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IN EDUCATION**

**INSPECTION OF
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LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY**

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CONTENTS	PARAGRAPHS
INTRODUCTION	1 - 3
COMMENTARY	4 - 14
SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT	
Context	15 - 18
Performance	19 - 29
Funding	30 - 34
Council structure	35 - 37
The education development plan	38 - 45
The allocation of resources to priorities	46 - 50
Best Value	51 - 53
Recommendations	
SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT	
Implications of other functions	54
Monitoring, challenge, support, intervention	55 - 61
Collection and analysis of data	62 - 65
Support for literacy	66 - 68
Support for numeracy	69 - 71
Support for information and communication technology	72 - 76
Support for schools causing concern	77 - 81
Support for governors	82 - 85
Support for school management	86 - 95
Support for gifted and talented	96 - 97
Support for early years education	98 - 99
Recommendations	
SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT	
Corporate planning	100 - 110
Partnership with external agencies and other local government departments	111 - 112
Management Services	113 - 117
Recommendations	
SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATION PROVISION	
Strategy	118 - 119
Statutory obligations	120
Improvement and value for money	121 - 127
Recommendations	

SECTION 5: ACCESS

The Supply of school places	128 - 131
Admissions to school	132 - 134
Provision of education otherwise than at school	135 - 138
Attendance	139 - 141
Behaviour support	142 - 144
Health, safety, welfare, child protection	145 - 146
Children in public care	147 - 148
Ethnic minority children	149 - 153
Social exclusion	154 - 156
Recommendations	

APPENDIX: RECOMMENDATIONS

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 work undertaken by the LEA on Best Value.

2. The inspection was partly based on data, some of which was provided by the LEA, on school inspection information and audit reports, on documentation and discussions with LEA elected members, focus groups of headteachers, staff in the department of education youth and leisure services 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 its schools. The response rate was 85 per cent.

3. The inspection also involved studies of the effectiveness of particular aspects of the LEA's work through visits to 11 primary schools, five secondary schools and one special school. The visits tested the views of headteachers and other staff, and in some instances, governors, 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. The inspection also took account of relevant evidence from Her Majesty's Inspectors' (HMI) national monitoring work.

4. **COMMENTARY**

5. The London borough of Hillingdon lies on the western edge of London. It includes affluent suburban areas as well as significant pockets of deprivation. Just under 30 per cent of the school population are from minority ethnic groups.

6. A number of historical factors have affected the LEA. A relatively high proportion of schools, including all but three of the secondary schools, were in the former grant-maintained sector. Levels of delegation to the remaining schools were high, and these schools chose to buy back a high level of LEA services, which were mainly well regarded. For the last few years, the council's spending on education has been below the Standard Spending Assessment for education. There have been fairly frequent changes in political and educational leadership, and the LEA did not provide its schools with rigorous challenge and intervention. More recently, schools have been affected by difficulties in recruitment and retention of staff.

7. Pupils' attainment is above average at the end of Key Stage 2, and average at the end of Key Stage 4. The rate of improvement is average or above, except at Key Stage 3. OFSTED school inspection reports indicate that, in general, the primary schools are performing better than the secondary schools.

8. A new director of education took up post in July 1999. He provides a clear vision for education and, together with the newly appointed deputy director, has considerably strengthened the leadership of the LEA. A number of important improvements have been made. In particular, primary schools have been provided with more effective monitoring and challenge. Intervention in the weakest schools has been more robust and, as a result, these schools are beginning to improve. This has been an important step forward and has significantly changed the culture in the LEA. However, challenge and support to the secondary schools are insufficiently well developed. Relationships with the secondary schools, including those which returned from the grant-maintained sector, have improved, but partnership is much weaker than with the primary schools.

9. The LEA has made considerable improvements in planning, performance management, and in the provision of data. There are areas of weakness, for example the Education Development Plan, which is the main plan for school improvement, and in special educational needs, where the LEA's strategy is not clear and provision of value for money is not assured. Additionally, although the LEA has many initiatives aimed at promoting social inclusion, they have not yet been drawn together into a coherent strategy which is clear to the schools.

10. Services provide generally sound provision to schools and, the LEA performs most of its functions satisfactorily. Overall, the LEA's strengths marginally outweigh its weaknesses.

11. The following functions are particularly effective:

- support for literacy and numeracy in primary schools;
- support from personnel;
- support for newly qualified teachers;
- support within education for child protection;

- support for early years; and
- support for Travellers, refugees and asylum seekers.

12. The following functions are not exercised adequately:

- the Education Development Plan;
- support and infrastructure for curriculum and administrative information and communication technology;
- the strategy for special educational needs and systems for demonstrating value for money in special educational needs;
- provision for pupils who have no school place;
- measures taken to combat racism; and
- property services and capital investment in schools.

13. Weaknesses in financial management led to major overspending by the council in 1999/2000. Monitoring systems have now been improved, but although members have stated that funding education at the level of the Standard Spending Assessment is now a priority, this will not be achieved before 2002/03. However, levels of delegated funding to schools remain high, and the council has passed on the increase in the Standard Spending Assessment to schools as expected by the Government. The council lacks a community plan, although there is an intention to produce one by 2002, and the council's values and themes lack sufficient emphasis on education. Despite these shortcomings in the council's planning, members provide satisfactory leadership and there is a consensus across elected members on educational issues.

14. Overall, this is an improving LEA. Nevertheless, in many schools the spectre of poor teacher recruitment and retention is undermining the best efforts of the LEA and the schools concerned to raise standards. This key issue has been given considerable attention by the LEA but actions so far have not met the need.

15. Although much remains to be done, the improvements so far in leadership, planning and support for school improvement are encouraging. On the whole, the LEA is aware of the weaknesses identified in the report and is already planning improvements. The inspection team is confident that the LEA has the capacity to address the recommendations made in the report and to continue to improve.

SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Context

16. The London borough of Hillingdon is situated on the western edge of London, and includes part of Heathrow Airport and the parliamentary constituencies of Hayes and Harlington, Uxbridge and Ruislip Northwood. It includes affluent suburban areas as well as some significant pockets of deprivation. The Department of the Environment's Index of Deprivation (1998) places Hillingdon as the 120th most deprived district out of 350 in England, but none of Hillingdon's wards are in the most deprived 10 per cent. Unemployment has fallen and in 1999 was 2.5 per cent. Census data shows that in 1991, the proportion of the population from social classes 1 and 2 was broadly average.

17. The population of the borough is estimated at 252,800, and is increasing at faster than the average rate. The school population in January 2001 was about 41,500, having risen by 9.2 per cent since January 1997. The proportion of school pupils from ethnic minorities was above the national average at 29.1 per cent (12.1 per cent nationally in 2000). A wide range of ethnic minority groups is represented, the largest of which is Indian. Recent surveys carried out by the LEA indicate a marked increase in the number of refugee and Traveller children in Hillingdon schools, the largest refugee group being from Somalia. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is broadly average for primary and secondary schools.

18. The percentage of pupils with a statement of special educational need (SEN) in primary schools in 2000 was similar to the national average (2.6 per cent compared with 2.7 per cent nationally) and to that found in similar authorities (2.5 per cent). In secondary schools in 2000, the percentage of pupils with a statement of SEN was above the average found nationally and in similar authorities (4.6 per cent compared with 4.0 per cent nationally and 3.4 per cent in similar authorities). The proportion of pupils educated in special schools is above that found nationally and in similar authorities.

19. There are 67 maintained primary schools in Hillingdon, one nursery school, 17 secondary schools, six special schools and one pupil referral unit (PRU). Thirteen of the primary schools and three of the secondary schools are voluntary aided (6 Church of England, 7 Roman Catholic and 2 Sikh). Twenty-one schools opted for grant-maintained status and these, plus a new secondary school, now have foundation status. Eleven independent schools are located in the borough. All the secondary schools have sixth forms.

Performance

20. Overall, pupils' attainment is above the national average at the end of Key Stage 2 and average at the end of Key Stage 4. The rate of improvement is average or above, except at Key Stage 3, where there is a dip and the rate of improvement is below average. Overall, primary schools are performing better than secondary schools.

21. Attainment in 2000 at Key Stage 1, when compared with that found nationally and in similar authorities, was average in reading and writing and above average in mathematics.

22. Attainment in 2000 at Key Stage 2 was above the national average and that found in similar authorities in English, mathematics and science. In English, 78.9 per cent of pupils attained Level 4 or above, compared with 75 per cent nationally and 75.3 per cent in similar authorities. In mathematics, 75.3 per cent of pupils attained Level 4 or above, compared with 72 per cent nationally and in similar authorities. The LEA's 2000 literacy and numeracy targets of 75 per cent and 74 per cent were both exceeded.

23. In 2000 at Key Stage 3, attainment in English, mathematics and science was average.

24. At GCSE in 2000, the proportion of pupils gaining 5 or more grades A*-C was in line with the national average and that found in similar authorities (48.1 per cent in the LEA, compared with 47.4 per cent nationally and 49.5 per cent in similar authorities). The LEA's 2000 target of 47.6 per cent was exceeded. The percentage of pupils attaining one or more grade A*-G was broadly in line with the national average, but below that for similar authorities.

25. At age 18 in 2000, the average points score per pupil for those entered for two or more A-levels or advanced GNVQs was below the national average (16.2 compared with 18.2) but close to that found in similar authorities (17.8).

26. The LEA has identified underachievement by boys, the most-able and certain minority ethnic groups (Black African, Black Caribbean and Bangladeshi).

27. At Key Stage 1, the rate of improvement between 1996 and 2000 was above the national trend. At Key Stage 2, the rate of improvement between 1996 and 2000 was broadly in line with the national rate. At Key Stage 3, the rate of improvement was below the national trend. At GCSE, the rates of improvement in terms of the proportion of pupils gaining 5+ grades A*-C, and the average points score, between 1996 and 2000 were above that found nationally, mainly because of a big improvement between 1999 and 2000.

28. Information from OFSTED inspections shows that the proportion of primary schools judged to be good or very good overall (75 per cent) is greater than that found nationally (71 per cent) or in similar authorities (69 per cent). The proportion of secondary schools judged to be good or very good (40 per cent) is very much lower than that found nationally (67 per cent) or in statistical neighbours (70 per cent). A much higher proportion of Hillingdon secondary schools was judged to require much improvement with respect to standards achieved (27 per cent), quality of education (20 per cent) and management and efficiency (27 per cent) compared with national averages (where corresponding figures are ten per cent, five per cent and six per cent).

29. Attendance in 2000 was below the national average in primary schools and was average compared with national figures in secondary schools. Unauthorised absence was high in both phases.

30. Permanent exclusions fell by almost 50 per cent between 1998/99 and 1999/2000. In 1999/2000, permanent exclusions from primary schools were below the national average, but those from secondary schools were above. Figures are set to rise slightly in 2000/2001.

Funding

31. The Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) for school provision in Hillingdon is 6 per cent above the national average and also above the average for statistical neighbours, but below the average for outer London boroughs. Hillingdon has consistently budgeted to spend below the SSA since 1996/97. In 2000/01, the increase in the council's SSA for schools was fully passed on to the Local Schools Budget (LSB) although this still leaves projected expenditure on education below SSA at 98.1 per cent. Members have expressed an intention to fund at SSA level by 2002/03.

32. The overall spending on schools is above the average for the LEA's statistical neighbours and that found nationally but below the average for the outer London boroughs.

	Hillingdon	Statistical Neighbours	Outer London LEAs	All English LEAs
Local Schools Budget (LSB) per pupil	£2,855	£2,775	£2,938	£2,755

33. The proportion of the LSB delegated to schools in 2000/2001 is high (87.1 per cent of LSB) compared to the average for similar authorities (84.9 per cent) and the average for the outer London boroughs (84.1 per cent). The LEA has met Government delegation targets. Schools are generally content with the range of responsibilities delegated. Centrally controlled budgets for statutory and regulatory duties, access and school improvement are below average for similar authorities. Arrangements for charging the costs of central services to the education budget are satisfactory.

	Hillingdon	Statistical Neighbours	Outer London LEAs	All English LEAs
Primary Local Schools Budget ISB per pupil	£1,958	£1,917	£2,024	£1,835
Secondary Local Schools Budget ISB per pupil	£2,833	£2,644	£2,729	£2,497

34. The LEA has been successful in co-ordinating bids for external funding through a steering group for additional funding and has targeted them to priorities. The total additional funding accessed by the LEA is above the average for LEAs nationally. A successful bid for Single Regeneration Budget funding has allowed a range of projects to be implemented in the Hayes and West Drayton area and New Opportunities funding has been accessed for childcare and out of school learning. Support has also been provided to schools on bids for lottery funding.

35. The council has been active in seeking funding for school places from residential development, which has allowed resources amounting to £2.3m over two years to be accessed for improved facilities and expansion in seven schools from planning agreements with developers. In addition, the council has submitted a Private Finance Initiative bid for a new secondary school in the north of the borough and is progressing a bid for City Academy status for an existing secondary school. Information to schools on available funding and advice for schools on the preparation of individual bids for grant are satisfactory.

Council structure

36. Hillingdon is a hung council with a minority Conservative administration. The current make up of the council is 33 Conservative, 32 Labour and 4 Liberal Democrat. The council has not yet modernised its structures as it considers there are difficulties in adopting a cabinet system in an authority where there is no overall control. At the time of the inspection, a full public consultation was in progress about which of the various possible structures to adopt. The results will be known by June 2001. Council intends to set up the necessary structures at that point, in order to meet Government requirements for Summer 2002.

37. The full council meets four times a year and delegates most policy decisions to eight committees and five sub-committees. One of the committees is education. The council is divided into six directorates, one of which is education, youth and leisure services (EYL). The directors, together with the chief executive and an assistant chief executive, form the council's senior management board.

38. Education, youth and leisure services is organised into six group management teams, each with a head of service. Most education services are in one of four of the groups: standards and effectiveness; pupil support; lifelong learning and resources. The standards and effectiveness group is headed by the deputy director.

The Education Development Plan

39. Although the Education Development Plan (EDP) has strengths, these are outweighed by the weaknesses, in particular the lack of commitment to it on the part of schools. Implementation of the plan is satisfactory.

40. The EDP, drawn up in 1999, was given approval for three years by the DfEE. There were reservations that the targets set and the school improvement programme for GCSE failed to tackle underachievement in the secondary sector, that SEN needed to be strengthened and that support to schools with serious weaknesses and

in special measures was insufficiently differentiated. The plan was reviewed and a supplementary plan was published in March 2000. However, it was not until June 2000 when a comprehensive evaluation of the plan took place along with a detailed audit of the performance of schools and the socio-economic context of the LEA that these weaknesses began to be tackled. Although key issues for action were identified in June there has been no overall revision of the plan to take account of the changes that have taken place. As a result schools are not clear about the current status of the EDP and the actions within it.

41. The priorities in the EDP have a clear rationale and cover national and local priorities. The audit carried out for the original EDP, while sufficiently detailed to identify broad priorities, was insufficiently robust in its analysis of performance data to focus activities precisely. There are weaknesses in the data analysis for minority ethnic performance, mobility of pupils and children in public care. The gaps in data analysis at Key Stages 3 and 4 were due to the fact that all but three of the LEA's secondary schools had been grant maintained and the LEA had not collected data from them for a number of years. Not surprisingly, therefore, activities related to underachieving groups focus on the acquisition of data.

42. There are seven priorities in total:

1. to raise standards of attainment in specific areas;
2. to develop information and communication technology (ICT) to support teaching and learning;
3. to attract high calibre staff and governors;
4. to develop learning partnerships;
5. to ensure access and equal opportunities for all students;
6. to support schools giving cause for concern; and
7. to support school-self improvement.

43. Activities are clear, and are generally appropriate. Tasks, in the original EDP, lacked sufficient precision and detail to demonstrate how improvement would take place. There is some improvement in this in the update of March 2000. Responsibilities within the plan are clear, but timescales within each activity are insufficiently sequenced and accountability is not sufficiently well defined. The original plan briefly sets out the relationship between the EDP, corporate and other education plans.

44. There are some areas of strength in the plan. Literacy and numeracy are appropriately covered with a suitable range of activities to meet the targets agreed with schools. Target-setting is generally sound. There were weaknesses in the first EDP in setting targets with secondary schools and targets for GCSE had to be adjusted to make them more challenging. However, appropriate procedures are now in place to moderate targets, targets for GCSE have been raised and the level of challenge has been increased where it was inappropriately low. Visits to schools confirm that as the LEA's analysis of data has developed, target-setting has improved.

45. Consultation on the original plan was wide ranging and amendments were made as a result. However, a majority of schools visited had little knowledge of the plan or its current status. Priorities in schools' development plans often matched

those in the EDP, usually because of the prominence given by both to national priorities rather than as a result of deliberate planning.

46. Strategies for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the EDP were weak but have improved and new arrangements are being developed through Best Value, which should improve matters further. Success criteria were insufficiently linked to outcomes in the first plan, and this presented difficulties in evaluating its implementation. The first revision was based on an insubstantial review of progress. However, an evaluation conducted in June 2000 was robust and included an improved analysis of performance data. This evaluation appropriately concluded that although the tasks had largely been undertaken a significant proportion of the success criteria had not been met. In a number of activities the LEA had insufficient information and ICT systems to capture data were inadequate. The review also highlighted the need to improve the performance management of services. A further review of the progress on the EDP has recently been undertaken which will inform the production of the 2001/02 plan. Interim targets set for 2000 for Key Stage 2, GCSE and reducing exclusions were met, but that for reducing unauthorised absence in secondary schools was not.

The allocation of resources to priorities

47. The extent to which the council has been able to target resources at its priorities for 2000/01 is unsatisfactory. Financial management and planning in the past have had weaknesses. Hillingdon has had low levels of reserves for some years. The three year budget strategy presented to the council's policy committee in September 1999 identified that the existing low levels of balances exposed the council to the risk that medium-term planning could be overtaken by short-term measures in the light of unforeseen budget pressures. However, it also recommended that additional funding for schools provided through the grant settlement should be used to benefit schools. In December 1999, three year budget strategies covering 2001-2004 for primary and secondary schools were produced to allow schools more stability in planning.

48. As a result of major overspending in social services and education in 1999/2000, in July 2000 the borough treasurer issued a section 114 notice under the Local Government Finance Act 1988. This resulted in a week-long expenditure freeze and a budget review across all services of the council. The review led to council setting in train immediate improvements in its systems. In EYL, the review identified major shortfalls in the budget monitoring of SEN transport, home to school transport and direct SEN provision. Since then, improved procedures have been put in place to ensure that budgets are monitored and that variances are identified and reported to the group management team monthly. In the case of SEN budgets, reporting responsibilities and arrangements have been revised to align operational and financial accountabilities more closely. However, the number of statements of SEN is still rising, albeit more slowly than before, leading to increased expenditure. Schools' delegated budgets were protected from the reductions required to contain spending within 2000/01 approved cash limits.

49. There has been some restructuring of central services in the LEA to deliver the priorities identified in the service plan. However, there has been limited

opportunity for money to be targeted to these priorities. The LEA has identified resources to increase the funding of these priority areas in 2001/02.

50. Consultation on the education budget is good, and includes discussion with headteacher representatives at formative stages of the process. There is confidence on their part in the openness of dialogue at all stages, although there is concern that the total spending is still below SSA.

51. The LEA's funding formula has been amended over the years to reflect its policy of delegating budgets for most of its non-statutory functions. Changes have been made over the past two years in how the funding for non-statemented special needs in primary schools is distributed. There has also been redistribution of funding to achieve greater parity across primary and secondary sectors, provision of matched funding for Standards Funds and a reduction in additional funding for small secondary and new schools. Revisions are fully consulted on and reasons for changes are clearly and transparently communicated.

Best Value

52. The external auditor has confirmed that statutory requirements have been met in the preparation and publication of the council's Best Value Performance Plan. The council accepted the auditor's recommendation that it should develop its performance management systems but there is still some way to go. A corporate performance management timetable was established in 2000/01 which includes the monitoring of performance indicators by members and the senior management board. Arrangements are in hand for the development of a community plan in 2001/02 with the aim of fully integrating it with the Best Value Performance Plan in 2002/03.

53. The LEA's arrangements for conducting Best Value reviews and implementing performance management are sound. Consistent guidance for those conducting reviews has been produced by the chief executive's Best Value team, and all heads of service are responsible for monitoring the progress of reviews within their divisions. The LEA has put particular emphasis on developing systems for producing and reporting performance indicators in 2000/01. The number of local indicators is limited, but the LEA intends to increase these when better local consultation arrangements are established. The principle of continuous improvement of all services in line with Best Value review principles is incorporated in the LEA's service plan, but the rigour with which it is implemented in services not subject to specific Best Value reviews is not sufficiently well monitored.

54. Schools are aware of the Best Value review process and some have actively participated in it. However, specific guidance has not been issued on the implementation of Best Value in schools, especially in relation to procurement of services.

Recommendations

To improve the quality of planning for school improvement:

- the work being undertaken to define service standards and performance indicators should be continued; these should be used to inform the success criteria in the EDP; and
- steps should be taken to ensure that schools know the current status of the activities within the plan and that systems are put in place to link the activities within the plan to those within schools' development plans.

In order to ensure that schools apply the principles of Best Value in the deployment of their budget:

- appropriate guidance should be issued to schools on the application of Best Value principles across their activities.

SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Implications of other functions

55. On the whole, the LEA's other functions give satisfactory support to school improvement. For example, the support for ethnic minority pupils, Travellers and asylum seekers and support for attendance and behaviour make a sound contribution. However, there are weaknesses, for example in the strategy for SEN and in the provision for pupils without a school place.

Monitoring, challenge, support, intervention

56. The LEA has improved its provision of monitoring, challenge, support and intervention, although significant weaknesses remain. In particular, challenge and support to the primary schools are now effective. The LEA has put in place appropriate systems for identifying schools causing concern. Intervention is now more robust and the LEA is making satisfactory progress in improving the weakest primary and secondary schools. However, challenge and support to the secondary schools are insufficiently well developed, and monitoring is not differentiated enough; these are important weaknesses.

57. The EDP set out the LEA's intentions with regard to school improvement. More recently, the LEA circulated an updated strategy to headteachers for consultation. Appropriate criteria have been set out against which standards, quality and management are judged. This is in line with the Code of Practice on LEA-School Relations, is more detailed and more clearly defines procedures for monitoring, challenging, supporting and intervening in schools. Schools are to be placed in one of five categories, ranging from good practice schools to those in special measures. A traffic light arrangement of green, amber and red is superimposed on this, through which support and intervention are to be provided differentially to schools. Although it has some good features, this proposed system is unnecessarily complicated. Schools are categorised through an annual school review conducted with every primary and secondary school by a link officer. However, in the special schools reviews are carried out by two of the special school headteachers who are reluctant to make judgements on their colleagues.

58. There are strengths in the annual school review but also some weaker elements. The LEA is trying to do too much, and the process is insufficiently differentiated. The review is a demanding, five-stage process, based on an entitlement of three days, which takes place throughout the year and culminates in a report to the headteacher and the governing body. It has been operating in primary schools since 1997, albeit in a different form. At the time of the inspection secondary headteachers had only just received the strategy and some were sceptical that it would work. Nevertheless, link officers have carried out the analysis of data and target setting elements of the review for all schools. The resulting reports are sound, consistent in their quality and approach and have been valued in the primary schools visited. Support for target setting provided by link officers has improved this year owing, in part, to the better data available, and is suitably challenging. The review also evaluates the self-evaluation processes in the school and monitors progress on the school development plan. This has not taken place this year yet, but primary

schools had found it supportive in the past. It is therefore not surprising that in the school survey primary schools rate this aspect of the LEA's work above satisfactory but secondary schools rate it below.

59. However, the reviews are insufficiently differentiated in their scope and rigour. Too much time is given to effective schools and too little time to those schools which cause the LEA concern, or have been identified by OFSTED as underachieving or having serious weaknesses. In visits to three schools causing concern, monitoring had been insufficiently rigorous to ensure that good progress was taking place and that the schools were targeting their energies in the most effective ways. Nevertheless, most schools designated as weak are receiving effective support and are improving.

60. The advice, inspection and management support service (AIMS) provides the lead on school improvement and service deployment is related directly to the priorities within the EDP. Service level agreements (SLAs) define those services purchased by schools and those undertaken for the LEA. Link officers are crucial in carrying out the LEA's statutory role including monitoring, challenge and intervention. They also provide subject support, which schools purchase. They have appropriate expertise and experience and are deployed to work with eight to twelve schools each. There is no expertise in SEN although special school headteachers believe this is not necessarily a pre-requisite for the link role. Despite link officers' roles being more precisely defined than in the past there remains a lack of clarity in their deployment to schools. Part of the link officer's role is to advise schools on the availability of support services provided by the LEA and to evaluate the effectiveness of these services in supporting the school to raise standards. Schools recognise that the brokerage role of these officers is growing but it does not yet extend to include advice on services provided by agencies other than the LEA. Additional support is provided through the curriculum advisers. They are generally well regarded by primary schools, are bought back through a service level agreement and cover almost every area of the curriculum. Consultants fill gaps in provision. Secondary schools purchase support selectively; the advisers are mainly primary focused.

61. The advice, inspection and management support service has suffered from a lack of management in the recent past. A new appointment has recently been made at deputy director level, which is leading to a more coherent approach. Management is improving. There are three senior advisers responsible for standards, school support and management support. They work closely together but a lack of leadership in the past has resulted in some inconsistencies in practice. The service plan for AIMS predates the recently proposed strategy for school improvement and is weak. However, all link officers and advisers have performance and development agreements based on their responsibilities for activities within the EDP. Performance plans are good, success criteria are, where possible measurable and individual's development needs are agreed with line managers through regular meetings. A service handbook is in place. This sets out professional accountabilities, but working protocols and procedures are not written down and shared with schools.

62. A Best Value review has been undertaken but has not been taken through committee. It signals the need for the service to clarify its purpose, structure and

costs and to develop a brokerage and procurement role. Resources for school improvement in Hillingdon are the second highest within statistical neighbours, but are below the London average. The review rightly concludes that the service has been most effective in the primary sector. The improvement in monitoring, challenge, support and intervention to schools and in the performance management of the service indicate that, despite a number of weaknesses, the service is capable of improvement.

Collection and analysis of data

63. The LEA's analysis of performance data was previously weak. Recently, considerable efforts have been made to improve the quality of data provided to schools. Performance data and their use to set targets in schools are now satisfactory and are improving. However, in special schools support has been limited.

64. The EDP appropriately targeted the need to improve the analysis of data for underachieving groups, pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds and the capacity of schools to improve the use of data to inform self-review. The revised EDP recognises the need to improve the transfer of data from one key stage to another.

65. The LEA's own review indicates that in most of these areas satisfactory progress has been made. Visits to schools and discussions with headteachers and officers carried out as part of this inspection confirm that view. Clear guidance has been provided for schools on target-setting, a commercial package for data analysis has been put into schools and training on its use has been provided. Schools' link officers have received training on data analysis.

66. The LEA recently improved its analysis of data on the achievement of ethnic minority pupils and work is underway to analyse the impact of mobility on pupils' attainment in Key Stage 3. Data transfer from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 has also improved this year although ICT systems are not yet fully in place to allow the data to be transferred electronically.

Support for literacy

67. Support for literacy is good overall with some very good features in primary schools. In secondary and special schools it is satisfactory. The LEA has a good strategy for literacy at Key Stages 1 and 2 that is outlined in the EDP and is linked well to family and community literacy projects and to the national literacy strategy. Plans for the consolidation of this work in Key Stage 3 are in place. The LEA's target for eleven year olds is set at 83 per cent achieving Level 4 and above in 2002. This is a challenging but achievable target. Seventy-eight point nine per cent of 11 year olds reached Level 4 and above in 2000, which exceeded the LEA's target of 75 per cent.

68. Strategies involving a focus on improving teaching and learning and providing direct support for individual pupils have been strongly led and well managed in primary schools. Weaknesses in reading at Key Stage 1, in writing at Key Stage 2 and in the performance of boys, have been systematically identified

through audit and analysis of performance. They have been addressed through centrally organised training in spelling and phonics and guided writing and support to individual schools. The LEA has made good use of the specialist expertise of teachers of literacy, teachers of English as an additional language and teachers in special schools to develop literacy skills for pupils with SEN, minority ethnic pupils and those for whom English is an additional language. The level of support in primary schools has, rightly, been based on a careful analysis of the performance of each school, rather than an LEA-wide analysis of need. Almost all of the schools provided with intensive support have made significant improvements. The quality and level of support in the secondary and special schools visited were more variable. A few schools expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of diagnostic feedback from lesson observation and the generality of advice which did not address the specific adaptation needed for pupils with SEN.

69. Primary schools have benefited from the knowledge, experience and effectiveness of the literacy consultants. They have provided well-focused and well-regarded help in raising standards based on identification of needs through lesson observation, scrutiny of reports and monitoring of pupils' work. The LEA has been effective in disseminating good practice through regular meetings of co-ordinators and the collection and distribution of examples of good work in individual schools. It has also made effective use of the various features of the national strategy such as booster classes. Literacy summer schools have been organised for pupils in secondary schools and the work has been supported by the school library service which ran a successful holiday scheme. Expert teachers have been identified and provide excellent support to colleagues through advice, training and delivery of model lessons.

Support for numeracy

70. Support for numeracy is good in primary schools and a satisfactory strategy is in place for Key Stage 3. The LEA target for eleven year olds was set at 78 per cent achieving Level 4 and above in 2002. The 2000 intermediate target of 74 per cent was exceeded by 1.3 per cent. The targets set are challenging, at 2 percent above the schools' aggregated targets, but are achievable.

71. The LEA has managed the implementation of the numeracy strategy well. Primary schools have benefited from centrally provided training, guidance and resources of high quality. Additional intensive or semi-intensive support which has been targeted at schools with most significant weaknesses has been successful in raising standards. A number of curriculum initiatives have been influential in raising standards. They include a focus on work in mental mathematics and the setting of half-termly targets by the LEA with resources provided to schools to support the work. These initiatives built on the strategy in the LEA that pre dated the national numeracy strategy. Mathematics challenges at each key stage and master classes for Year 9 pupils encourage pupils to deepen their understanding and apply their mathematical skills to solve problems.

72. Leading mathematics teachers have been used effectively to give demonstration lessons, spread good practice in teaching and learning and to support the management of the numeracy strategy in individual schools. The LEA has

secured sponsorship for a Mathematics 2000 booklet and activity pack which have enabled parents to support the development of their child's mathematical ability at home. Numeracy courses for parents and family workshops have provided further encouragement for parents to be informed and involved in raising standards of numeracy at schools and at home. The establishment of a resource bank of six computers gives schools with limited computer access the opportunity to use ICT as a learning tool in mathematics. Regular newsletters and meetings have helped co-ordinators in schools to be kept abreast of developments. Numeracy summer schools have been held successfully.

Support for ICT

73. Support for ICT in the curriculum and in administration is unsatisfactory overall. This is because there are weaknesses in strategic planning and in strategic management. There are some strengths in the support provided to primary schools by the curriculum advisers and in support to schools on management systems and technical matters.

74. Inspection data indicate that standards in Key Stage 1 and 2 are above those in schools in similar LEAs and nationally. Nevertheless, there is no room for complacency as standards are unsatisfactory in almost 25 per cent of primary schools. Standards in secondary schools are unsatisfactory in 29 per cent of schools at Key Stage 3 and 36 per cent of schools at Key Stage 4.

75. The LEA strategy for ICT is not understood by schools and is insufficiently focused on improving standards. Activities within the EDP focus on improving provision of hardware and software and management systems, although the importance of ICT in the teaching of literacy and numeracy is recognised. The LEA's ICT and data strategy defines an integrated approach to administrative and curriculum ICT. However, the planning within it is less detailed than the EDP. Planning by the curriculum advisers for ICT is well focused and based on an audit of need. Priorities appropriately include developing the role of the co-ordinator, making effective use of the QCA schemes of work and ensuring that schools cover the National Curriculum.

76. Progress has been slow in a number of areas. This to some extent is the result of a lack of management oversight for the area. Advice on the use of delegated National Grid for Learning (NGfL) funding is not given to schools and awareness of the LEA's ICT strategy is limited. In the first year of the introduction of the NGfL, an ICT inspector was in place and schools were given guidance on its introduction. Over the last two years schools have gone their own ways and the impact of the initiative has not been monitored. All schools are now connected to the internet and have an e-mail address. However, teachers and pupils do not yet have addresses and use in primary schools is varied. The LEA has no website, although this is planned to be in place after Easter. The use of electronic data transfer between schools and the LEA and sharing of information and good practice is limited. In addition schools have had little guidance on New Opportunities Fund training.

77. Some progress has been made. Link officers will, for the first time, monitor ICT as part of the annual school review and a good *aide memoire* has been produced to ensure information is gathered consistently. In eight primary schools visited curriculum support for ICT was responsive and generally sound. Curriculum materials have been produced in a number of subjects and training has taken place. ICT support has recently been expanded to meet the demand from schools. A thriving curriculum co-ordinators' group is established which schools find useful as a means of exchanging information. Secondary schools make very little use of the LEA's support, although three schools visited were complimentary about training they had attended. In the school survey, primary schools rate support better than satisfactory and above average. Secondary schools rate it below satisfactory and below average.

Support for schools causing concern

78. Support for schools causing concern is now satisfactory overall. The LEA currently has one primary school in special measures, six schools (including the pupil referral unit) with serious weaknesses, one identified as underachieving and six schools which are a cause of concern. Two schools were recently removed from special measures, and one was judged to have remedied its serious weaknesses. Additionally, five schools causing concern to the LEA have improved in the last six months, and have been removed from the category.

79. In the past, the LEA was ill-prepared to identify and support schools with weaknesses. During the period from 1998 to early 2000, ten schools were placed in special measures or deemed to have serious weaknesses by OFSTED Section 10 inspections. This situation only changed on the appointment of the new director of education, who rightly saw improving the weakest schools as a top priority. He was prepared to instigate and support robust intervention, including bringing in new headteachers where necessary.

80. Currently, schools in special measures receive good support. This has included the secondment of experienced headteachers, provision of extra funding, support from link officers, for example for training school management in monitoring and evaluating lessons, and support from curriculum advisers. Schools have also received good support from personnel over issues such as competency. Link officers play a vital role in monitoring the progress being made in schools and helping to co-ordinate support. Consistency in the quality of support from link officers has improved. In one special measures school visited which was receiving good support, the effect was being considerably diluted by shortages of permanent staff, and the high turnover of the agency staff being used.

81. Progress being made by schools with serious weaknesses, or identified as underachieving or causing concern to the LEA, although good in most cases, is more variable. In three visited, the monitoring provided by the LEA lacked sufficient rigour. There was over-reliance on the headteachers' views, and a lack of clear sequenced targets for improvement. Hence, despite much helpful support, the schools were not making sufficiently good progress. The LEA is prepared to intervene in and actively support schools which have not been identified by OFSTED but cause concern to the LEA. This is generally having a positive impact. A promising initiative to support

10 schools in the West Drayton area, several of which are experiencing difficulties, has been set up, but it is too early to see any impact.

82. The progress of schools causing concern is overseen by the school recovery panel, which appropriately allocates funds to the schools. Meetings of the services involved in providing support to schools are held to co-ordinate support across the LEA. However, in a few instances, schools have had difficulty accessing sufficient support from services which are outside AIMS.

Support for governors

83. Support to governors is sound with good features. The EDP identifies a number of appropriate strategies related to improving governance. Activities cover improvements to recruitment, training to develop governors' capacity to support school improvement and targeting support at those schools which have been identified as causing concern. A substantial commitment has also been made to training governors in their role in performance management and in planning for school self-review.

84. Support to governing bodies is provided through a SLA or on a 'pay as you go' arrangement. Primary schools subscribe heavily to the SLA but secondary schools make limited use of it. There is a wide range of training opportunities for governors but many courses are under-subscribed. Governors value the termly newsletter and briefing for headteachers and chairs of governors by the director of education. The LEA no longer provides clerks to governors. As a result, there is no formal mechanism for putting items on the agenda of meetings and the LEA rarely provides items for governors to discuss. This is a missed opportunity for communication and consultation. Governors in primary schools visited felt well supported in carrying out their duties and have been able to use LEA policies as exemplars to inform their own.

85. The LEA has recently promoted the 'Index of School Governance' which has been designed to help governors with self-review. A school self-evaluation conference has been run for headteachers and chairs of governors. Governors value the annual school review accompanied by feedback from the link officer. In four schools visited the LEA had worked with governors to improve the monitoring of the school. In one school the LEA had appointed 12 new governors and the director of education attends all the governors' meetings.

86. The LEA has taken action which has effectively reduced vacancies for governors. They now stand at six per cent, one per cent above the target set by the governor support service. Currently, most vacancies are for governors appointed by the LEA. This is because they have to be affiliated to a political party. There are few governors from ethnic minority groups.

Support for school management

87. Support to management has been effective in the primary schools. However, in the secondary schools there are some weaknesses, often because they have been reluctant partners in the LEA's initiatives.

88. OFSTED inspection data indicate that management in primary schools is generally better than the national picture and in similar LEAs. However, in the secondary schools there are weaknesses. Inspection evidence points to improvements in the management of primary schools between first and second inspections but deterioration in the secondary schools. A similar picture emerges with regard to the quality of teaching. OFSTED data also indicates that there are weaknesses in teachers' expectations and in methods and organisation in Key Stage 3.

89. The LEA's strategy in the EDP is appropriate. It deals with attracting and developing high calibre staff and governors and supporting school self-improvement. Training and development feature strongly and include headteacher induction, development and training. The review of the EDP in June 2000 rightly highlights the need to focus attention on improving teaching and learning in the secondary sector, but there is no evidence a strategy has emerged as a result.

90. Problems with the recruitment and retention of staff have become more severe since the EDP was written, and the LEA has put considerable energy into these areas. It has established a strategic manager for recruitment and retention, funded by the Teacher Training Agency (TTA). Data are being collected but are not sufficiently well analysed to identify the issues precisely; a bid has been made to the TTA for a researcher to carry out this work. The recruitment and retention of newly qualified teachers and the support and induction they receive are strengths. The LEA liaises closely with institutes of higher education and through recruitment fairs and the ethnic minority project with other LEAs. A graduate and registered teacher programme for teachers trained overseas and for further education is in place. The LEA has established taster courses for return teachers in shortage subjects and has set up work placements in schools for career changers. Additional support has been provided to governing bodies on the appointment process and on literature and advertising. However, gaps in the strategy exist, for example, although it has become recognised that teachers are key workers and housing needs to be found for them, schools have no sense that recruitment and retention have become council priorities.

91. Despite this work, the actions taken so far have not met the needs of those schools where the problem is most severe. For example, in three of the primary schools visited, two causing concern, teacher turnover and recruitment were having a detrimental effect on standards within the school. Headteachers were spending a disproportionate amount of their time and the school budget on teacher recruitment, teacher supply and retention. In most of the other primary and secondary schools visited the situation, while not severe, was deteriorating.

92. The school survey shows that support to headteachers in primary schools is viewed as better than satisfactory. This is a reflection of the good work undertaken

by the link officers. Secondary schools are more ambivalent and rate support for senior managers as satisfactory overall. There are weaknesses. The LEA has not carried out its intention to put in place induction for headteachers. A mentoring programme for new headteachers is in place but the schools visited and the headteachers interviewed were critical. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that there is no handbook to which headteachers new to the authority can turn. Training offered centrally is poorly attended by secondary headteachers but is considerably better attended by primary headteachers. The national professional qualification for headteachers (NPQH) is in place. Visits to schools, and the school survey, indicate that middle management training, overall, is weak. There are few opportunities other than in literacy and numeracy in the primary sector for middle management training. In the secondary sector the Beacon school has a well-established middle management development programme but there has been no dissemination or sharing of this practice.

93. The central training programme offered to schools is too wide and a number of courses are undersubscribed. Training needs are based on a good range of information but training is not sufficiently linked to the priorities within the EDP. There has been little constraint on the range of provision other than cost, because the service is fully self-funding, purchased by schools through a SLA or on a pay as you go basis. Primary schools are heavy subscribers, secondary schools are more selective. Continuing professional development has been part of a Best Value review on training across the council. Comparison with other training providers produced for the review indicate that courses in Hillingdon are cheap. In general, schools feel training provides good value for money and course evaluations indicate 80 per cent satisfaction. The Best Value review reaches the conclusion that the LEA is offering too wide a range of courses and the improvement plan sets targets to reduce them by 25 per cent over the next three years. This is an appropriate conclusion, which is substantiated by schools' views, but the planned reduction is too little over too long a period of time.

94. The LEA's approach to supporting schools to become self-improving is good in the primary sector although some secondary schools are reluctant to work with the LEA. Officers are accredited by OFSTED and the Basic Skills Agency as trainers. LEA conferences on self-evaluation for primary headteachers have been well attended. There has been good support to primary schools on monitoring teaching and learning and in seven of the schools visited, self-evaluation was well embedded. Three of the five secondary schools visited had benefited from training on self-evaluation. In a number of the schools visited link officers had provided support with the production of the school development plan, or OFSTED action plan. Guidance has recently been produced on the school development planning which is satisfactory although it has been produced separately from the school self-evaluation arrangements.

95. Dissemination of good practice is identified for development in the EDP. The LEA has made limited progress in this area and has not utilised the potential of the Beacon schools or the cluster group arrangements in which primary schools, and occasionally secondary schools, meet. Almost all the schools visited felt the LEA could do more to broker support across a wide range of services. This deficiency

has been recognised in the AIMS Best Value review and in the corporate Best Value review of training and development.

96. The LEA carries out its statutory responsibility with regard to the Standing Committee for Religious Education (SACRE). A good new multi-faith curriculum has been developed and an action plan drawn up for its implementation.

Support for gifted and talented

97. Support for gifted and talented pupils features in the first EDP and has been updated in the revision, but it is at an early stage of development. Activities are appropriate and include the production and circulation of guidance, the development of strategies and provision of training for teachers. Seven primary schools and one secondary school have piloted the work within the borough, guidance has been produced and a working group of headteachers established. Monitoring by the LEA of the first EDP indicates that there has been some slippage in putting in place the strategy.

98. Visits were made to six primary schools and one secondary school where work was being targeted at the most able. In two schools good progress had been made. Both had a co-ordinator in place and had made links with other schools in the borough. Policies were in place and one school had made extensive use of the LEA guidelines. Two secondary schools had participated in the borough organised mathematics challenge. The other primary schools were unaware of the LEA's strategy. Overall, more needs to be done to communicate and co-ordinate the work already taking place.

Support for early years education

99. Hillingdon has a long-standing commitment to early years learning and has made good progress in this area. The early years development and childcare plan is based on a detailed analysis of need for places. It takes good account of the local circumstances and recognises the needs of disadvantaged and minority groups. Information about childcare is a key part of the strategy and there has been a good response to the establishment of a children's information service.

100. Clear targets are given as steps towards providing all children with three terms of nursery education and providing additional childcare facilities. Steady progress is being made towards the government targets for child care places by the end of 2003. Interim targets for increasing the number of nursery places and for providing additional child minding places have been achieved. Schools have received very good help and advice on the admission of younger children into school settings. All rising fives will be in school by 2001. There are early indications that the policy of earlier admission to schools is likely to have a positive effect on standards, particularly of oracy by the end of Key Stage 1.

Recommendations

In order to improve monitoring, challenge, intervention and support:

- further develop the proposed strategy for school improvement to clarify the relationship between categories into which schools are placed and the support provided to them;
- the annual school review should be differentiated in terms of the time allocated and the scope of the review, to take account of the different needs of effective schools and those which cause concern;
- following negotiation, special schools should be provided with a link officer;
- the role of the link officer in carrying out monitoring, challenge and intervention, and in supporting schools in developing the schools' capacity to procure better services should be more precisely defined;
- a new AIMS service plan should be put in place which reflects the changes that have taken place to the EDP and links to the personal development plans of officers; and
- the AIMS handbook should be extended to ensure that working practices and protocols are written down; these should be shared with schools.

In order to maintain the progress being made on support for the use of performance data:

- systems should be put in place, which allow performance data to be transferred electronically and in a timely way from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3;
- the work being undertaken to gather and analyse the effect of mobility at the end of Key Stage 2 on attainment in Key Stage 3 should be continued; and
- special schools should be provided with support and guidance on the use of data to set targets.

In order to improve the quality of support provided to administrative and curriculum ICT:

- the strategy for ICT should be updated, drawing on the audit of progress being undertaken by the link officers in schools;
- the proposals to put in place the LEA website should be carried out and it should be utilised to develop curriculum guidance in subjects as a means of sharing good practice in schools; and
- systematic monitoring of the utilisation of NGfL funding in schools should be implemented, together with the provision or facilitation of appropriate technical advice.

In order to improve support for schools causing concern:

- procedures for monitoring schools causing concern should be strengthened, so that all such schools are provided with rigorous monitoring reports, based on all available first-hand evidence, and also with clear sequenced targets for improvement; and
- procedures for co-ordinating support from services which are outside AIMS should be strengthened.

In order to improve support to governors:

- better use should be made of governors' meetings in schools for communicating and consulting and responding to emerging LEA issues; and
- steps should be taken to fill vacancies for LEA governors in schools and where they cannot be filled, schools should be allowed to nominate governors to those vacancies without insisting that they declare a political affiliation.

In order to improve the quality of support to management:

- steps should be taken to work closely with secondary schools, to clarify a strategy for providing support to improve the quality of management and leadership, and to focus attention on ways in which teaching and learning, particularly in Key Stage 3, can be improved;
- induction for newly appointed headteachers should be put in place;
- in consultation with schools a strategy should be put in place and provision made available for middle management training;
- the number of training courses run centrally by the borough should be reduced and training more closely linked to the LEA's priorities for school improvement; and
- a structure through which good practice in schools can be shared should be put in place, and through which support can be brokered and schools can be encouraged to develop procurement skills.

SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Corporate planning

101. The council's planning does not provide a sufficient focus for education planning, although planning within education, youth and leisure services (EYL) is sound, and all statutory plans have been produced as required. The council adopted five corporate values and five corporate themes in 1998. These were used as the basis for the Best Value Performance Plan in 2000. The corporate values are that the council is:

- high performing and forward looking;
- working to a clear vision;
- proud to serve the public;
- respected by the public;
- proud of its achievements; and
- operating as one council.

102. The corporate themes are: a fair deal for all; modernising the way in which we work; providing better services; involving the community locally; and working in partnership and improving communications. There is no community plan at present, but there is an intention to produce one by 2002. There is insufficient emphasis on education in the council's values and themes. Nevertheless, there are five community programmes delivered in partnership with other agencies which form part of the Best Value Performance Plan and to which EYL makes a significant contribution.

103. Education, youth and leisure services adopted its own mission statement, values and strategic objectives in July 2000. These are appropriate. The mission statement is:

"To enhance the quality of life in Hillingdon by promoting learning and leisure opportunities for children, young people and adults in our diverse community."

104. The strategic objectives include:

- to provide leadership and direction for the LEA;
- to promote school improvement and high standards in schools;
- to address the special educational needs of children;
- to ensure all children have access to education;
- to offer high quality opportunities for lifelong learning; and
- to secure support services needed by schools.

105. Satisfactory structures are in place in EYL for service and team planning and review, and for performance management. Further improvements are being made. The EYL service plan for 2000/01 restates the corporate values and themes, and sets out how the EYL strategic objectives are to be achieved. It provides cross-referencing to other LEA and corporate plans and policies. The service plan is supported by team plans and by performance and development agreements for all staff which relate closely to it. However, some developments on the ground are now ahead of the service plan, which does not fully represent current priorities. For example, considerable work is now taking place to gather and analyse data and

develop performance indicators. EYL undertakes quarterly reviews of progress against performance indicators, in line with corporate policy. Individual teams have also started to review progress against those performance indicators which are linked to their team plans.

106. Although there are still gaps, an impressive amount of development work on planning and performance indicators has been completed. The pace of this work has put particular pressure on the policy, research and ICT service and this has been exacerbated by the lack of clear project management in this area and a shortage of staff. In response to this, there are plans to increase the service's staffing and strengthen its role within the standards and effectiveness group under the line management of the deputy director. This move is part of a planned restructuring of EYL, which will also bring personnel into the standards and effectiveness group so that joint working with the recruitment strategy manager can be strengthened. This new structure is appropriate and in line with what is happening nationally to strengthen support for raising standards.

107. The council has not given sufficient priority to education, but reaching SSA is now a stated priority of the leader. The legacy of past weaknesses in financial planning and management means that this will not be achieved before 2002/03. Increases in SSA this year have been passed on to schools in line with Government expectations and there is a clear determination to do so again next year. Financial decision-making is transparent.

108. The education committee, which has a broad membership and is still in operation, has worked reasonably well. There is currently a consensus across elected members from the different political parties on educational issues. For example, all parties supported the implementation of a phased programme to admit all rising fives by September 2001. The neediest schools were appropriately included in the first phase. Reports, including those on standards in schools, are subject to scrutiny and questions during briefings and in committee. Individual school inspection reports go to education spokespersons. The chair of education meets headteachers termly, and is building up a relationship of trust. Senior officers provide leading members with sound advice and members have backed the director of education over some difficult decisions, for example over action to tackle weak schools. However, members have not been presented with an overview of current plans for development. Delegation to officers is appropriate.

109. Overall, senior officers provide EYL with committed and competent leadership. The appointment of a new director of education in July 1999, and a new deputy director in October 2000, considerably strengthened the senior management team. The director of education has a clear vision for education and is seen by schools as a credible leader. On arrival, he correctly identified strengthening support for school improvement as the most important priority. Previously, there had been insufficient challenge to and intervention in weak schools. Changes, although not universally popular, were overdue. Further improvements are needed in the strategy for school improvement, in SEN, in the overall strategy for inclusion and in the strategic overview of all services contributing to inclusion, where insufficient use is being made of data to determine what needs to be done. This is recognised by the

senior management team, and in the first three of these areas working groups are already convened and making progress.

110. Improving partnership with schools was another important priority for the director of education. Twenty-one of the LEA's schools, including all but three of the secondary schools, had opted for grant-maintained status. They were brought back into the LEA in April 1999. Although relationships with secondary schools have improved, the LEA and the schools have not defined and agreed the basis for a proper partnership. The LEA has not succeeded in persuading many of the secondary schools that it can provide appropriate challenge and support. Relationships with the primary schools are good and now include an appropriate degree of challenge.

111. There are four key strategic advisory groups for headteachers and officers. These have been successful up to a point, especially in providing officers with up to date advice, but links with headteacher forums and cluster groups have not always been strong enough to allow for proper consultation with all members. Headteachers are not always aware of the content of policies that are being discussed. There are also concerns about the breadth of coverage and overlap between groups and the LEA has not yet reviewed how well these arrangements are working. The introduction of an informative and comprehensive fortnightly newsletter, the 'EYL Update', has improved communication.

Partnership with external agencies and other local government departments

112. There is a good range of effective partnerships with outside agencies. The lifelong learning partnership has been in place for three years. Good progress is being made. For example, family learning projects in targeted schools have helped to improve attitudes and performance of pupils in Key Stage 1. The LEA is a key stakeholder in the education business partnership (EBP), which, at the end of 2000, achieved the national quality standard. The EBP is well regarded by schools, provides work experience, and is involved in other promising projects with schools, for example mentoring. There is also good liaison with the police. Liaison with the diocesan authorities over school places is effective but strategic liaison over school improvement is not strong.

113. Strategic liaison between EYL, social services and the health authority is sound. There are some good examples of joint working. For example, 'Healthy Hillingdon', a scheme developed by a partnership of local agencies which all want to promote health in schools, was launched in 2000, and is jointly funded by the LEA and the health authority. However, liaison with social workers at school level is too variable to be satisfactory. Where statutory assessments of SEN are not completed within the 18 week timescale, this is almost entirely due to delays in obtaining advice from the health authority.

Management services

114. Overall, the support provided by management services to schools is satisfactory, although there is some variability. A consequence of the high level of delegation is that a large number of support services are offered to schools on the

basis of buy-back arrangements through SLAs. The SLAs are well presented and contain clear information on what services offer, both on a buy-back basis and at no cost where the statutory responsibilities of the LEA are being delivered. Schools visited were generally satisfied with the format and content of SLAs. A survey of schools has been carried out annually since 1995/96 on the quality of the services provided by Hillingdon and the results are analysed and reported to members. Where services have been criticised, action has been taken to improve provision. Take-up of services is variable with, in general, primary schools buying back a high level of operational support. Secondary school buy-back is lower.

115. The LEA provides very little information to schools on alternative providers of services apart from information on building contractors, some premises management services when requested and professional development where the requirements cannot be met within existing provision. The expertise gained by secondary headteachers during their experience in the grant-maintained sector has not been sufficiently recognised and accessed by the LEA for wider dissemination.

116. **Personnel** in Hillingdon operates as a corporate function with the exception of the schools' personnel service which delivers the LEA's statutory employer's responsibilities and provides schools with operational advice and support. This support is good and highly valued by schools. Particular strengths are the consistency and quality of advice provided by all members of the service, the support to headteachers and governors on capability processes, advice and guidance on the implementation of legislative and DfEE changes and support for newly qualified teacher and other teacher recruitment. The ability of the service to contribute to strategic recruitment and retention initiatives is limited by the lack of resources to establish comprehensive data collection systems, incorporating those schools which use alternative payroll and personnel services. The proposed transfer of the personnel service into the standards and effectiveness group alongside the recruitment strategy manager is appropriate and should enable closer working.

117. The **Finance** service provides sound support for budget managers and schools as well as delivering the statutory and regulatory role of the LEA. It plays a key role in preparation and consultation on financial strategy as well as monitoring the overall financial position of the EYL group. The resourcing of the service is being increased to enable better monitoring of SEN finances. Schools visited who bought the bursar service rate it good in assisting with budget management and financial systems support. Current monitoring procedures do not systematically identify potential deficits in schools that do not buy back the service and a review of this area is underway. A formal strategy for identifying and handling budget deficits needs to be established so that schools are clear about the action required by themselves and the LEA. At the end of 1999/2000, 4 per cent of primary schools and 18 per cent of secondary schools had deficits, including a secondary school with 15 per cent deficit which has now had its budget delegation withdrawn. Twenty-two per cent of primary schools and 12 per cent of secondary schools had surpluses greater than 10 per cent of the delegated budget. Schools are asked to provide reasons for surpluses greater than 12 per cent. Financial benchmarking data is not provided by the LEA, but schools are advised to make use of the Audit Commission schools' benchmarking website which has been supported by the LEA.

118. Services provided through the council's **Property Consultancy** received ratings from schools visited and from the school survey which were too variable to be satisfactory overall. There were complaints that quotes for building maintenance were unacceptably high and that the quality of building projects was unsatisfactory. Conversely, in other schools the service was praised for the quality of advice, project management and cost effectiveness. Schools have now been issued with the council's list of approved contractors. The recent building condition survey has indicated capital investment needs of £39.2 million on urgent and essential works over the next two years across all Hillingdon schools. The council's capital spending on LEA schools over 1999/2000 and 2001/01 is projected at £11.3 million including contributions from the council's capital funding. Due to the council's financial position these contributions will not be available for 2001-02 which is an unsatisfactory situation. It is not clear how much guidance is given to schools on prioritising the spending of delegated capital funds in line with requirements identified in the condition surveys of buildings.

Recommendations

In order to improve support for education at a corporate level:

- the proposed community plan should be developed by the council, and should make explicit reference to education; and
- the recruitment and retention of teachers should be prioritised as a corporate issue and strategies developed across departments at a borough level.

In order to improve strategic management in EYL:

- the service plan should be updated so it reflects the scope of current work;
- a clear project management plan should be drawn up for the policy, research and ICT service, which makes priorities clear and ensures that the work load is matched by the resources allocated; and
- a coherent strategy for inclusion should be established, and the strategic overview of all the services contributing to inclusion should be strengthened; this should include making greater use of the available data to identify what precisely is happening in each area and what action is needed.

In order to improve partnership and consultation with schools:

- the effectiveness of the strategic advisory groups should be reviewed, and improvements made where necessary.

In order to improve support for vulnerable pupils:

- structures should be put in place to ensure that liaison between social workers and schools works effectively.

In order to improve the support for management services:

- the personnel team should be more fully involved in development and delivery of strategic recruitment and retention strategies;
- systems should be put in place for early identification of potential deficit budgets or excessive surpluses in all schools; and
- an appropriate strategy should be drawn up for handling deficit budgets in schools, including identifying the roles and responsibilities of schools and LEA officers in the development and implementation of a financial recovery plan.

SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATION PROVISION

Strategy

119. The LEA's overall strategy for SEN lacks clarity. There is a three-year policy for SEN which dates from 1998 and is reviewed annually. Elected members have accepted and adopted a general statement of principles. This includes a commitment to inclusion and the development of more locally-based provision in order to reduce over time the number of pupils with statements of SEN who are placed in independent and out-of-borough special schools. This is being used as the basis for discussions about the strategy and policy for SEN, using the SEN advisory group and a group which is considering inclusion.

120. While this review is taking place, schools are unclear about the LEA's strategy and policy for SEN, particularly the implications of inclusion and the planned future role of special schools. This to some extent is the result of shortcomings in the mechanisms used by the LEA for communication and consultation. When the review is completed and the policy and strategy for SEN are determined, it will be important that they are clearly communicated, so that they are understood and shared by all schools.

Statutory obligations

121. The LEA meets statutory requirements in terms of statutory assessment, the maintaining of statements of SEN, and conducting annual and transitional reviews. There has been a significant improvement over the past year in the completion of statutory assessments and the issuing of proposed statements of SEN within the target timescales set by the Audit Commission. Over 90 per cent, apart from allowed exceptions, are now completed within the target timescale. A sample of casework files shows that the procedures are conducted fairly and sensitively and have good regard to parents' views. The effective work of the parent partnership officer and the early years support for SEN also contribute to the effective working with parents and contribute to the low number of parental appeals to the SEN tribunal.

Improvement and value for money

122. Although overall support for pupils with SEN is satisfactory, measures taken to demonstrate value for money are weak. The LEA spends a significant level of funding (£14.7 million in 2000/01 excluding special transport) on provision for pupils who are the subject of a statement of SEN. This equates to 13.3 per cent of the LSB, compared with averages of 11.2 per cent in similar authorities, 12.1 per cent in outer London boroughs and 10.9 per cent nationally. Spending was underestimated in 2000-2001 and revised estimates for 2001-2002 show that this is continuing to rise beyond the original levels included in the budget. The LEA is piloting a small-scale project on the provision of resources for pupils at stage 3 of the Code of Practice and there are early signs that this is successful. It would be useful to extend this further, as resources permit, as part of the LEA's strategy to reduce the number of statements of SEN it maintains.

123. The level of spending on placement of pupils who are the subject of a statement of SEN in independent and out-of-borough special schools is high, at £79 per pupil compared with £42 nationally and £56 in similar authorities. The LEA has plans to reduce this, over time, by developing more locally-based provision, mainly in resourced provision attached to mainstream schools.

124. Funding for pupils with SEN at stages 1-3 on the SEN registers is delegated to schools on the basis of a formula. In secondary schools the formula relates to the results on a reading test administered to all pupils in Year 7. In primary schools, the LEA is consulting on replacing the previous formula, which related to an audit of pupils with SEN, by one relating to baseline assessment data together with performance on one aspect of the National Curriculum assessment tests at the end of Key Stage 1. Although the new formula has been produced by consultation with a group of primary school headteachers, schools are still concerned that it has a narrow basis and may not adequately distribute funding to those schools with scores above the operating level, but which have pupils with SEN. Further work is needed to ensure that the formula is both equitable and transparent to all schools.

125. The quality of the various services to support pupils with SEN is mainly good. Schools spoke highly of services for sensory impaired, the language and communication team, and the portage system for nursery pupils, for example. The service for pupils with specific learning difficulties has been disrupted by staffing problems. The work of the educational psychology service is appreciated by most schools but is often over-burdened with statutory assessment and review work as a result of the high number of pupils put forward for assessment for statements of SEN by schools. In some schools the service also undertakes preventative work and gives advice and support. Overall, there is some variability in quality of service provided by individuals and in the way in which different educational psychologists work in schools.

126. Special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs) in mainstream schools receive good support via the SENCO clusters, and are provided with relevant training. SENCOs in schools visited reported receiving useful support from the school's educational psychologist or the allocated SEN officer.

127. There are gaps in the specialist training provided for new staff in special schools and in the adaptation of more general curriculum training so that it meets the particular needs of special schools. Opportunities have not been taken to promote work across special schools and across special schools in neighbouring LEAs on particular issues, such as the development of appropriate targets to be set in special schools. The LEA lacks a specialist inspector for SEN.

128. The LEA is not yet effectively monitoring and evaluating the costs and effectiveness of its provision for SEN. Some comparative work on Best Value has been undertaken, but is at an early stage of development. At present, it relates mainly to comparisons of the levels of producing and maintaining statements of SEN across a number of LEAs. There is little evaluation of the relative costs or effectiveness of provision in raising standards achieved by pupils with SEN.

Recommendations

In order to improve support for SEN:

- a clear strategy for SEN needs to be produced which:
 - is based on guidelines adopted by elected members;
 - includes a revision of the LEA's policy on SEN;
 - takes account of the role of special schools;
 - sets out the LEA's approach to early intervention and to controlling the continuing increase in the already high proportion of statements of SEN;
 - ensures that funding is clearly and equitably distributed; and
 - ensures that the use of funding delegated to schools is monitored, and the impact of support on the progress and standards achieved by pupils is monitored and evaluated.

SECTION 5: ACCESS

The supply of school places

129. The management of school places is satisfactory. Prior to April 1999 the LEA, as an authority with a high proportion of grant-maintained schools, worked closely with the Funding Agency for Schools which had the responsibility for secondary school places. Since April 1999 the LEA has taken a strategic approach to the planning of school places which is appropriately linked to the asset management planning. Relationships with diocesan boards and other partners are effective. The school organisation plan provides a sound basis for assessment of and response to demographic changes, new housing developments and the effect of pupils coming into the secondary sector from other boroughs. There are currently no Key Stage 1 classes above 30 with only one teacher.

130. The LEA has taken effective action to ensure that capacity is available to meet increasing rolls across primary and secondary phases and the level of surplus places is below the national average. Currently the percentage of surplus places is 8.2 per cent in primary schools and 6.9 per cent in secondary schools. Forecasts of pupil numbers indicate that this surplus capacity is essential to meet the expected rises in primary and secondary pupil rolls.

131. A proposal for a new secondary school to provide 150 places per year group in the north of the borough is currently awaiting approval of Private Finance Initiative credits from the DfEE. In the interim, a secondary school in the north of the borough has been expanded to meet the demand for provision of places.

132. All 17 maintained secondary schools and one special school have sixth forms with sizes ranging from below 50 to above 400. The LEA is currently working with secondary heads to develop a strategy that delivers high-quality sixth-form provision and a few schools visited had already entered into collaborative arrangements with other schools or Uxbridge College. The demand for post-16 education is anticipated to increase in coming years and the LEA is awaiting the outcome of the consultation on the transfer of funding to the Learning Skills Council before proceeding further.

Admissions to school

133. The LEA is making sound progress in developing admissions arrangements in a complex context although it is not able to meet fully the wishes of parents. The borough does not manage the admissions process for 12 secondary foundation schools and a further 16 voluntary aided schools which are admissions authorities.

134. The LEA's admissions booklets are informative and easy to use and meet the requirements of the admissions code of practice. However, a very low proportion, only 26 per cent of parents, obtained places for their child in a school of their first choice. This is a reflection of the number of secondary schools for which the LEA does not act as the admissions authority, particularly in the north of the borough. Efforts are made by the LEA to brief primary headteachers so that adequate advice can be provided to parents of secondary transfer pupils.

135. Admissions are operated to a common timetable. All but about 20 pupils are allocated places in secondary schools by the end of June. The LEA has made efforts in the past through the admissions forum to establish a centralised admissions process and common application form but has been unsuccessful in gaining the agreement of the secondary schools, to the detriment of pupils and parents within the borough. The recent Best Value review of the pupil support services has identified this as an area for improvement. Expenditure by the LEA on this area is significantly less per pupil than either similar authorities or the national average.

Provision of education otherwise than at school

136. The LEA's provision for pupils who have no school place is unsatisfactory overall. The LEA spends less than half the national average on access to education and this is reflected in the insufficiency of appropriate places for pupils who do not have a statement of special educational needs but require some education outside the normal school setting. The system of referral for such pupils to the pupil planning meeting is well known to schools. Once pupils are out of school for reasons of exclusion, illness or other reasons, their placement is regularly monitored through the pupil tracking meetings, during which action plans are updated. However, both the length of time taken to place a significant minority of pupils and hours provided have been unsatisfactory. A shortening of the average time between referral and placement and an increase in hours of tuition to an average of 12 hours per pupil are very recent improvements.

137. Schools are not satisfied that the range of alternative education matches the needs of all pupils. The PRU has been identified by OFSTED as having serious weaknesses, but following support from the LEA has improved. Schools regard it as making good provision, mostly for permanently excluded pupils. However, it cannot meet the current demand. As a result, there has been an unplanned increase in home tuition. For a few children this is only five hours a week.

138. The LEA has appropriate arrangements to monitor the education of children whose parents choose to educate them at home but not all homes have been visited within the specified time. Pregnant schoolgirls are encouraged to stay in their schools for as long as possible; where this is impossible, they are offered tuition.

139. Although there is a stated commitment to reintegration in the LEA's policy, rates are currently low. Pupils who attend the PRU are entered for examinations and achieve some success. The LEA lacks an overview of the attainment of all pupils who are permanently excluded. Plans are in place to improve provision by providing 25 hours of full-time education within 15 days by September 2002 and to work with the youth offending team to develop a new service for children who are not attending school and specifically those at risk of offending. The service has the capacity to improve, but at present there is insufficient overview of provision and outcomes.

Attendance

140. Support for attendance is satisfactory overall. Overall attendance is broadly in line with the national average in secondary schools but it falls below in primary schools. In 1999/2000 the target of 0.9 per cent unauthorised absence in primary schools was met, but that of 1.3 per cent in secondary school was not met. The future targets are going to be hard to achieve, based on past performance. The transitory nature of the school population is one contextual factor which has contributed to this lack of improvement. A major local employer of parents in schools in the south of the borough has operational restrictions on staff taking leave in school holidays, which also has an adverse impact on pupils' attendance.

141. The education welfare service provides good support which is valued by most schools. It has played a key role in enabling the LEA to fulfil its statutory duties and members of the service have worked energetically to help schools to improve attendance through a number of activities. These have included regular attendance checks, home visits, attendance at parents' evenings and presentations at assemblies. The LEA takes attendance very seriously and is in the top quartile of London authorities for taking out prosecutions against parents. The maintenance of these pupils on roll through the long period of time taken before the court proceedings take place however, makes attendance figures worse in the short term. Other general help from the central service has included the establishment of a truancy hotline and regular truancy sweeps with police, although these have had limited impact.

142. The service evaluates the effectiveness of its strategies and make changes to its patterns of working in an attempt to have greater impact. Education welfare officers now target more support to schools with the highest rate of absence. Projects at particular schools have resulted in improved attendance but the numbers of pupils involved are small. The LEA recognises that the systematic collection of data will enable not only better targeting of schools but earlier intervention. It has attempted to collect data monthly but this policy does not differentiate between schools where attendance is or is not a problem, and not all schools have co-operated. Most schools do not have computerised registration systems which would make the request easier to comply with. Secondary schools are able to use their discretion about how to use delegated funding to support improved attendance. The LEA offers advice which is not always heeded and does not monitor the impact closely.

Behaviour support

143. LEA support for improving behaviour is satisfactory. The EDP and the behaviour support plan reflect the high priority placed on reducing the rate of permanent exclusions. In this, the LEA has been successful, although there has been a slight rise so far in 2000/01. As with national trends, there is a disproportionate representation of minority ethnic groups in these figures. The provision of counselling services by a project funded by the health authority and the youth service has contributed to the reduction in exclusions, particularly those related to drug misuse. The LEA encourages schools which are relatively high

excluders to introduce pastoral support programmes to address the needs of individual pupils at risk of exclusion.

144. The behaviour support plan links well to other plans and contains reasonable targets and strategies to improve attendance and behaviour. It gives a clear guide to the LEA's intentions but not of how the success of the various strategies is to be evaluated. The behaviour support forum, which is a multi-agency group, monitors the implementation of the behaviour support plan but there is no effective mechanism for judging how well secondary schools are using the delegated funding targeted at supporting attendance and behaviour. The forum also has a co-ordination function but this is not yet well developed.

145. The educational psychology service plays a key role in supporting pupils presenting difficult behaviour. Its advice, training and support are highly regarded by schools. A behaviour support team was established to offer preventative help in line with the borough's support for inclusion. The team has produced useful written guidance and helpful training courses on aspects of behaviour management have been provided for staff and classroom assistants. A help line and "surgery" sessions enable staff to have ready access to advice on particular problems and to resources. However, although some pupils have benefited from shared placements with the PRU, there is not sufficient support from the LEA in dealing with children with extremely challenging behaviour.

Health, safety, welfare, child protection

146. The LEA has clear and comprehensive policies on health and safety. Schools have access to a range of specifically focused materials and training as well as regular information through 'EYL Update'.

147. Good child protection procedures are in place and are effectively communicated to schools. Schools can access telephone support and advice if they have concerns. They have confidence in the advice provided and rate highly the support given. A good range of information is available to staff, pupils and parents on a variety of issues such as domestic violence and protection from paedophiles. The LEA has provided extensive training to raise awareness and up-date staff in schools and in related central services of changes in procedures. There is close monitoring of children on the child protection register. The LEA makes a valued contribution to the area child protection committee. Links with social services are too variable to be satisfactory at the operational level in school.

Children in public care

148. Support for children in public care is satisfactory and the local authority meets statutory requirements for ensuring the welfare of the children. A number of attempts have been made to develop multi-agency working between education, health and social services. The Quality Protects Management action plan is appropriate and is in place. There has been co-operation for example, in a jointly managed pre-nurture group at one of the special schools to carry out preventative work with vulnerable children; joint working between members of the behaviour support team and social services to support foster carers; and a joint project to

provide specific support for emotional and mental health. The necessary restructuring of the social services department has however, hampered the development of joint protocols for working together. These have been developed very recently.

149. The LEA now makes a determined effort to monitor and track the attendance and achievement of these pupils; monitoring has hitherto been unsatisfactory. A recent joint conference between social services and education was held to launch the new guidance on the education of children in public care. Schools regard the present advice and support from the LEA as good and well-informed. Appropriate targets have been set for the attainment of pupils in 2002 but better co-ordination of inter-agency work is needed if these targets are to be achieved. It is planned to bring together the separate pieces of information that are kept about these children into a database which will provide a better basis for tracking their progress. All pupils have a health plan but not all have the personal education plan which forms the education component of the young person's care plan. There is a phased programme for drawing up personal education plans for all the children.

Ethnic minority children

150. The LEA's support for ethnic minority children has good features, and the support for refugee, asylum seeker and Traveller children, given the range and complexity of the issues to be addressed, is good. The EDP includes several activities targeted at these groups. It contains reference to the performance of minority ethnic groups but there is little specific action in relation to this. The ethnic minority and Traveller achievement grant plan presents a more clearly defined and appropriate strategy, setting out priorities and targets derived from local needs and national policies.

151. The ethnic minority achievement support service provides very helpful guidance for example on monitoring, partnership teaching and supporting new arrivals. Joint work with the literacy and numeracy advisers has resulted in helpful guidance on good practice in the development of literacy and numeracy skills for ethnic minority pupils. The majority of schools are very satisfied with the quality of advice and training for staff and of direct support to individual children. Particular strengths are the systematic assessment and monitoring of the stage of language acquisition of pupils and strategies to address the needs of recently arrived asylum seeker and refugee children. The ethnic minority achievement support service team offers translation and interpretation support on an informal basis.

152. Grant funding is delegated to schools according to clear criteria. Schools are required to draw up action plans to show how resources are used and plans are rigorously monitored. There are proposals to allocate funding so that underperforming groups are targeted. This approach is appropriate. The collection and analysis of attainment data by ethnicity are recent moves, and their use in identifying underachieving groups and setting realistic targets for minority ethnic groups is just beginning. In particular, Black African, Black Caribbean and Bangladeshi pupils have been identified as underachieving. Strategies for dealing with this are underdeveloped.

153. The LEA provides very good support for Traveller children. Trusting relationships have been established with Traveller communities. The schools visited indicated a good balance achieved between working with individual pupils and their families and helping schools to tackle educational issues.

154. The council strategy provides a well-planned and sequenced programme of support to refugees and asylum seekers, initially to the family and then to pupils on their admission to school. Helpful guidance is given to teachers by the staff of the unaccompanied asylum seekers project and together they develop strategies to meet the needs of pupils. The project staff form a good link between school and the assessment centre.

Social exclusion

155. The council has a stated commitment to combat social exclusion and racism and a large number of different strategies are already in place. However, they have not yet been drawn together to provide a coherent strategy for social inclusion and the LEA is not providing a vigorous enough lead on combating racism. The corporate equalities group deals with equality on a broad basis and a multi-agency group has a scrutiny function with regard to racial harassment. Ensuring access and equal opportunities through supporting vulnerable groups and individuals is a common thread in the EYL service plan and the EDP. In the broad context, the LEA works effectively with its partners to use a range of local and regeneration funding for the benefit of education inclusion. Partnerships with statutory and voluntary groups have led to the development of shared objectives and jointly funded placements such as those for children with autism. A highly successful jointly managed health promotion service works very effectively to address inequalities in health in schools and in the community.

156. The LEA's equality of opportunity in the curriculum policy outlines the need for each school to have an equality of opportunity policy which meets the need of the school and complies with national legislation. A growing number of projects have been developed to reduce absence and exclusion from school; to improve the effectiveness of support and further the integration into mainstream of pupils with special educational needs; and to support children and families in disadvantaged situations. Monitoring the impact of policies and initiatives has not been rigorous and action not well co-ordinated. Recently the LEA has recognised the lack of strategic direction and has established a working group to take this work forward. A broader definition of educational inclusion has been agreed and principles for establishing a secure and co-ordinated basis for inclusion are being discussed.

157. LEA guidelines for dealing with racist incident were drawn up before the publication of the report of the Inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence (Macpherson report, 1999). However, the distribution to schools was not followed up in any systematic way with training or an action plan. The council's racial harassment forum receives racist incident forms from the majority of schools which adhere to the policy to complete them. Schools report, however, that there is no response to this information. The LEA has strengthened its relations with particular minority ethnic groups in the community but there is no strong leadership or systematic monitoring of issues related to race relations. Although one of the

objectives in the EDP is to counter racial intolerance there is no mention of who will take a lead and how this will be achieved. Staffing in the council and in schools falls well short of being representative of the ethnic mix of the LEA. Under representation of these groups on governing bodies of schools is a concern.

Recommendations

In order to improve the service to parents on admissions and school places it is necessary to:

- pursue vigorously within the admissions forum the adoption and implementation of a centralised admissions process for all schools which incorporates the use of a common standardised application form; and
- progress the proposal for a new secondary school in the north of the borough or investigate alternative options with some urgency.

In order to improve provision for children who have no school place:

- strategies should be developed to improve the success rate in re-integrating pupils;
- information about the attainment, progress and attendance of all pupils who are educated other than at school should be brought together in order to monitor and evaluate the success of alternative types of provision; and
- as soon as possible, and by September 2002 at the latest, the maximum time pupils wait for alternative provision should be reduced to 15 days, and the time entitlement increased to 25 hours per week.

In order to improve support for attendance and behaviour:

- the use of the pupil retention grant in secondary schools should be monitored more closely; and
- the provision for pupils with particularly challenging behaviour difficulties should be strengthened.

In order to improve the attainment of pupils from minority ethnic groups:

- specific intervention strategies to deal directly with the underperformance particularly of Black Caribbean, Black African and Bangladeshi pupils should be identified and put in place.

In order to improve support for combating racism:

- an action plan should be put in place which ensures that schools' reports on racist incidents are systematically followed up, and training provided; and
- leadership and responsibilities in this area should be firmly established.

APPENDIX: RECOMMENDATIONS

To improve the quality of planning for school improvement:

- the work being undertaken to define service standards and performance indicators should be continued; these should be used to inform the success criteria in the EDP; and
- steps should be taken to ensure that schools know the current status of the activities within the plan and that systems are put in place to link the activities within the plan to those within schools' development plans.

In order to ensure that schools apply the principles of Best Value in the deployment of their budget:

- appropriate guidance should be issued to schools on the application of Best Value principles across their activities.

In order to improve monitoring, challenge, intervention and support:

- further develop the proposed strategy for school improvement to clarify the relationship between categories into which schools are placed and the support provided to them;
- the annual school review should be differentiated in terms of the time allocated and the scope of the review, to take account of the different needs of effective schools and those which cause concern;
- following negotiation, special schools should be provided with a link officer;
- the role of the link officer in carrying out monitoring, challenge and intervention, and in supporting schools in developing the schools' capacity to procure better services should be more precisely defined;
- a new AIMS service plan should be put in place which reflects the changes that have taken place to the EDP and links to the personal development plans of officers; and
- the AIMS handbook should be extended to ensure that working practices and protocols are written down; these should be shared with schools.

In order to maintain the progress being made on support for the use of performance data:

- systems should be put in place, which allow performance data to be transferred electronically and in a timely way from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3;
- the work being undertaken to gather and analyse the effect of mobility at the end of Key Stage 2 on attainment in Key Stage 3 should be continued; and
- special schools should be provided with support and guidance on the use of data to set targets.

In order to improve the quality of support provided to administrative and curriculum ICT:

- the strategy for ICT should be updated, drawing on the audit of progress being undertaken by the link officers in schools;
- the proposals to put in place the LEA website should be carried out and it should be utilised to develop curriculum guidance in subjects as a means of sharing good practice in schools; and

- systematic monitoring of the utilisation of NGfL funding in schools should be implemented, together with the provision or facilitation of appropriate technical advice.

In order to improve support for schools causing concern:

- procedures for monitoring schools causing concern should be strengthened, so that all such schools are provided with rigorous monitoring reports, based on all available first-hand evidence, and also with clear sequenced targets for improvement; and
- procedures for co-ordinating support from services which are outside AIMS should be strengthened.

In order to improve support to governors:

- better use should be made of governors' meetings in schools for communicating and consulting and responding to emerging LEA issues; and
- steps should be taken to fill vacancies for LEA governors in schools and where they cannot be filled, schools should be allowed to nominate governors to those vacancies without insisting that they declare a political affiliation.

In order to improve the quality of support to management:

- steps should be taken to work closely with secondary schools, to clarify a strategy for providing support to improve the quality of management and leadership, and to focus attention on ways in which teaching and learning, particularly in Key Stage 3, can be improved;
- induction for newly appointed headteachers should be put in place;
- in consultation with schools a strategy should be put in place and provision made available for middle management training;
- the number of training courses run centrally by the borough should be reduced and training more closely linked to the LEA's priorities for school improvement; and
- a structure through which good practice in schools can be shared should be put in place, and through which support can be brokered and schools can be encouraged to develop procurement skills.

In order to improve support for education at a corporate level:

- the proposed community plan should be developed by the council, and should make explicit reference to education; and
- the recruitment and retention of teachers should be prioritised as a corporate issue and strategies developed across departments at a borough level.

In order to improve strategic management in EYL:

- the service plan should be updated so it reflects the scope of current work;
- a clear project management plan should be drawn up for the policy, research and ICT service, which makes priorities clear and ensures that the work load is matched by the resources allocated; and
- a coherent strategy for inclusion should be established, and the strategic overview of all the services contributing to inclusion should be strengthened; this should include making greater use of the available data to identify what precisely is happening in each area and what action is needed.

In order to improve partnership and consultation with schools:

- the effectiveness of the strategic advisory groups should be reviewed, and improvements made where necessary.

In order to improve support for vulnerable pupils:

- structures should be put in place to ensure that liaison between social workers and schools works effectively.

In order to improve the support for management services:

- the personnel team should be more fully involved in development and delivery of strategic recruitment and retention strategies;
- systems should be put in place for early identification of potential deficit budgets or excessive surpluses in all schools; and
- an appropriate strategy should be drawn up for handling deficit budgets in schools, including identifying the roles and responsibilities of schools and LEA officers in the development and implementation of a financial recovery plan.

In order to improve support for SEN:

- a clear strategy for SEN needs to be produced which:
 - is based on guidelines adopted by elected members;
 - includes a revision of the LEA's policy on SEN;
 - takes account of the role of special schools;
 - sets out the LEA's approach to early intervention and to controlling the continuing increase in the already high proportion of statements of SEN;
 - ensures that funding is clearly and equitably distributed; and
 - ensures that the use of funding delegated to schools is monitored, and the impact of support on the progress and standards achieved by pupils is monitored and evaluated.

In order to improve the service to parents on admissions and school places it is necessary to:

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- progress the proposal for a new secondary school in the north of the borough or investigate alternative options with some urgency.

In order to improve provision for children who have no school place:

- strategies should be developed to improve the success rate in re-integrating pupils;
- information about the attainment, progress and attendance of all pupils who are educated other than at school should be brought together in order to monitor and evaluate the success of alternative types of provision; and
- as soon as possible, and by September 2002 at the latest, the maximum time pupils wait for alternative provision should be reduced to 15 days, and the time entitlement increased to 25 hours per week.

In order to improve support for attendance and behaviour:

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- the provision for pupils with particularly challenging behaviour difficulties should be strengthened.

In order to improve the attainment of pupils from minority ethnic groups:

- specific intervention strategies to deal directly with the underperformance particularly of Black Caribbean, Black African and Bangladeshi pupils should be identified and put in place.

In order to improve support for combating racism:

- an action plan should be put in place which ensures that schools' reports on racist incidents are systematically followed up, and training provided; and
- leadership and responsibilities in this area should be firmly established.

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