good in literacy and numeracy. There has, however, been insufficient progress in raising pupil attainment in, and the use of, ICT in the curriculum.

The allocation of resources to priorities

41. The extent to which the LEA targets its resources on priorities is satisfactory. Commissioning and performance plans produced annually by chief officers set out the key service priorities within the framework of the council's seven pledges and, for education, the Hounslow education partnership strategic plan. The system provides an appropriate mechanism for more robust longer term financial planning but this is only just being put into place.

42. 'Our children are our future' is one of the council's seven pledges but, even though capital expenditure on education buildings has reflected the primacy of the pledge, revenue expenditure on education has been below SSA for at least five years. The council has recognised the need for greater expenditure and has reduced the gap from almost four per cent below in 1997/98 to the current one

per cent. Additional investment of £500 000 in secondary education in 2001/02, following £800 000 in 1999/00, will close the gap further.

43. The council's long-standing belief in investment in early years is reflected in its spending above SSA for under fives. This policy has been supported in residents' surveys. The council is undertaking a major review of spending on under fives in 2001/02.

44. School budgets are monitored well. Primary balances at the end of 1999/00 were six per cent of the total delegated primary budget compared with one per cent in secondary schools. About a third of secondary schools had a current deficit budget compared with six per cent of primary schools. Two secondary and one primary had deficit budgets over five per cent, in each case with appropriate plans to achieve a balance.

Structures for achieving Best Value

45. Satisfactory progress has been made within the education department in establishing performance management, although targets need to be more specific and performance indicators better defined. Education service plans are clear but are not sufficiently aligned with financial planning. The Best Value regime is providing an increased rigour for developing these themes within a strategic framework. The external auditor approved the council's Best Value Performance Plan without any qualification. A number of Best Value reviews are planned for 2000/01 that relate to the education service including reviews of the education psychology service and the education advisory service and two cross-cutting reviews on transport operations and race equality. As yet, no education Best Value reviews have been reported to committee. The LEA does not provide its own guidance to schools to reflect their responsibility for securing Best Value.

Recommendations

In order to improve the effectiveness of the EDP:

- make the plan more differentiated and define target groups more clearly; and
- make success criteria for all priority areas specific and measurable.

In order to improve the strategic management of resources:

- ensure that the review of spending on under-fives contains a rigorous evaluation of the effectiveness of provision.

In order to improve the structure for achieving Best Value:

- develop service planning by sharpening targets and including more clearly

defined performance indicators. Align service plans more closely with financial planning;

- increase the emphasis on the measurement of performance across the education department; and
- provide guidance to schools on their responsibilities in respect of Best Value.

In order to strengthen the strategy for school improvement:

- improve lines of communication, consultation and responsiveness between members and schools; and
- review the role and function of the education scrutiny committee.

SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Implications of other functions

46. There is effective management across all levels of the school improvement, the social inclusion and access services. Education staff are highly regarded by schools and praised for the quality of support which, from the evidence of all schools visited, is consistently of a good standard. Support from the advisory service, the teaching support service, the education psychology service and the educational welfare service is appropriately differentiated and targeted to need. Personnel services make a positive contribution to school improvement.

47. A few functions are less effective and undermine the more positive features of the LEA's work. By far the most significant of these are the weaknesses in the provision of Information and Communication Technology for administration. These impede the LEA's and schools' ability to make the most effective use of management information and communication systems. This creates understandable frustration in schools when staff are unable to e-mail information in a reliable and consistent way. Inadequate procedures exist for the electronic transfer of pupil data which means over-reliance on paper systems and an increase in the bureaucratic burden on school staff.

Monitoring, challenge, support, intervention

48. The LEA performs its functions of monitoring, challenge, supporting and intervening in schools satisfactorily. Evidence from school visits, focus group interviews and the school survey indicate clear understanding and the strong approval of headteachers and governors for the way in which the LEA is applying the Code of Practice for LEA-School relations. Respective roles and responsibilities are well established.

49. The LEA knows its schools well. All of the evidence available is used to place schools in one of five categories. This classification helps to ensure that monitoring and support are broadly in proportion to need. For those schools where there are concerns (designated as focus schools) there are at least four days per year for monitoring and support work; this is sensible provision. By contrast, the basic provision of three visits per year for all other schools is over-generous for those where high standards are being maintained.

50. Monitoring visits are thorough and appropriately concerned with school improvement. Visits have set agendas, which are agreed by the advisory service and are shared with schools via the director's advisory panel and other professional reference groups. There is sufficient flexibility for attached advisers to negotiate visits to ensure that monitoring can also support and further the school's self-review processes. However, in schools visited the links between

LEA monitoring and school self-review were not always clear; overall, insufficient emphasis is being given to providing an external validation or moderation of the school's own findings. For the majority of schools, the outcome of monitoring visits is often an oral feedback to headteachers. The lack of clear written feedback leaves too much scope for ambiguity in the reporting and understanding of information. Information from monitoring is not given directly to governing bodies, although there is an opportunity for advisers to attend one governing body meeting per year. Focus schools receive more formal written reports and these provide clearer and more concise judgements and advice regarding improvement and standards achieved. The LEA pools the experiences from monitoring visits and this contributes to the dissemination of good practice at cluster meetings of schools.

51. The criteria for intervention are clear and agreed with schools. Data and other information are increasingly used successfully to identify schools which might be coasting, weak or failing. Intervention strategies have been used effectively in focus schools visited. Evidence from school visits and files show that management and attainment are improving in schools where there have been concerns. All schools visited had been subject to appropriate challenge through the target-setting process, especially where the LEA considered performance targets to be too low. The support provided by the advisory service is of good quality and has been effective in bringing about improvement, for example, in literacy and numeracy and for pupils with English as an additional language. Nevertheless, the LEA is aware that key tasks remain. Continuity and progression in the early years and the rate of progress for those pupils gaining five or more GCSE grades A*-C need improvement.

52. The advisory service is effectively deployed, well managed, and has clear programmes of work and agreed priorities. Individuals are well matched to their roles and there are appropriate staff development and appraisal procedures which give sufficient scope for robust performance management. The service as a whole has made significant contributions to school development planning and helping schools to establish monitoring and review procedures. The high level of buy-back indicates the confidence that schools have in the service. The LEA was judged to have made at least satisfactory contribution to school improvement in all schools visited and a good contribution in three-quarters of the schools. Improvement in those schools that have received intensive support has been most marked. The costs of the advisory service are average, and it provides good value for money.

53. The advisory service is making steady progress in incorporating Best Value principles. There is a strong commitment to delivering improvement. Views and opinions of partners are actively sought; schools in particular help shape the levels of service. However, there has been insufficient consideration by the LEA and many of its schools of alternatives to in-house provision, or active questioning to see if better value for money could be obtained through brokering

or securing provision from elsewhere.

Collection and analysis of data

54. The LEA provides a comprehensive, high quality set of data to its primary and secondary schools to complement that produced nationally. Data provision covers locally agreed assessment instruments as well as national testing. Data recently provided for schools contain useful information about the local performance of different ethnic minority groups. The visits to schools during the inspection revealed a high level of satisfaction with the data produced for individual schools.

55. Growing attention is being given to value added analysis. For example, the addition of value added information at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 is proving particularly useful to secondary schools visited. Steps are being taken to collect, store and analyse pupil level data. Work already underway means that the quality of data and value added analysis provided to schools will be improved even further in the near future.

56. Training for school staff and governing bodies in the interpretation and use of data has been delivered efficiently and effectively. The LEA has also produced good quality guidance materials to support the setting of individual pupil targets. Primary and secondary schools are developing confidence in using a range of data set targets for setting individual pupils and for cohorts. Senior management teams of schools visited were using the materials well to inform work with subject leaders.

57. The analysis of data at both LEA and school level is good and forms the basis for visits by advisers to discuss the setting of targets, and the implications for teaching, learning and school development planning. School visits confirm that the process is rigorous. Attached advisers have consistently challenged schools and governing bodies where targets were judged to be too low; schools have raised targets as a result.

58. Systems for the electronic transfer of data within the LEA are underdeveloped. Schools use paper based systems to ensure that pupil records are shared across the different key stages on transfer.

Support for literacy and numeracy

59. The LEA has provided effective support to schools in the development and extension of the national numeracy (NNS) and literacy (NLS) strategies. Schools have benefited from an approach which has concentrated sharply on the raising of standards, the development of whole school policies and the need for schools to become self-sufficient over a relatively short period of time. There are clear common threads from the LEA's approach to supporting numeracy and literacy.

The work of both teams is highly rated by schools.

60. Since 1997, the Key Stage 2 results for English have improved at a rate well above the national trend, reaching 73 per cent in 2000 (one per cent above the target). The LEA is securely on track to reach the 2002 target of 78 per cent Level 4 and above. At Key Stage 1, the progress in reading has been above the national average whilst that in writing has been well above the national trend. Unusually in the 2000 tests, the LEA's results in writing were better than in reading. This has been attributed to a pre-NLS concentration on an area the authority regarded to be weak. The LEA is appropriately re-evaluating ways to strengthen results in reading.

61. Good levels of support have been offered to schools to improve literacy. This has included training in data interpretation and target setting, the monitoring of teaching, demonstration lessons, joint lesson observation and focused guidance on delivering the literacy hour. More generally, a good supportive network of other schemes is available or is developing. For example, Reading is Fundamental (a project offering free books to young children and their families), the involvement of the primary community team in supporting the development of family literacy and an adult volunteer reading scheme. The increased co-ordination of the work of the literacy team and the Hounslow language service is helping schools to provide effective literacy support for pupils with English as an additional language (EAL).

62. In mathematics at Key Stage 2, results have improved by 13 per cent since 1997, which is an improvement well above the national trend. In the 2000 tests, 70 per cent of pupils achieved Level 4 and above (five per cent above the target). The LEA was well set to achieve its 2002 target of 73 per cent and sensibly have negotiated a two per cent increase, setting a new target of 75 per cent. At Key Stage 1, the results have also improved at a faster rate than nationally, with the expectation that 90 per cent of pupils will reach Level 2 or above by 2002.

63. Numeracy consultants have assisted schools well in targeting underachievement and in improving the use of mathematical language. They have also provided valuable support for subject co-ordinators. Strategies have included classroom observation and feedback, demonstration lessons, evaluation of action plans and helping schools provide EAL pupils with access to the numeracy lesson. Leading mathematics teachers have been an essential part of the progress being made and this is reflected by the very positive evaluations from schools. The primary community team is helping to support the development of family numeracy.

64. Both strategies have been managed effectively by the general advisers for mathematics and English. Schools were appropriately identified for inclusion in the intensive cohorts using performance data, OFSTED reports and the results of

the LEA's own monitoring. Most schools receiving intensive support in both numeracy and literacy have made good progress, either meeting or exceeding their targets. Moreover, results in literacy and numeracy intensive schools have improved at a rate greater than the LEA as a whole. Schools not receiving intensive support have been provided with appropriate training and support and can buy into additional time if required.

65. Good foundations have been set for moving both strategies into secondary schools. Key Stage 3 consultants have been appointed, and the mathematics and English advisers have been working with the secondary subject leaders on a regular basis. Arrangements have been made for secondary teachers to visit Year 6 leading numeracy or literacy teachers' lessons.

Support for Information and communication technology (ICT)

66. Overall, support for ICT is unsatisfactory. Support for hardware and software has improved significantly through the National Grid for Learning (NGfL) initiative. However, the ratio of computers to pupils within the LEA is below the national averages for both primary and secondary schools. Provision varies greatly between schools, particularly at secondary level. To alleviate these differences the LEA has been working closely with schools to encourage them to use leasing arrangements in conjunction with Standards Fund money and delegated budgets. The budget allocation within the EDP for 2001-2002 has been reviewed to take account of current shortcomings.

67. The LEA is making good progress with implementing the NGfL. Each primary school and special school has either a suite or classroom-based computers as part of the NGfL provision. Schools have to produce an agreed ICT plan before being included in the NGfL initiative and receive good support to achieve this. The provision of New Opportunities Fund (NOF) training has been helpful in raising the basic skills of many teachers. Usefully, an exemplar scheme of work has also been drawn up to assist schools in ICT delivery that will be circulated in the summer term. Internet access has been provided to all schools but to date there is very limited provision of online curriculum material or a framework for its use. A potentially useful LEA virtual teachers' centre website has been established but this is still at too early a stage of development to be an effective resource for schools. There is no LEA Intranet to enable rapid transfer of information.

68. There is a supportive INSET programme available to teachers but support for ICT in schools has been fragmented. There has been too little use of teacher expertise through the development of leading ICT teachers to support curriculum development work. At Key Stage 3 assessments carried out by teachers show pupils' ICT capability to be well below national expectations in approximately half of the secondary schools. The LEA is reliant on OFSTED reports to judge standards and does not collect and analyse Key Stage 3 data.

69. The recent deployment of technicians to assist small primary schools has had a significant impact. In such schools visited good technical support has led to greater confidence and competence in the use of ICT to support teaching and learning. For two other schools visited response to requests for technical support has been poor.

Support for schools causing concern

70. Support for schools causing concern (focus schools) and those in special measures or with serious weaknesses is good. The proportion of primary schools identified by OFSTED as requiring some improvement is in line with national averages. At secondary level the proportion needing some improvement is low.

71. At the time of inspection three schools were identified as having serious weaknesses and eight schools were receiving additional focused support. Two schools had recently been placed in special measures from a position during 2000 of no schools being in this category.

72. There is clear evidence from those schools which have been removed from special measures that the LEA is rigorous in its approach and works well with senior management teams and governing bodies to effect improvement at management and classroom levels. Recovery rates have been good and well above the national average.

73. When a school becomes a focus school or has serious weaknesses identified the LEA responds quickly and effectively. Appropriate action plans for recovery are established quickly as evidenced, for example, from the two schools recently designated as requiring special measures. Issues of headteacher or teacher competence are confronted directly and, where necessary, staff are replaced. Such action in one school had led to a dramatic improvement in standards of attainment within two years. The progress of all schools causing concern is regularly and appropriately reviewed by the education department's senior management team. Lead members undertake detailed and appropriate scrutiny of the progress of focus schools.

74. There is a well managed exit strategy for all focus schools. For instance, special measures and serious weakness schools remain as 'focus' schools with additional advisory support and monitoring for a period of time afterwards to ensure there is no regression in standards.

Support for governors

75. Support for governors is satisfactory. There are good communication systems between the LEA and governing bodies based on the director's detailed termly report, and briefing sessions for chairs of governors. Consultation processes are effective. A good clerking service is also available for governing

bodies wishing to purchase services. Minutes from governor meetings are monitored centrally so that issues arising can be dealt with efficiently. A telephone help-line enables a prompt response to governor questions and concerns.

76. There are appropriate induction processes for newly appointed governors and a good range of training opportunities, including school-based governor training. A cross-borough training course for chairs of governors was especially praised by governors interviewed, for the opportunity it provided in gaining a broader perspective on the governor role. Training sessions are focused appropriately on key priority areas, for example, literacy and numeracy, or on subjects specifically designed to develop governors' understanding of their strategic role, such as target-setting. The links between the governor support services and the personnel and advisory divisions are strong. Many schools buy in the attached adviser to attend some or all governing body meetings. Monitoring systems, however, do not actively promote and develop the governors' strategic role. For example, chairs of governors do not, as a matter of course, receive written notes from routine monitoring visits, which reduces their ability to evaluate the effectiveness of their schools.

77. The LEA has problems with the recruitment and retention of governors. An annual turnover of around 20 per cent has been compounded recently by the need to establish 18 new governing bodies. A range of recruitment strategies has been adopted which include advertising in local newsletters and papers, posters and mail shots to voluntary organisations. LEA governor vacancies are also high. A recent decision by the council to re-define the selection criteria for LEA governors is improving the LEA's ability to deploy governors to schools with vacancies. In three-quarters of schools visited, LEA governors were reported to be insufficiently involved in the work of their governing body, and this is a shortcoming.

Support for school management

78. Support for school management is good overall. There are particular strengths in the provision for supporting senior management teams. Evidence from primary and secondary schools that have been inspected twice by OFSTED shows improvement in management and efficiency. Over the last four years the LEA has been robust in dealing with weaknesses in the senior management of about a fifth of schools.

79. Attached advisers have gained the trust and respect of schools and are acknowledged as playing a key role in supporting senior managers. The LEA is committed to a programme of supported self-review and for some time has been actively encouraging schools to develop their own self-review procedures. All schools have introduced their own processes and about half of those visited have well established review strategies and need limited or no LEA involvement in their management.

80. The overall strategy for supporting the training needs of senior and middle managers is good. There are appropriate induction arrangements for newly appointed headteachers and deputies which include the opportunity to be mentored by a headteacher colleague. Encouragement is given to senior managers to continue their professional development by way of the national training schemes. The LEA is quick to respond when urgent needs arise. For example in three schools visited, there was evidence that immediate and effective support had been arranged when the headteachers had been taken ill. Middle management courses are provided and these have been particularly effective in the foundation subjects. Through the support for the implementation of the national numeracy and literacy strategies, advisers have been influential in enhancing the management skills of classroom teachers in the primary and special sectors. Arrangements for monitoring the support and assessment of newly qualified teachers (NQTs) are secure. The LEA also provides a programme of courses and individual school support which is flexible and relevant to the needs of the new teachers.

81. Most schools visited are experiencing difficulty in recruiting teachers and in retaining them; for example, there has been a significant turnover in trained literacy and numeracy co-ordinators. Headteachers are rightly concerned that this situation will have a negative impact on their attempts to maintain and improve standards of attainment. The LEA recognises the problem and is making every effort to tackle what is not just a local problem.

Support for early years

82. Hounslow has made a positive commitment to early years education. In particular focused investment in nursery provision within mainstream schools means that the LEA is now able to provide a free part-time place in the maintained sector for all three and four-year-olds whose parents request one. The partnership is committed to encouraging new developments in the private and voluntary settings but such provision remains unevenly distributed across the borough.

83. An early years and childcare partnership has been formed, with appropriate membership, to co-ordinate the improvement and expansion of childcare and early years education in the borough. The early years childcare development plan (EYCDP) is sound. It appropriately supports the Council's equal opportunity policy and the strategy for intervention for children with Special Education Need. The LEA has been proactive in securing funding for Sure Start and in building increased integration between education and childcare through the provision of extended day care. The children's information service is proving a useful key point of reference for parents seeking guidance on appropriate childcare places.

84. OFSTED inspections of school-based nurseries indicate strengths in the quality of the early years curriculum, the teaching of the under fives and the

provision made for children with SEN. However, the progress made by the under fives and at Key Stage 1 is not as good as that seen nationally or compared with similar authorities. OFSTED inspections of nursery provision outside of maintained settings show that, whilst there are strengths in children's personal and social development, overall there are weaknesses in the quality of teaching and assessment. Networks between public and private providers are being established but these are not yet strong. There is also an appropriate focus on establishing a joint training programme for staff in early years classes and centres but again it is in the early stages of development.

Recommendations

In order to improve the strategy for school improvement:

- reduce the number of monitoring visits made routinely to all schools;
- follow up monitoring visits to all schools with written feedback that provides sharp and clear judgements and focused action points;
- make the reports available to the chair of governors as well as the headteachers; and
- establish urgently an effective system for the electronic transfer of pupil performance data.

In order to improve standards in Information and Communication Technology :

- improve the support for teaching and learning of ICT and monitor the impact on levels of attainment;
- work with schools to improve the ratio of computers to pupils in both primary and secondary schools; and
- make better strategic use of the ICT expertise within schools in the authority to support curriculum developments.

In order to improve support for governance:

- monitor the appointment and effectiveness of LEA governors.

In order to improve provision for the early years:

- help secure better progression as children move through the foundation stage and into Key Stage 1.

SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Corporate planning

85. Corporate planning is coherent with a clear relationship between a complex hierarchy of plans. Seven pledges form the core of the council strategy. These are at the heart of the annual corporate business plan, which shows how the work of the council is derived from political and managerial imperatives, and translated into departmental business plans. Education is implicitly involved in all seven pledges, but the first, 'our children are our future' is most closely related to educational priorities. Within education a vision statement elaborates upon 'our children are our future', setting out the principles that underlie the work of the department. The principles are visibly reflected in the Hounslow education partnership strategic plan, which sets out in some detail the nature of the LEA's commitment to its partners. Key tasks needed to deliver the strategic plan are clearly set out, and cross-referenced to other plans, notably the EDP. Tasks are focused appropriately on areas likely to be successful in raising achievement in schools. Schools have been consulted well and strongly support education priorities and actions. Communication about long-term strategies and plans could be sharper. Schools visited were not clear about the action plans for turning around weak services and about a third were sceptical that a robust strategy is in place to improve Information and Communication Technology administration. Successful schools visited questioned the longer-term aims and direction for education within Hounslow and, in particular, their own role within the strategy for improvement.

86. Over the years the council has been successful in obtaining funding to support urban regeneration and local developments. Isleworth has benefited from Capital Challenge funding and Brentford and Feltham from the Single Regeneration Budget. Specific projects have been designed to enhance school provision for community work and to involve parents more in education through the establishment of family literacy and numeracy groups. One of the specific projects in the Feltham area is based on improving educational and training opportunities. The enhanced work experience project targets secondary pupils at most risk of exclusion and is having a marked success in improving the attitude and commitment of those young people involved.

87. The speed and transparency of financial decision making are satisfactory. At the corporate level performance is reviewed annually, and a resource bid made through a commissioning and performance plan. Within the education management team there is a well-established system for translating objectives and targets into costed action at service level, but plans are not closely aligned with financial planning. Schools are consulted well on the planning and review of the education budget and the vast majority view the arrangements as satisfactory.

88. On the whole plans are implemented well. Schools are improving, as is the attainment of pupils. A well-established monitoring and review process forms a sound basis for service reviews, individual target-setting and appraisal. The department is well placed to build the current structure and practice into a sharper performance management system. In particular, there is scope to sharpen targets and performance indicators within service plans.

89. The leadership provided by elected members and senior officers is satisfactory. Members trust officers to take appropriate decisions. There is a clear scheme of delegation to chief officers but with suitable checks and balances in place. There is broad agreement across the different political parties on educational matters. All statutory plans have been approved and are revised on a regular basis. Senior officers have provided members with sound and timely advice.

90. The director and senior officers have been instrumental in developing a climate of mutual respect and trust with schools and other stakeholders. Stability in staffing has facilitated secure relationships and there is a shared set of values between the schools and the LEA. Education leadership is approachable and responsive and structures for consultation are effective. The Hounslow education partnership brings together a range of consultative groups and discussion groups involving the LEA, schools, community groups and other organisations. The group acts as an avenue for discussion about how the LEA might respond to new initiatives and a forum where actions are open to scrutiny and constructive criticism.

Partnership

91. Strong partnership working is facilitated by the Hounslow education partnership. Positive relationships have been built with, for example, the police through work on community safety, strategies to reduce youth crime and to combat drug and alcohol abuse. There is also good liaison with social services and health within the early years and childcare partnership and for supporting pupils with complex emotional and behavioural difficulties. The Hounslow education business partnership achieves substantial involvement of employers in a range of work-related initiatives that benefit schools. There is a strong partnership with the diocesan authorities and good structures for the involvement of ethnic minority community groups. A commitment to creating a positive ethos within a borough with such wide cultural diversity is helped significantly by good Standing Advisory Committee on Religious Education involvement and support.

92. Nevertheless, there are areas at an operational level where partnership working with health and social services needs strengthening. There are still undue delays in carrying out assessments of Special Education Need children within the statementing process. On occasions there is a less than prompt response or inconsistency of approach in the handling of child protection issues.

Management services

93. The quality of management services provided to schools is variable. Personnel services are good, financial services are satisfactory, but all aspects of ICT support for school administration are poor. Premises related services are not generally well rated by schools although the school survey and school visits show that this is not the case for every school.

94. Most services are offered to schools through the Hounslow education learning partnership (HELP) booklet, published in 1999. Most schools visited found the booklet useful and, for the most part, there is a high level of buy-back of services. The information provided in HELP is reasonably clear, sets out a distinction between those parts of a service provided centrally and those delegated, often offers a range of options and provides a structured complaints procedure allowing for a school's withdrawal from a specific service level agreement. That the booklet is not updated annually is a shortcoming.

95. Despite its usefulness, the HELP booklet falls short of what is required in a context of Best Value. In particular, buy-back services do not follow a common format which clearly delineates in-service and financial terms the centrally retained and buy-back elements of the service. The information does not provide a range of costed options nor does it demonstrate how the service meets Best Value criteria.

96. All aspects of the personnel service were rated highly both in the school survey, and by all schools visited, with all schools regarding it as at minimum satisfactory. All schools buy back almost all of the full service. Contracts are issued efficiently, good personnel records maintained and there are effective working arrangements with corporate personnel, trades unions and the outsourced payroll service. Good advice is given to governors and headteachers on casework issues and initiatives such as the management of absence policy are properly followed through. There are good plans to enhance the quality of the service further through the completion of the personnel handbook and the extended use of a computerised record system.

97. Recruitment and retention are key elements of the personnel service available to schools. It is clear from statistical evidence and school visits that the problems of appointing and retaining teaching staff are becoming progressively more severe, with the number of vacancies increasing and applications for many posts reducing annually. Often in concert with neighbouring LEAs, and within a corporate council approach, Hounslow has introduced a series of well-conceived initiatives to improve the situation; for example, recruitment fairs, raising the profile of teaching within local communities, and organising a 'returners' course. Schools visited considered that the LEA was doing all that could be expected to combat locally an issue with wider connotations.

98. Financial services' support on the planning of school budgets, accuracy of financial systems and arrangements for schools to make financial transactions are all satisfactory or better. The financial service works well with internal audit. Aspects of financial services have been delegated for some years and about 60 per cent of schools buy back; termly monitoring takes place for those schools which do not. There is scope to improve the service by undertaking or brokering more benchmarking work on school budgets and by increased dialogue with schools on the specific service they require. Proper procedures are followed to monitor school budgets.

99. Systems for Information and Communication Technology (ICT) administration are poor. The justified criticism from schools covers a wide range of issues, including the lack of an up-to-date ICT strategy, inadequate procedures for transfer of pupil data, an ineffective system for electronic data exchange and technical support for schools which is slow and often unhelpful. In 1999, the council correctly determined to adopt a corporate approach to the provision of ICT services. It has only just approved the commitment of £800,000 to establish a network to link all schools by permanent connections to the Internet and to each other via the council wide network, all to be implemented by early 2002. There is a schools' strategic working group for ICT which has been involved in the production of a revised ICT strategy and proposals for its implementation. However, almost all schools visited knew of neither and, understandably, most conveyed a sense of despair. Much remains to be done to implement the strategy and win the confidence of schools.

100. The other services provided to schools receive a mixed response. That for building maintenance work is considered less than satisfactory. The quality of advice given by the attached surveyor is variable, although the major criticism is for the work undertaken by contractors, who are often seen as slow in undertaking repairs. The need for improvement, allied to greater consistency, is recognised by the officers concerned. The provision of some transport services is currently subject to a Best Value review which is projected to introduce improved management systems and financial savings. No primary school has requested delegation of the provision for school meals, and the direct service organisation has won the contract for four secondary schools. The catering service is considered by schools to be satisfactory.

Recommendations

In order to improve management services:

- restructure the HELP booklet, to give full information to schools about the costs of centrally retained and buy-back elements of each service to enable them to determine if value for money is being provided; and
- introduce as a matter of urgency the proposed improvements in the provision for Information and Communication Technology administration.

SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATION PROVISION

Strategy

101. The LEA's strategy for meeting special educational needs is good. Special Educational Needs (SEN) policies and the SEN development plan collectively outline a clear strategy and direction for SEN provision, including establishing a clear role for special schools. The development plan provides a useful overview of SEN priorities, provision and action, but there is insufficient linkage and cross-referencing between this plan and the Education Development Plan. The development of socially inclusive practice in schools is a major feature of the LEA strategic plans for SEN. Schools have been consulted well on the plans and most of those visited understand and strongly support the LEA strategy.

102. The inclusion agenda is set against a gradually rising budget for statements, transport and independent school funding. The LEA has taken a careful look at those aspects of provision where incidence is greatest and where the numbers of pupils placed in independent provision is highest. As a consequence the LEA is moving sensibly toward increasing the borough's provision for autism and considering further the provision for emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD). As part of this strategy the LEA has secured funding to establish an SEN inclusion project which is partly focused on increasing support for pupils with EBD in mainstream schools. The project is already having a positive effect. As part of the project successful re-integration into mainstream has been secured for a small group of about 14 pupils who were attending special schools and centres. A major spin-off from the project has been the development of a close partnership between the teachers, pupils and the LEA support services. Support and training provided for mainstream teachers as part of the project is helping to avert problems with pupils escalating to a point where special school placement is needed. It is also contributing to a reduction in exclusion of pupils with EBD.

103. There is an effective management structure for SEN provision. The teaching support service (TSS) is placed within the support and advice division and this gives a very clear link to school improvement. The education psychology service (EPS) and administration team are within the community learning and special needs division, providing a strong link with the access and social inclusion teams. Sufficient time and resources are given for the SEN teams to meet and work together, which ensures a coherent and joined up approach to supporting SEN developments.

Statutory obligations

104. Reasonable steps are taken by the LEA to meet its statutory obligations, but the proportion of statements issued within 18 weeks is too low at 68 per cent. If those delayed for reasons beyond the LEA's direct control are included the rate

falls to 40 per cent compared to the national average of 58 per cent. The LEA has had to recover from an information technology systems failure and long standing vacancies within its administration department. There is now a new database for SEN, and timescales are improving rapidly with the full support of other agencies.

105. There is a very useful set of criteria to assist schools in placing pupils on the appropriate stages of the SEN register. Whilst the materials are helping special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs) to develop whole school understanding, the LEA recognises that there is insufficient moderation between schools to ensure consistency of judgements across the borough. Plans are already in place to instigate moderation procedures.

106. SEN statements are of a satisfactory standard. Annual reviews and transitional reviews are conducted on time and the LEA is represented appropriately at the meetings. The number of referrals to tribunals has remained steady over recent years but most have been withdrawn before reaching tribunal. Increasing parents' confidence in the provision made for the child with SEN is rightly seen as a crucial element in the success of the SEN strategy. A recently appointed parent partnership officer is able to offer independent support and access to a conciliation service, should it be needed. There are already signs that this is proving effective in responding to parent queries and concerns and in empowering parents to contribute to their child's development. Information for parents is not always presented well. Documentation for parents is written in a style that is often complex and difficult to read and as such is insufficiently user-friendly.

School improvement and Best Value

107. The LEA exercises its functions in support of pupils with SEN with a clear focus on raising standards. SEN provision overall was judged at least satisfactory in all schools visited and in over three-quarters was judged to be good. In particular, schools value the expert knowledge and constructive support provided by the teaching support service (TSS) and educational psychologist service (EPS). The TSS has been especially effective in helping schools plan and implement individual education plans and in building staff confidence in supporting pupils with SEN. From the evidence of school visits and focus group interviews, the concentrated effort placed on training SENCOs for their role has been successful in developing the competences needed by them to manage developments in schools. A recently appointed general adviser for SEN has provided welcome specific support for special schools, especially in helping them set performance targets for individual pupils.

108. Good links for SEN are developing with other agencies. For example, the authority has established regular dialogue between services providing support for

young children with SEN. This is leading to improved pre-school assessment and better targeting of resources. There are also good links with the department of child and adolescent psychiatry to support children with significant EBD or psychiatric problems.

109. SEN funding is fair and transparent. Schools receive clear detail about funding levels for SEN, including funding for statements which has been delegated to schools. Most schools visited consider delegated funding for SEN to be sufficient, and welcome the flexibility that delegation gives in allowing them allocate provision according to the needs of pupils. There are rigorous and thorough systems for monitoring the effectiveness of how schools use funding for both statemented pupils and for those pupils at the early stages of the SEN Code of Practice. Monitoring places a strong emphasis on scrutinising progress made by pupils. Evidence from school visits indicates that the process is also helping schools shift their focus towards prevention and early intervention strategies. There is a well-developed understanding in many schools visited that children's needs can be met without progressing through all of the stages to a statement. There was also clear evidence of children moving down through the stages of the SEN register as well as up.

110. In relation to SEN, the LEA is starting to work closely to Best Value requirements. Aims for the service are appropriately challenging and plans are emerging that are effectively communicated to schools. Staff performance is monitored closely and the work of the service is evaluated appropriately through processes for internal self-evaluation, feedback from schools and, increasingly, evidence from parents. A Best Value review of the education psychology service currently being conducted is projected to lead to an increased efficiency in the delivery of the service. Evidence shows that the LEA is progressing steadily towards meeting its objectives. Success rates for inclusion are good. In particular, a measured approach to inclusion is being taken that allows schools time to prepare bids if changes to accommodation are required, and to enable mainstream staff to be trained and confident in dealing with the needs of the pupils.

Recommendations

In order to improve provision for special educational needs:

- improve the efficiency of the administration of statutory assessment; and
- make documentation for parents clear and user-friendly.

SECTION 5: ACCESS

The supply of school places

111. Hounslow manages the supply of school places adequately. Statistical planning has been generally accurate and the milestones of establishing a school organisation committee and producing school organisation plans have been reached. However, the school organisation plan itself provides insufficient information both in relation to data and conclusions.

112. Effective and well-planned action has already taken place to effect the amalgamation of four pairs of infant and junior schools into four primary schools for 2001. At the time of the inspection, the LEA was about to begin the process of reducing primary accommodation in the Feltham area. Once all these changes have been made surplus places in primary schools will be reduced to well below the current nine per cent.

113. The total of surplus places in secondary schools is now three per cent. This includes one school with 21 per cent spare capacity. Of the fourteen secondary schools, six have pupils in excess of capacity (four of the six have over ten per cent in excess of capacity.) In light of the new sufficiency and suitability data and also the pressure on admissions described below there is a pressing need to address this position.

114. Visits to schools and the school survey indicate that many schools regard the LEA's management of school places as less than satisfactory. The provision of a new primary school in Feltham in 1995 where there are now surplus places, the reduction of infant standard numbers and the expansion of popular secondary schools may well be contributory factors to explain some schools' concerns. In each case the action taken was in proper pursuance of policy, although the LEA might have communicated this more effectively.

115. The infant class size plan has been introduced and all Hounslow schools with infant children will have classes of fewer than thirty in September 2001.

Admissions

116. The admissions and appeals system is administered in a highly satisfactory manner. The secondary admissions process in particular is complicated both by the variety of Hounslow schools and inter-authority transfer: in 1999, 2,316 Hounslow pupils were placed outside the LEA whereas 3,360 pupils from other LEAs attended Hounslow secondary schools, representing over one fifth of the 11-16 pupils on roll. Consideration was given to the introduction of a banding system for secondary admissions in 2000 but this was rejected for good practical reasons, maintaining the established secondary admissions pattern. Although subject to regular review to account for specific changed

circumstances, admissions to primary schools through designated primary admission areas have operated since 1982. An admissions forum was established in January 2000 and subsequently used to advise on all admissions issues.

117. Admissions booklets are sound and provide the necessary information for parents according to the Code of Practice. There is appropriate co-ordination on the adoption of common dates in the admissions process with neighbouring LEAs and Hounslow voluntary aided schools. Officers have been involved in the training of appeals panels and administer some voluntary aided appeals on the school's behalf, both of which have been well received. Appeals are held in a timely manner in accordance with the Code of Practice. Appeals are high in secondary schools, because of parental preference for popular schools and the lack of surplus places. Secondary appeals heard have grown from 269 in 1999/00 to 312 in 2000/01. In primary schools, there has been a decrease from 45 to 11.

118. Hounslow has a high rate of pupil movement during the academic year which, in 1999/2000, saw 884 pupils (757 primary and 127 secondary) move within the LEA, 1,891 (1497 and 394) out of the LEA and 2,265 (1753 and 512) into the LEA. Even though the numbers are higher for primary schools, primary pupil turbulence does not occasion particular difficulties in the admission process. For secondary schools, because most schools are full through admissions at the beginning of the year, the majority of mid-term applicants for a secondary place have to enter the appeals process. The LEA has recently agreed a protocol with secondary headteachers for handling mid-term admissions.

Asset management

119. The LEA has much ground to make up in its performance so far on asset management planning. The LEA has satisfied the DfEE in respect of the condition assessments carried out as part of the asset management plan process. Nevertheless, both in the school survey and school visits, the majority of schools regarded the quality of asset management planning as poor, at best. Almost all schools visited expressed concerns about the inadequate, superficial manner of the LEA's school condition survey and the lack of consultation. Many of them considered that insufficient guidance and monitoring had accompanied the suitability survey which they had to conduct themselves. This has led to a general uncertainty about the reliability of data maintained by the LEA. The fact that the schools' consultative group for the asset management plan did not meet until July 2000 has further increased schools' unease.

120. Hounslow has a good record of capital investment to improve its school building stock. Between 1986 and 1999 Hounslow provided ten new schools, and undertook major redevelopment at seven secondary and two primary schools.

Recently, good use has been made of planning agreements from large-scale developments and the sale of land (totalling £3.9m since 1995) to enhance education building. Consideration is now being given to a private finance initiative scheme. There is effective monitoring of building costs.

121. The total costs of urgent and essential work identified in the condition surveys is over £16m, a large amount above the level of resources budgeted. While schools have access to appropriate technical support to assist them in their responsibilities, at present there is ample evidence of schools' lack of confidence in that support.

Social exclusion

122. The LEA's commitment to social inclusion is supported strongly by schools. Appropriate attention is given within the EDP priorities and other key plans to raising the attainment, provision and support for vulnerable pupils, although the identification of specific groups could be more precise. Education makes a good contribution to regeneration strategies. At the strategic level, initiatives are developing strength, and there is a high level of collaborative working between SEN services, teaching support services, school improvement and welfare services and other agencies such as the police.

123. Progress is being made. Permanent exclusions are reducing. As part of a series of effective measures to improve attendance, the education welfare service and the police have joined forces to undertake termly truancy watch initiatives. This has had the effect of reducing condoned absence and has started to raise awareness in the local community about the importance of regular attendance. Good guidance has been provided for schools on managing cultural diversity and satisfactory measures are in place to combat racism. A number of social events at local authority level portray and celebrate diversity. For example, a recent conference on valuing diversity in early years education contained a good mix of seminars and workshops on a range of equality issues, including those related to race equality. The day was well attended. The LEA works closely with the ethnic minority consultative group (EMCG) and there is strong support for the department's focus on raising the achievement of Black Caribbean and African heritage pupils.

124. Nevertheless, there remain significant challenges to be faced by the LEA if it is to be successful in combating social exclusion and effective in raising attainment of under-performing pupils. Challenges include: improving provision and attainment of children in public care; reducing fixed term exclusions and continuing to maintain and improve levels of attendance within an increasingly mobile and transient school population. In about a tenth of schools, monitoring and reporting of racist incidents are insufficiently robust. Whilst the council and its leading members are representative of the local population, progress in redressing an imbalance within the education service and within the teaching

profession has been slow.

125. The LEA is working towards meeting Best Value requirements in relation to social inclusion and access. Strategic plans are clear and have been effectively communicated to schools. There is a clearly stated commitment to securing greater efficiency and effectiveness in all areas of the service. Schools report high levels of satisfaction with most social inclusion and access services and where they have raised issues have found the LEA to be responsive. Considered as a whole, costs of access services are broadly in line with national averages and value for money is good.

Provision of education otherwise than at school

126. Support for pupils out of school is satisfactory and is rapidly developing effectiveness. There is a flexible range of provision that includes hospital teaching, home tuition and a pupil referral unit (PRU). There are clear phased plans for ensuring full-time education for permanently excluded pupils by September 2002. Currently the timetable at the PRU provides all pupils with well-structured provision for 80 per cent of the time. This includes adequate time for the study of core subjects as well as a range of foundation subjects including a modern foreign language. For those pupils in the final years of compulsory schooling there are ample opportunities to study, and from the evidence of the 2000 results, gain success in an increasing range of accredited courses including GCSE English and mathematics, GNVQs and certificates of achievement. A good range of provision, including link courses at the local college, is secured for those few pupils for whom a return to full-time mainstream education is either inappropriate or unlikely.

127. The PRU is able to offer a small number of temporary off-site placements for especially challenging Key Stage 3 pupils who are in danger of exclusion. The provision is proving a popular option with schools and, although there are clear criteria for placement and a panel which carefully considers on a case-by-case basis whether placement is appropriate, demand is in danger of outstripping supply. In a climate where eight secondary schools are in the process of establishing learning support units, the LEA is sensibly resisting growth in PRU provision and is quite rightly taking the stance that any extension of off-site placements will need to be met through a reduction in the numbers of permanently excluded pupils.

128. Policies and procedures for reintegrating pupils back into mainstream are clear. Well over a half of excluded Key Stage 3 pupils are successfully reintegrated into mainstream school within six months of attendance at the PRU. This represents a substantial improvement compared with two years ago when only about a sixth of pupils were reintegrated within six months. The broad and balanced curriculum on offer at the PRU is a major factor facilitating transition and in ensuring a successful reintegration. Negotiating with schools to accept excluded pupils has proved problematic, and a handful of those secondary

schools with spare capacity have taken more than their fair share of challenging pupils. A protocol is now in the process of being agreed whereby all secondary schools will offer placements through a system of managed transfer. All involved see this as a step in the right direction.

129. The LEA has sound procedures in place for registering and monitoring pupils who are educated by parents at home. Suitable checks are made on all home-educated pupils and satisfactory reports prepared outlining the progress made against the curriculum.

Attendance

130. Support to improve attendance is satisfactory, overall and effective in secondary schools. There has been a noticeable trend of improvement in secondary attendance over the last three years, with an especially marked reduction in authorised absence. Attendance rates in secondary schools are now in line with national averages. Attendance in primary schools remains below the national average, despite over the last three years improving at a slightly faster rate than nationally. At primary both authorised and unauthorised absence remain relatively high. Most schools consider that they receive good support from the education welfare service (EWS). The EWS has good links with other LEA teams and contributes appropriately to EDP priorities.

131. Visits to schools by education welfare officers (EWOs) are made regularly. Time is allocated appropriately according to need. In particular the six schools with attendance levels of less than 90 per cent receive well targeted support. There is a clear statement of intent for working in partnership with schools, with procedures and responsibilities defined well. The consistency with which EWOs carry out their duties is starting to have a marked effect, especially in secondary schools. Legal proceedings are increasingly being used when necessary with prosecutions fast tracked if appropriate.

132. The EWS provides good guidance to individual schools on developing a whole school approach to improving attendance, including establishing prompt follow up of absences and early intervention strategies. In particular, the service has helped individual schools produce policies and guidelines aimed at reducing the impact of extended holidays on pupils' attendance. This valuable work at school level is not supported sufficiently by work at a whole area level so that all parents, carers and pupils develop a clear understanding of the importance of regular attendance and punctuality. A quarter of primary schools visited do not feel secure that a consistent approach is being adopted across the borough and this is seen to be constraining the effectiveness of their own initiatives.

Behaviour support

133. Effective support is provided for behaviour problems faced by schools.

The LEA strategy, as set out in the behaviour support plan 2001-2003, is comprehensive and clear and has been subject to extensive consultation. Schools know how to access support.

134. The LEA is tackling high levels of permanent and fixed term exclusions. Over the last two years there has been a reduction in the number of permanent exclusions from secondary schools. Evidence indicates that this trend is continuing; there has been a 20 per cent reduction in the number of permanent exclusions between September 2000 and February 2001 when compared with the same period last year. The LEA is well placed to meet its 2001/02 target of 61 pupils and is sensibly in the process of renegotiating a lower target. Permanent exclusions from primary schools have risen slightly but remain broadly in line with national averages. As nationally, boys account for the majority of all permanent exclusions. However, unlike the position in a number of authorities, ethnic minority heritage pupils are not over-represented within the exclusion figures. Fixed term exclusions, although reducing, remain above the national median and are too high.

135. A wide range of strategies is used to improve the behaviour management skills of staff in schools. These include support in developing individual pupil programmes and providing training courses for midday supervisors. The strength of the support for behaviour lies in its prompt response and expert advice. This includes support for complex cases and very disturbed youngsters needing the combined support of several agencies. Although schools often have to wait for such support, there is sufficient flexibility in the system to allow a prompt response to urgent need. The stability and continuity of staffing within the Teaching Support Service, which has allowed the gradual acquisition of a repertoire of skills, is seen by schools visited as a major contributory factor to good standards of behaviour within schools.

136. The LEA actively promotes early identification of behaviour problems and prompt follow up with focused behaviour management strategies. A workshop has been established at one of the primary schools for early years non-statemented pupils with behavioural difficulties. Pupils attend the workshop on a half term basis, usually for about two terms. Primary headteachers visited view this as a valuable resource and evidence shows that it is effective in its interventions with individual pupils. At secondary level, termly consultative meetings are being established involving a range of LEA support services. These are intended to assist with the identification of pupils at risk of permanent exclusion and to explore *in situ* what options are available to schools to assist them in meeting the needs of these pupils. Discussions include the examination of a school's approach to individual cases as well as whole school approaches to social inclusion. It is too early to judge the success of the initiative, but secondary schools visited broadly welcome the move.

Health, safety, welfare, child protection

137. The LEA has clear policies on health and safety and schools have detailed guidance and materials on policies and procedures. Risk assessment forms for off-site visits are monitored thoroughly and feedback is given to schools where necessary. A health and safety self-assessment tool is being developed with eight schools and is expected to be available to all schools in January 2002. The health and safety officer collates the accident forms, looks for trends and reports back to schools where appropriate. Schools visited report that questions are responded to quickly and that sound advice is given.

138. There is good training and support for child protection issues and this extends from headteachers to newly qualified teachers. The LEA holds an up-to-date list of designated teachers with responsibility for child protection issues and monitors attendance at training sessions. Training has been well received by those schools visited. Assistance with child protection issues at school level has improved recently, but there are still instances where action is insufficiently prompt. This is particularly the case if the child lives outside the borough.

Children in public care

139. Strengths outweigh weaknesses in the provision for children in public care. The local authority has made good progress in collecting information on educational attainment, attendance records and special educational needs. Data is now held on all 200 children in public care, including the 50 per cent educated outside of the borough.

140. The council has taken corporate responsibility to promote the educational achievement of children in their care. The social services and education departments have improved co-ordinated and strategic action to promote educational achievement as well as the pastoral support of children in public care. For example, a looked-after children and education group (LACE) has been established and practical steps have been taken, such as giving focused and structured support to the children out of school hours. Training on preparing personal education plans and monitoring attainment is being provided for schools on a rolling programme, but at the time of the inspection no school visited had attended training.

141. Weaknesses remain. National targets were adopted for children in public care which are now recognised as being insufficiently robust and are being revised. Secondary schools visited remain understandably frustrated by an inadequate flow of information caused by a lack of continuity of care and frequent changes of social workers. Problems are compounded when the children are resident in other boroughs. These issues are recognised. The authority is in the process of agreeing a joint protocol with other LEAs in the London region on educational provision, monitoring and review of children in public care including

those with statements of SEN.

Ethnic minority children

142. The LEA provides satisfactory support for pupils of minority ethnic heritage, especially considering the challenges presented by the high levels of cultural and linguistic diversity and the increasing inflow of refugees and asylum seekers. The needs of ethnic minority children are a central theme running throughout the Educational Development Plan and this priority is endorsed by all headteachers interviewed and schools visited. The EDP, however, is not an adequate account of the actions taken to support ethnic minority pupils. In particular it lacks detail of how resources are allocated and of the targets set to raise achievement of ethnic minority groups. The ethnic minority and Traveller achievement grant (EMTAG) plan is much more thoroughly researched and appropriately cross-referenced to the EDP.

143. The total budget allocated by the council significantly exceeds that required to secure EMTAG funding, demonstrating members' commitment to raising the achievement of ethnic minority groups. The majority of the EMTAG funding (85 per cent) is devolved to schools on the basis of an agreed needs-based formula which takes good account of the prime objectives of the grant. Schools use much of the funding to buy back into the Hounslow language service (HLS) which is highly regarded. Almost all schools visited are using their ability to manage the HLS staff not only to target individual pupils but also to develop the skills of their own staff so that the strategies being developed can be integral within the school.

144. Detailed guidance and advice has been provided to schools on ways to use the 'non-language' element of the EMTAG funding. Schools visited, often in co-operation with the advisory teacher for race equality, are developing a range of strategies to raise self-esteem, aspirations and attainment within these groups. For example, a secondary school-based Windsor Fellowship monitoring programme is targeted with success at raising self-esteem and aspirations amongst black Caribbean and black African heritage pupils.

145. The collection and analysis of ethnic minority attainment data is comprehensive and used well to identify underachieving groups; target-setting is developing well. The LEA has a series of well-conceived small projects focused on raising achievement of under-performing minority ethnic groups where pupils are spread across the borough in numbers too few to be of statistical significance at an individual school level. Data recently provided for schools contains useful information about the local performance of different ethnic minority groups and clearly identifies if the school has under-performance. Over a third of schools visited are using the information well and are formulating plans to monitor and track achievement of groups of pupils, but not all have recognised that a shift is needed beyond target-setting at an individual level. The LEA is not complacent and recognises that there is still much to do in working with schools and community groups to raise the achievement of black Caribbean and black African

heritage pupils. Advisory staff working to raise the achievement of ethnic minority pupils are capable of securing improvement. However, the LEA needs to question if they have enough staff working in this area to ensure developments are sufficiently rapid and sustained.

146. The Traveller support team provides good support for over 200 Traveller children, their families and the schools which they attend. An early years support assistant is working closely with families to encourage enrolment in nursery schools and to ensure baseline assessment data is gathered. Attainment of Traveller children is now tracked as an integral part of the LEA's system and cohort targets have been set. The Traveller team provides much appreciated in-service training to promote an awareness of Traveller culture and to help schools develop whole school policies on Travellers.

147. Hounslow Language Service offers well planned but flexible support to schools receiving refugees and asylum seekers. A new arrivals helpline is available offering immediate advice and a very good interpreting service. The service organises support networks for families and provides in-service training to enable schools to develop their own expertise.

Measures to combat racism

148. The education department made a positive and prompt response to the publication of the Macpherson report. Information was sent to schools summarising the main findings of the report, highlighting the importance of promoting cultural diversity in the curriculum and of monitoring and dealing with racist behaviour. Discussions took place with the schools and the ethnic minority consultative group. This was followed by a series of well received training courses on issues of race equality, cultural diversity and underachievement in some ethnic minority groups. This training continues and is a structured part of induction for all teachers new to Hounslow.

149. As part of its action plan, the LEA launched a self-review initiative 'stages of development in cultural diversity and race equality in schools' which aided schools in revising their existing policies and practices. The attached adviser visits to schools in the summer term 2000 concentrated on the outcome of the schools' reviews. From the meetings with headteachers and evidence from school visits, it is clear that this initiative was a rigorous process which has brought positive changes.

150. Up-dated guidance was issued to schools on the way to report racial incidents. Vigorous and effective action was taken to encourage schools to report incidents consistently. As to be expected this led to a sharp increase in the number of cases reported. The system is monitored rigorously. Incident forms are analysed centrally and reports issued. Where trends are noted, such as abuse directed at Travellers, then the schools are contacted and advised accordingly. In addition, summary reports are made available to the senior

management team in the education department, the EMCG and all governing bodies. This is an appropriate system. The response from schools is positive and from evidence of visits to schools it is clear that the LEA is influencing action. The current reporting rate of 90 per cent of schools is expected to be 100 per cent next year. There is increasing co-operation between the LEA, the housing department and the police to enable racist incidents to be more effectively dealt with.

151. The LEA and its schools are acutely aware of the under-representation of ethnic minority groups within teaching staff and within senior officer positions within the LEA. Clear guidance on fair recruitment and selection of staff is available to schools and governors and the LEA is devising further strategies to encourage suitable applicants from ethnic communities to apply for vacant posts. Progress is slow.

Support for gifted and talented pupils

152. In consultation with its schools, the LEA is developing sound strategies for the identification and teaching of the most able pupils. A detailed analysis of the performance data has been identifying potential high achievers by age, gender and ethnic minority grouping. Good practice has been developed in a number of schools, especially secondary schools, over the last few years. This has been used, together with advice from other sources, in producing a policy and guidance document circulated to schools recently.

153. Four successful summer schools for gifted and talented pupils have taken place and some primary schools have had training at a local university. Plans are in place to train teachers in developing differentiated work for the most able, increasing their personal targets, strengthening the links between primary and secondary schools with specialist secondary teachers working with primary colleagues. This represents a positive approach to this challenge.

Recommendations

In order to improve the management of admissions, school places and asset management:

- review the adequacy of secondary school provision;
- with secondary schools, monitor the effectiveness of the protocol for mid-term admissions; and
- establish systems to ensure all parties have confidence in the premises data used to determine priorities for the asset management plan.

In order to improve practice in promoting social inclusion:

- implement strategies to reduce further the high levels of fixed term

exclusions;

- press forward with systems of tracking and monitoring attainment of children in public care and implement further strategies to raise their levels of achievement;
- ensure that all schools monitor the achievement of ethnic minority groups and set targets that are consistent with LEA wide targets;
- review staffing levels to ensure that there are sufficient staff to bring about rapid and sustained improvement for underachieving minority ethnic groups; and
- continue to seek ways of tackling the under-representation of ethnic minority staff within schools and the education department.

APPENDIX: RECOMMENDATIONS

SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

In order to improve the effectiveness of the EDP:

- make the plan more differentiated and define target groups more clearly; and
- make success criteria for all priority areas specific and measurable.

In order to improve the strategic management of resources:

- ensure that the review of spending on under-fives contains a rigorous evaluation of the effectiveness of provision.

In order to improve the structure for achieving Best Value:

- develop service planning by sharpening targets and including more clearly defined performance indicators. Align service plans more closely with financial planning;
- increase the emphasis on the measurement of performance across the education department; and
- provide guidance to schools on their responsibilities in respect of Best Value.

In order to strengthen the strategy for school improvement:

- improve lines of communication, consultation and responsiveness between members and schools; and
- review the role and function of the education scrutiny committee.

SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

In order to improve the strategy for school improvement:

- reduce the number of monitoring visits made routinely to all schools;
- follow up monitoring visits to all schools with written feedback that provides sharp and clear judgements and focused action points;
- make the reports available to the chair of governors as well as the headteachers; and
- establish urgently an effective system for the electronic transfer of pupil performance data.

In order to improve standards in information and communication technology (ICT):

- improve the support for the teaching and learning of ICT and monitor the impact on levels of attainment;
- work with schools improve the ratio of computers to pupils in both primary and secondary schools; and
- make better strategic use of the ICT expertise within schools in the authority to support curriculum developments.

In order to improve support for governance:

- monitor the appointment and effectiveness of LEA governors.

In order to improve provision for the early years:

- help secure better progression as children move through the foundation stage and into Key Stage 1.

SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

In order to improve management services:

- restructure the HELP booklet to give full information to schools about the costs of centrally retained and buy-back elements of each service, to enable them to determine if value for money is being provided; and
- introduce as a matter of urgency the proposed improvements in the provision for ICT administration.

SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS PROVISION

In order to improve provision for special educational needs:

- improve the efficiency of the administration of statutory assessment; and
- make documentation for parents clear and user-friendly.

SECTION 5: ACCESS

In order to improve the management of admissions, school places and asset management:

- review the adequacy of secondary school provision;
- with secondary schools, monitor the effectiveness of the protocol for mid-term admissions; and
- establish systems to ensure all parties have confidence in the premises data used to establish priorities for the asset management plan.

In order to improve practice in promoting social inclusion:

- implement strategies to reduce further the high levels of fixed term exclusions;
- press forward with systems of tracking and monitoring attainment of children in public care and implement further strategies to raise their levels of achievement;
- ensure that all schools monitor the achievement of ethnic minority groups and set targets that are consistent with LEA wide targets;
- review staffing levels to ensure that there are sufficient staff to bring about rapid and sustained improvement for underachieving minority ethnic groups; and
- continue to seek ways of tackling the under-representation of ethnic minority staff within schools and the education department.

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