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IN EDUCATION

**INSPECTION OF
DUDLEY
LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY**

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in conjunction with the
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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 (December 2001)*, which focuses on the effectiveness of local education authority (LEA) work to support school improvement. The inspection also took account of the Local Government Act 1999, insofar as it relates to work undertaken by the LEA on Best Value. The previous inspection of the LEA took place in June 2000 and the report was published in October 2000.

2. The inspection was partly based on data, some of which was provided by the LEA, on school inspection information and audit reports, on documentation and discussion with elected members, staff in the education and other council departments and representatives of the LEA's partners. In addition, a questionnaire seeking views on aspects of the LEA's work was circulated to all schools. The response rate was 69 per cent. Use was also made of the LEA's own self-evaluation.

3. The inspection also involved studies of the effectiveness of particular aspects of the LEA's work through visits to four primary schools, two secondary schools and one special school. The visits tested the views of governors, headteachers and other staff on the key aspects of the LEA's strategy, particularly the effectiveness of support to schools causing concern.

COMMENTARY

4. Dudley is a large urban LEA that lies at the heart of the Black Country on the south-west edge of the West Midlands. The overall socio-economic profile and levels of unemployment and deprivation match the national average, although this masks great variation within the borough. The borough is home to an increasing number of asylum seekers from a range of ethnic backgrounds.

5. The LEA is one of the lowest funded LEAs in the country. For a number of years, the council has funded education substantially above its Standard Spending Assessment (SSA). Despite this, the total spent on schools remains below the metropolitan district average and the national average. Standards of pupils' attainment in national tests or examinations are at or around the national average and rates of improvement are similar to those found nationally. There is, however, evidence of underachievement by boys and by pupils from minority ethnic heritage groups. There is also wide variation in the performance of individual schools.

6. The previous inspection in 2000 found significant weaknesses and inconsistencies, especially in strategic planning for education and in decision-making. Moreover, the absence of strategic direction raised doubts about the LEA's ability to address outstanding issues quickly and effectively.

7. Since then, the LEA has made satisfactory progress overall, and has greatly extended its capacity to manage improvement. It now performs the majority of its functions at least satisfactorily, although significant weaknesses remain.

8. The period immediately following the last inspection was one of rapid, extensive and necessary adjustment, resulting in the complete change of the education senior management team. The current director came into post in January 2001 and the assistant directors in June and August 2001. Together with elected members, the education management team has tackled weaknesses with energy and resolve. In particular, a radical re-appraisal of the functions of the LEA led to a major restructuring and reorientation of the advisory service.

9. Satisfactory progress has been made in improving provision for children in public care and for raising the attainment of minority ethnic groups, including Travellers. There has also been a determined effort made recently to address longstanding and intractable problems in providing education for pupils who have no school place and in supporting schools to manage behaviour. The new team has a firm grasp of the issues and planned changes have the potential to secure improvement.

10. Financial support to schools was judged to be good in the last inspection. Evidence indicates that this function is still delivered to the same standard and therefore it has not been re-inspected. Of the functions inspected, the LEA now discharges the following particularly effectively:

- support for information and communication technology in the curriculum;
- support for school governors;
- arrangements for admissions to schools;

- the quality of the leadership provided by elected members; and
- the quality of advice given to elected members.

11. The following, previously graded unsatisfactory, have improved and are now satisfactory:

- co-ordination, implementation and evaluation of corporate plans;
- leadership and strategic direction given by senior officers;
- targeting of resources on priorities and developing a Best Value culture;
- defining and communicating effectively the LEA's role in monitoring, challenge, support and intervention;
- strategic planning of services to support school improvement;
- support to schools for the use of performance data;
- support for schools causing concern; and
- support for children in public care.

12. The following weaknesses remain:

- the development and implementation of a strategy for special educational needs and inclusion;
- support for gifted and talented pupils;
- provision of property services;
- provision of grounds maintenance;
- provision for pupils who have no school place; and
- support for behaviour.

13. Most of the new developments remain unproven in terms of raising standards and in improving the quality of education and the welfare of pupils. While many schools welcome the clear structures and the new policy framework, the majority of headteachers have still to be convinced that the changes will bring sustained improvement. Responses to the school survey indicate a perception of a reduction in the quality and impact of many services since the last inspection. At this critical moment, the building of the trust and confidence of all schools is a priority for the new education management team.

14. The above strengths and weaknesses are well understood by the LEA and were largely identified through its own thorough self-evaluation. The inspection team is confident that the LEA is capable of responding to the recommendations in the report, and of continuing to make progress.

SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Context

15. The context of the LEA has not changed greatly since the last inspection. Dudley is predominantly urban in character with several distinct townships, each with its own character and identity. The overall socio-economic profile and levels of unemployment and deprivation match the national average. However, this masks great variation within the borough. Whilst the southern and western fringes are relatively affluent there is localised deprivation in a number of neighbourhoods, and about a quarter of Dudley's wards are amongst the most deprived nationally. When manufacturing industries were strong, Dudley attracted immigrants, largely from the Indian sub-continent. Inward migration continues and the borough is home to an increasing number of asylum seekers from a range of ethnic backgrounds.

16. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is broadly in line with the national average and the average in similar LEAs ¹. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups (11.0 per cent) is broadly in line with the national average (12.1 per cent), but above that in similar LEAs (9.2 per cent). There is a well above average proportion of primary-aged pupils in special schools. The proportion of secondary-aged students in special schools is in line with the national average. The percentages of pupils with statements of special educational needs are in line with national averages in mainstream primary schools and well below average in mainstream secondary schools. The proportion of pupils with statements of special educational needs placed in schools outside the borough is below the national average and the average for similar authorities.

17. Dudley currently has around 48,000 pupils of compulsory school age educated in 82 primary schools, 22 secondary schools, seven special schools and three pupil referral units (PRUs). There are around 7,000 children below compulsory school age on the roll of maintained primary schools. The LEA receives a significant number of pupils from neighbouring authorities at the beginning of Key Stage 3. The primary school population is in slow decline. The secondary school population is set to increase in the next three years before entering the same decline. As only three secondary schools have sixth forms, post-16 education is provided principally by a tertiary system involving the three colleges of further education and one sixth-form college.

18. The 'Dudley Partnership for Achievement', a school-led education action zone (EAZ) comprising 21 schools in the middle of the borough, has been operating since April 2000.

Performance

19. Key features of schools and overall pupil performance are:

¹ Dudley's statistical neighbours are Bexley, Enfield, Havering, Bolton, Bury, Tameside, Wigan, North Tyneside, Stockton-on-Tees and Stoke-on-Trent.

- Pupils' attainment on entry to primary schools is broadly in line with the national average.
- Attainment at Key Stage 1 is broadly in line with national averages and averages in similar LEAs. In reading and mathematics, the rates of improvement of pupils achieving level 2 and above are higher than the national trends and the trends in similar LEAs. In writing, the rate of improvement matches the national trend but is well below the trend in similar LEAs.
- Attainment at Key Stage 2 in English is broadly in line with the national average and the average in similar LEAs. A dip in performance in mathematics in 2001, following a trend of steady improvement, was more pronounced than the national trend and attainment fell below the national average and the average in similar LEAs. The rates of improvement in both subjects are generally in line with the national trends and above the trends in similar LEAs.
- Attainment at Key Stage 3 in English and mathematics is broadly in line with national averages and averages in similar LEAs. In English, the rate of improvement is above the national trend and the trend in similar LEAs. In mathematics the rate of improvement is in line with the national trend and the trend in similar LEAs.
- The proportions of pupils attaining five or more A*-C grades at GCSE are broadly in line with the national average and the average in similar LEAs. The proportions of pupils attaining one or more A*-G and five or more A*-G are in line with averages in similar LEAs and above national averages. The rates of improvement at GCSE are broadly in line with the national trends and generally above the trends in similar LEAs.
- The average points score for pupils entered for two or more A levels and for GNVQ (Advanced) are well above the national averages. However, the proportion of pupils staying on to full time education is well below that achieved nationally.
- There is evidence of underachievement by boys and by pupils from minority ethnic groups. Indian pupils, the second largest group of minority ethnic pupils, achieve above the LEA average but African-Caribbean, Pakistani and Yemeni pupils score well below. There is wide variation in the performance of schools, for example, in 2001, the proportion of pupils attaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A*-C ranged from less than 20 per cent to over 80 per cent. A few low performing primary schools have made uneven progress at Key Stage 2 over the last three years.
- OFSTED inspection data indicates that the quality of Dudley's primary schools matches that of its statistical neighbours but is just below that nationally. The proportion of primary schools graded good or very good (66 per cent) is slightly below that nationally (69 per cent). The proportion of secondary schools graded good or very good at the time of their first inspection (77 per cent) was above that nationally (70 per cent). However, evidence from secondary schools that have been re-inspected suggests that this has not been maintained: the proportion of these schools judged to be good or very good is now below that nationally and in similar LEAs.

- Attendance in primary schools is in line with the national average and is above the average in secondary schools. Unauthorised absence is broadly in line with the national average in primary schools and is below the national average in secondary schools.
- The rate of permanent exclusion is below the national average in primary schools and broadly in line with the national average in secondary schools.
- One primary school is currently in special measures, three primary schools are designated as having serious weaknesses and one primary school has been categorised as under-performing. The LEA has identified five further schools (four primary and one pupil referral unit) for priority attention. Overall, the number of schools in these categories has fallen from 16 to ten since the previous inspection.

Funding

20. Dudley's Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) for both primary and secondary pupils is close to the lowest of all metropolitan districts. At £2,357 per primary pupil and £3,023 per secondary pupil, the SSA is 11 per cent below the national average in both cases. For a number of years the council has spent substantially above SSA. In 2001/02 this amounted to 8.7 per cent above the indicative sum, totalling approximately £8 million, bringing spending on schools much closer to national averages than would otherwise be the case.

21. Despite this, the total amount spent on schools remains low, as it was at the time of the last inspection. The Local Schools Budget (LSB) per primary pupil stands at £2,510, compared with a metropolitan district average of £2,590 and a national average of £2,695. Secondary LSB funding per pupil is £3,106 compared with a metropolitan district average of £3,293 and a national average of £3,403.

22. In 2001/02, Dudley delegated less than average funding to schools. The delegated percentage of the LSB was 85.7 per cent compared with 87.1 per cent for similar authorities, 86.7 per cent for metropolitan districts and 86.5 per cent nationally. In 2002/03 the delegated percentage has risen, in line with government requirements, to 87.7 per cent. The authority retained centrally a higher than average percentage of the Standards Fund.

23. Dudley's overall centrally retained expenditure is in line with the average for other authorities, although in 2001/02 central spending on special educational needs was substantially above average. In 2002/03 this has changed, with £2.5 million previously held at the centre for special educational needs services being delegated to schools.

24. In common with other authorities, capital expenditure has increased substantially in recent years. In 2001/02, gross capital expenditure per pupil was higher than the average for similar authorities, metropolitan districts and nationally.

25. The council has maintained a good record of attracting additional funding, with significant education elements to Single Regeneration Budget and European funded

projects. Dudley was involved at an early stage in the development of the Private Finance Initiative for schools through the Dudley Grid for Learning; a Private Finance Initiative to replace two schools is also now well advanced. Contracts have been signed and the new schools will open in January and September 2003.

Council structure

26. Political control of the borough council continues to rest with the Labour Party. In 2000 the council reformed its structure to create a policy cabinet, with executive authority, based on a leader of the council working with nine lead members. Within this executive, a lead member holds a specific portfolio to supervise the implementation of policies in the area of education and lifelong learning. A number of cross-party select committees, including a select committee for lifelong learning, have been set up to challenge decisions and policies, to scrutinise performance, to contribute to policy development at the consultation stage, and to monitor the decisions made by the executive. The select committee for lifelong learning meets in public and includes diocesan and parent governor representatives. In addition, there are five area committees that provide a forum for debating and dealing with local issues. A new constitution has recently been approved by the council and came into effect in May 2002, just after the inspection; this formalises the previous arrangements.

27. Education and lifelong learning is one of seven council directorates. The education directorate consists of five divisions, each headed by an assistant director: school effectiveness; access and inclusion; community education and development; resources and planning; and library services. This structure has only been fully in place since autumn 2001.

The LEA Strategy for school improvement

28. At the time of this inspection the Education Development Plan 1999/02 (EDP 1) had just reached the end of its cycle. The LEA had obtained approval for its Education Development Plan 2002/07 (EDP 2), subject to a condition that a clear strategy is developed to ensure that the targets for Key Stage 2 mathematics are met.

29. EDP 2 is a sound plan with more strengths than weaknesses. It has the following priorities:

- raising attainment in the Early Years towards the early learning goals, and in primary education, especially in numeracy and literacy;
- raising attainment in Key Stage 3;
- raising attainment in Key Stage 4;
- narrowing the attainment gap/tackling underachievement;
- support for schools causing concern; and
- working within partnerships.

30. The LEA's audit for EDP 2 was thorough and provided a firm basis upon which to build a development programme. A good case has been made for the priorities and there are sound links with corporate and other statutory plans. Special

educational needs is a strand of priority 4 and forms part of activity designed to raise attainment in the early years. The plan seeks to promote inclusion strategies to ensure that the entitlement of all pupils is met and standards are raised. Given this, special educational needs are insufficiently reflected across all priority areas.

31. Activities are justified by the audit. For each activity there is a useful outline showing broad intentions within each of the five years of the life of the plan. With the exception of priority 4 and priority 6, where actions are sometimes too vaguely described, there are generally clear links between priorities, targets, activities, actions and success criteria. The plan is ambitious, as befits a situation where there is much remaining to be done. However, this has resulted in a large number of activities and tasks, many of which are targeted at all schools or a wide range of teachers. Intended outcomes relate to the actions being suggested, but success criteria vary in their specificity. Timescales for activities are clear. Responsibilities for implementing, monitoring and evaluating progress are defined clearly.

Recommendations

In order to improve the effectiveness of EDP 2:

- make the plan more focused and define target groups more clearly; and
- develop robust success criteria for all actions to enable effective monitoring and evaluation.

32. Performance targets for 2004 are challenging. Those at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 are realistic, but require a faster rate of progress compared with current trends. Key Stage 2 targets are extremely challenging, especially for mathematics; based on the 2001 results and current trends, an increase of 18 percentage points in mathematics by 2004 implies an improvement rate considerably greater than in previous years.

33. The last inspection judged EDP 1 to be sound, but progress in implementing the plan uneven and overall unsatisfactory. Progress in implementing the final two years of EDP1 has remained unsatisfactory, despite some notable success in implementing the priorities for literacy and numeracy, in meeting the targets of the National Grid for Learning and in raising the attainment of children in public care. As before, progress has been uneven and there has been some slippage, largely as a consequence of the need to restructure the school effectiveness division and the inevitable period of discontinuity that this created. The LEA will struggle to reach its 2002 targets for English and mathematics at Key Stage 2, but is on track to meet its other targets.

The allocation of resources to priorities

34. The authority's allocation of resources to priorities, considered unsatisfactory at the last inspection, is now satisfactory. This is in line with the LEA's own evaluation. Satisfactory progress has been made on the last report's recommendations, which related specifically to inaccurate coding of expenditure,

limited school involvement in decision-making, inappropriate methods for allocating additional funding to schools and weak benchmarking information.

35. The high priority accorded to education in council plans has been reflected in the continued funding of the service well above the standard spending assessment (SSA) and the way in which education SSA increases have been passed on to the education service. Spending within the education budget is reasonably aligned to priorities, although the linking of resource and policy decisions is not explicit enough. Government spending targets for 2002/03 have been met.

36. Consultation with schools on budget issues is satisfactory and has improved since the last inspection. Headteacher representatives are involved earlier in the process than they were, although the emphasis is still on the provision of information rather than early engagement in the decision-making process.

37. The education budget was managed well in 2001/02. Special educational needs spending, previously a particularly problematic area, has been brought under control. The coding of expenditure is now generally consistent with other authorities, which allows comparisons to be made. Preparations are in hand for schools' financial benchmarking to be supported through a national website, although schools have yet to see the benefits of this.

38. The school funding formula is rightly being subjected to fundamental review. The present formula is complicated and out-of-date. A working group, including representatives from schools, is considering alternative models, based on an activity-led approach, for implementation in 2003.

39. School budgets are generally under control and are monitored well by the LEA. Any additional funding made available to schools outside their budget shares is now subject to explicit rules set out in the funding scheme. The LEA has introduced a licensed deficit scheme, although this has been used only on rare occasions. The problem is the reverse: too many schools carry forward too high a balance. The LEA recognises this and has required schools to analyse and report on their reasons for holding reserves.

40. Grant bidding is co-ordinated well across the council and has been pursued successfully within the education directorate across a wide range of sources. A number of schools speak highly of the support they have received to gain access to individual grants.

Promoting continuous improvement, including Best Value

41. The previous inspection judged this area of work unsatisfactory and recommended that a performance management model should be developed urgently, along with the implementation of the principles of Best Value. The LEA has acted on the recommendations and now has in place satisfactory strategies to promote continuous improvement.

42. Sound progress has been made in the development of a performance management framework, although the principles are not yet embedded in the

organisation. There is a coherent planning regime at corporate, directorate and divisional level; at a service level, however, the process is variable and still under-developed. Appropriate arrangements are in place for the formalised reporting of performance information to officers and elected members. The council is committed to a structured approach to securing improvement, which is being pursued through the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) model.

43. Progress on implementing Best Value arrangements has been satisfactory across the council as a whole. The Best Value Performance Plan was judged positively by the external auditor, except for a minor issue of non-compliance relating to the summary plan. While the quality of Best Value reviews across the council has been variable, the best, such as the recent review of corporate information and communications technology, have been very good. In recent months the review programme has been significantly amended, in line with national guidance, to include fewer reviews. These will cover broader themes to which the education service will contribute.

44. Only two early reviews, on external grants and the youth service, have been completed within the education and lifelong learning directorate. The one on external grants was narrow in scope and lacked real challenge. The planned review of access and inclusion was understandably postponed until relevant senior staff were in post and is not yet complete. However, over the past 18 months, the LEA has carried out a radical overhaul of its structures and policies. While not implemented under formal Best Value procedures, the LEA has had clear regard to Best Value principles. The reorganisation of the advisory team, for example, involved fundamental challenge and a major re-orientation of the service.

SECTION 2: SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

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

45. The effectiveness of the LEA's support for school improvement was judged to be unsatisfactory at the time of the last inspection. The LEA had been slow to adapt to the requirements of the Code of Practice for LEA-School Relations. Quality of advice and support lacked consistency and arrangements for performance review were inadequate. In particular, the lack of strategic direction was judged to lessen the impact of some talented individuals within the advisory service. Sound progress has been made since the last inspection. Overall the LEA's school improvement functions are carried out satisfactorily.

46. The LEA has introduced a clearly focused and targeted approach to school improvement that is helping schools to achieve greater autonomy. Although new, the school effectiveness division is already having a positive effect on school improvement and is providing appropriate support to schools according to their need. The rationalisation of the advisory service has led to its increased effectiveness, improved strategic planning, greater challenge of schools and more suitable intervention where necessary. Overall, the school improvement services provide satisfactory value for money.

47. Standards of pupils' attainment in national tests or examinations are at or around the national average and rates of improvement are similar to those found nationally. There is, however, evidence of underachievement. Standards in some schools and for some groups of pupils remain too low. Support for gifted and talented pupils is unsatisfactory. The LEA faces considerable challenges and needs to secure substantial improvements if statutory targets for 2004 are to be met, especially in primary schools.

48. New management structures for school improvement services are in place. These are leading to greater coherence and more efficient use of resources. Support is no longer provided on demand, and the level of delegation of the advisory service is sufficient to enable schools to purchase the support that they need. The reduction in the size of the advisory team, especially the loss of support for middle managers in foundation subjects, is causing concern in the majority of schools. The LEA has taken appropriate account of this and is planning to provide schools with alternative brokered provision in collaboration with, for example, the Black Country School Improvement Partnership. However, developments have been slower than originally envisaged.

49. Cross-directorate support is now more coherent. There is satisfactory co-ordination of the behaviour support service, the ethnic minority achievement service, the educational psychology service and the education welfare service to support schools causing concern. However, the deployment of the behaviour support service in schools other than those causing concern is unsatisfactory.

50. Strategic planning for school improvement services is satisfactory. A new vision and strategy of school improvement have been developed and senior officers are providing satisfactory leadership in appropriately prioritising key tasks. The new service plan for the school effectiveness division contains an appropriate set of priorities, based on a thorough audit of need. Monitoring and evaluation strategies

are being developed for each of the priority areas, but have not yet progressed very far. The plan lacks clarity about how resources are allocated to priorities.

51. Induction of new advisory staff is good. All newly appointed school development advisers undergo appropriate induction, with mentors supporting them in all aspects of their work but particularly that which is school based. Explicit links are developing between service targets and those set for individual staff. Workloads are monitored to ensure that advisory staff are not over-burdened, but evaluation of service performance is not firmly embedded. Under-performance, if it occurs, is now being challenged. All advisers have access to appropriate development opportunities.

52. The expertise of the team has been strengthened by the appointment of highly qualified and experienced staff. A high priority has been placed on recruiting new staff able to combine good leadership and management experience with a willingness to work flexibly.

Monitoring, challenge and intervention

53. These functions, judged unsatisfactory at the last inspection, are now satisfactory. The LEA was recommended to develop a strategy which clarified the implementation of the Code of Practice for LEA – School Relations. This has now been done satisfactorily through a local protocol, which gives details of the responsibilities and accountabilities of the respective partners. This has been welcomed by most headteachers, but a minority are still unclear about the implications of the protocol and are too heavily dependent on the LEA.

The effectiveness of the LEA's work in monitoring and challenging schools, including the use made of performance data

54. The LEA focuses support satisfactorily on areas of greatest need. Increasing use is made of performance data to help identify schools with weaknesses or those that are under-performing. The LEA places each school in one of four categories, three of which imply some level of concern. This enables monitoring, challenge and support to be tailored to the specific needs of individual schools and to be targeted on areas of greatest weakness. There are clear criteria for intervening in schools, assessing the subsequent progress made by them and for reviewing, in general terms, the effectiveness of the support provided. Intervention in schools following an OFSTED inspection is required only occasionally. The majority of the school development advisers are new to the authority, and two-thirds of those now in post were only appointed between November 2001 and January 2002. The LEA is investing productive time and effort in building up school profiles, and new staff are rapidly becoming knowledgeable about the strengths and weaknesses of its schools.

55. The LEA has a satisfactory monitoring policy and sound procedures for its implementation. Elected members are informed regularly about the performance of schools. The annual cycle of monitoring visits is designed to build on school self-review, but not all schools are familiar with this or understand the procedures. Advisers' notes of routine monitoring visits are usefully copied to chairs of governors. However, these notes of visit are of variable quality and only the best provide a sharp evaluation of strengths and weaknesses and clear action points. They contrast

sharply with written reports following formal LEA reviews of schools causing concern, which mostly provide clear and detailed feedback.

56. Provision and use of data are now satisfactory. Electronic transfer of data has been implemented fully through the LEA's information and communication technology systems. The LEA provides a range of informative value-added data for secondary schools that allows targets to be based on prior attainment. An equivalent system is being developed for primary schools. Plans are in place to offer a comprehensive school profile for all schools by September 2002 that will include value-added data by gender and ethnicity and trends over time.

57. Sound guidance has been developed for schools on the use of data for target setting and training provided on its use. The improved quality of data sent to schools and growing proficiency in its use has led to the majority of schools setting challenging targets for 2003. There are few discrepancies between schools and the LEA over targets that are considered too low. A few schools, however, still do not appreciate that the key task is to set targets for improvement rather than simply predict results. In response to the survey, schools did not rate highly the consistency of challenge offered by advisory staff. Visits to schools, however, indicate that this situation is beginning to change. Target setting in special schools remains under-developed and many schools are at an early stage in setting targets for minority ethnic groups or underachieving pupils.

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

58. This area, rated unsatisfactory at the last inspection, is now satisfactory. The LEA's policy and procedures for identifying, monitoring and supporting schools causing concern have significantly improved over a short space of time.

59. Data from OFSTED inspections indicates that the proportion of schools identified as requiring some or significant improvement is slightly higher than the national average and broadly in line with the average in similar LEAs. Currently one primary school is in special measures, three other primary schools continue to have serious weaknesses, one primary school has been designated as underachieving and a further four primary schools and one pupil referral unit have been identified by the LEA as causing serious concern. The number of schools in categories of concern has fallen from 16 to ten since the previous inspection. Through its new procedures for identifying and categorising schools, the LEA is improving its ability to identify weaknesses in a school at an early stage. Nevertheless, there is still the occasional slippage, such as the primary school recently identified by OFSTED as having serious weaknesses.

60. There is a well-planned and suitably differentiated programme of co-ordinated support for individual schools causing concern. Difficulties are increasingly tackled promptly and incisively. Reports to both the headteacher and the chair of governors are helpful in moving the schools forward. However, the LEA's strategic statement does not quantify sufficiently the support that schools within the different categories can expect to receive and there is an absence of clear exit criteria for schools causing concern. The measurements of success that give hard evidence of the effectiveness and efficiency of the LEA's support are under-developed.

Recommendations

In order to improve support for schools causing concern:

- determine the amount and kind of extra support schools in each band may expect to receive;
- identify clear exit criteria; and
- develop clear indicators of the effectiveness and efficiency of the LEA's support.

Support for literacy

61. In the last inspection, support for literacy was judged to be satisfactory. This continues to be the case. The literacy team has undergone considerable changes of personnel between the two inspections. Two of the consultants are relatively new to the post and the line manager had been in post for only a week at the time of the inspection. The changeover from the previous post holders has been managed fairly smoothly and there are clear strategies to ensure continuity of approach and effective transfer and sharing of information.

62. Standards at Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 are broadly in line with the national average. However, at Key Stage 2, standards of reading are much higher than standards of writing. In writing, girls score much higher than boys. This reflects the national picture. Pakistani girls and African-Caribbean boys also underachieve in a similar way to those in other parts of the country. The trend in the authority has been one of gradual improvement. Between 2000 and 2001, Key Stage 2 results improved by 1.7 per cent against a backdrop of little improvement across the country. Writing standards during that period improved by 2 per cent. The LEA's target for 2002, 83 per cent, however, remains a significant challenge.

63. Schools speak highly of the training provided for literacy. This is targeted appropriately on the national priority of writing, and the LEA is rightly focusing on improving boys' writing in particular. The LEA is starting to target its intensive support not only on the lowest performing schools, but also on schools where recent analysis points to under-performance by more able pupils.

Support for numeracy

64. The last inspection judged support for numeracy to be satisfactory overall. Current support continues to be satisfactory. The line manager and two consultants, who form the present numeracy team, are all very recent appointments to the authority. There are appropriate strategies in place to ensure continuity and effective transfer of information, and clear structures for the management and performance of the team.

65. Over the last three years, the improvement in standards at Key Stage 1 has been above the trend nationally and for similar authorities. In 2001, standards at this key stage were broadly in line with national averages and averages for similar authorities. At Key Stage 2, the trend has been broadly in line with the national trend

and above that for similar authorities. In common with the national picture, there was a dip in results in 2001. However, in the case of Dudley, this meant that results fell below the national average and that for similar authorities. The numeracy team has analysed the possible reasons for the drop in Key Stage 2 results and is using this information to plan and launch a Year of Mathematics in collaboration with the Dudley Grid for Learning. A rise of nine percentage points is needed if the LEA's target for 2002 of 75 per cent is to be met. This represents a significant challenge.

66. Co-ordinators interviewed during the inspection spoke highly of the training that they had received, particularly through the five-day courses. Meetings of mathematics co-ordinators have produced a series of useful materials for teaching different aspects of mathematics. The LEA is developing exit strategies from support in order to encourage schools to take more responsibility for bringing about improvement amongst their own pupils.

Support for information and communication technology

67. The last inspection found that support for information and communication technology was good. This continues to be the case. Support to schools is managed through a Private Finance Initiative, involving a partnership between the LEA and an international company. This innovative project, which had just been introduced at the time of the last inspection, is now firmly in place. The rigorous evaluation procedures central to the contract clearly show that it has had a positive impact on the standards achieved by pupils and on the confidence of staff.

68. Standards generally are above average. The percentage of pupils in the LEA attaining nationally accredited awards at Key Stage 4 is well above both the national average and the average for similar authorities. The percentage of Key Stage 3 pupils, assessed by their teachers as attaining level 5, is in line with the national average and above the average for similar authorities. OFSTED school inspection reports indicate that progress in information and communication technology at Key Stages 1 to 3 is better than the averages nationally and for similar authorities and in line with them at Key Stage 4. The LEA has provided appropriate support in moderating teacher assessments, in order to increase their validity and reliability.

69. At both primary and secondary level, the ratio of computers to pupils is considerably higher than the national average and the average for similar authorities. Systems have also been installed in community centres and children's homes. There are plans to extend provision to foster homes, using money from a recent successful bid for additional funding.

70. The LEA has been very successful in promoting the training of teachers, using the New Opportunities Fund. The percentage of teachers trained within the borough is higher than the national average and the average for similar authorities. In the case of primary schools, the percentage is over twice the national average. Teachers and headteachers interviewed were complimentary about the training which they had received, both through the New Opportunities Fund and directly from the LEA. However, they were more critical of the support for the cross-curricular application of information and communications technology which, they felt, had declined since the last inspection. The LEA has recently established a 'Learning Futures Team' to

address this issue and the materials which they have made available on the website are imaginative and have been well received.

Support for raising standards at Key Stage 3

71. Support for raising standards at Key Stage 3 is satisfactory and improving rapidly. The LEA has adopted the National Key Stage 3 Strategy and all the secondary schools have begun to implement it. The strategy manager has been in post for nearly five months and was appointed from an LEA which was in the Key Stage 3 pilot scheme. She has brought with her a great deal of experience in the field. This has been a significant factor in the good rate of progress made by the LEA. An appropriate audit of need was conducted as part of the preparation for EDP 2 and a draft strategy discussed with secondary headteachers. Links between the LEA strategy and EDP 2 are strong. Appropriately challenging performance targets have been set up to 2004.

72. Standards at Key Stage 3 in English, mathematics and science are broadly in line with the national average. Until 2000, rates of improvement were broadly in line with national trends. In 2001, while standards continued to rise in science and remained stable in mathematics, there was a decline in English against the national trend. Despite this, standards in English remain in line with the national average for the proportions of pupils gaining level 5 and above. However, the standards of those pupils gaining the higher level grades in English at Key Stage 3 are now below the national average.

73. Strong links have been forged between the Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 2 consultants to build good quality bridging units between the two key stages and to ensure continuity. Similarly, links are being developed to establish continuity between Key Stages 3 and 4. Training, much of which is done alongside teachers in schools, has been well received. The LEA is at the early stage of setting up systems for monitoring the impact of the strategy on standards and on teaching and learning. It has provided satisfactory guidance to support schools in the analysis of results and in developing programmes of action.

Support for minority ethnic groups including Travellers

74. At the time of the previous inspection, the LEA's support for minority ethnic groups, including Travellers, was judged to be satisfactory overall, with a number of strengths. In particular the LEA had developed a long-term strategy to raise the achievement of minority ethnic pupils and was deemed very effective in providing imaginative solutions to the low achievements of particular groups of pupils. There was a good policy and clear guidelines to meet the needs of bilingual pupils. Support for meeting the needs of Traveller pupils was regarded as well organised and effective.

75. Support remains satisfactory. The strengths identified in the previous report have been consolidated and further improvements have been secured. The ethnic minority achievement service (EMAS) has been placed sensibly within the new school effectiveness division to ensure the team is integral to supporting school improvement. Close links have been forged with the West Midland Service for

Traveller Education. The LEA has devised clear policies on equal opportunities and racial harassment but these are not yet supported by consistent monitoring and evaluation.

76. The collection and analysis of attainment data for pupils from minority ethnic communities are comprehensive and used increasingly effectively to identify underachieving groups and to monitor progress. Target setting is developing satisfactorily. Most groups at Key Stage 2 met their 2001 targets in English and exceeded them in mathematics. At Key Stage 4 there was significant improvement on the 2000 results. However, despite some improvements in educational attainment, minority ethnic pupils continue to perform significantly worse than both the LEA and the national averages, especially Pakistani, Yemeni and African-Caribbean boys. Minority ethnic groups are over represented within the most recent figures for permanent exclusions. The LEA is investigating the reasons for underachievement and is starting to plan strategically to improve standards.

77. Most of the Ethnic Minorities Achievement Grant funding is devolved to schools on the basis of an agreed needs-based formula, which takes appropriate account of the prime objectives of the grant. The EMAS team monitors the schools' use of grant funding and is starting to evaluate evidence to determine the impact and links to school improvement. The LEA offers well planned, but flexible, support to schools receiving refugees and asylum seekers.

78. The LEA continues to provide innovative additional support for minority ethnic pupils who are underachieving; for example, through three supplementary schools, an African-Caribbean Initiative Programme and through the work of education support officers. The success of these initiatives in improving self-esteem, promoting positive attitudes and contributing to the improving trend in examination and test results has prompted elected members to convert the funding to base budget and core delivery now that funding from the Single Regeneration Budget has ceased.

79. The work of the Traveller Education Service is now integrated effectively into the LEA's strategy for school improvement. Collection and analysis of data and the monitoring and evaluation of progress are being strengthened through a series of relevant activities within EDP 2. The LEA team works closely with families on local authority sites and private sites and is increasingly working with settled Travellers in permanent housing. The service provides valuable support to schools for those children who tour seasonally and who need to be provided with distance learning packages.

80. The LEA is using the Commission for Racial Equality standards and is taking positive steps to raise schools' awareness of "Learning for All". There is a well-received programme of training and good guidance for schools that focuses on the development of policies, procedures and strategies to promote racial equality and to raise standards of attainment.

Support for gifted and talented pupils

81. This is a new focus, and was not examined in the last inspection. Support for gifted and talented pupils is unsatisfactory. This judgement is in line with the LEA's own evaluation. The LEA has the capacity to secure improvement.

82. There have been several successful projects and initiatives within the borough to support more able and talented pupils. These have included summer schools for physical education, projects involving professional artists, musicians and dancers, and a range of activities organised by the Dudley music service. Two 'Learning Express' summer schools have also been held in which more able pupils have worked on relevant projects. However, these activities have tended to be free-standing and have not always led to support for gifted and talented pupils being embedded into schools' curriculum.

83. The LEA recognises that there are weaknesses in its provision. The criteria used to identify gifted and talented pupils are too narrowly focused on performance in core subjects and very little use is made of data on pupils' performance in other areas of the school curriculum or in extra-curricular activities. There is heavy reliance on teachers' and parents' perceptions of pupils' general abilities, unsupported by other information.

84. A newly appointed adviser has recently taken responsibility for this area. Support for gifted and talented pupils is included in EDP 2, an action plan has been drawn up, and a priority manager identified to oversee its implementation. The plan includes relevant actions and gives a clear indication of responsibilities and evaluation and monitoring procedures. However, it does not include sufficient detail of how resources and time are to be allocated to activities. Moreover, the plan is not underpinned by a sufficiently well thought through and clearly articulated LEA vision or strategy for supporting gifted and talented pupils.

Recommendations

In order to improve support for gifted and talented pupils:

- develop appropriate criteria for the identification of such pupils;
- develop a clear strategy for gifted and talented pupils; and
- set clear timescales for actions and identify how resources are allocated to activities.

Support for school management

85. Support for school leadership and management was deemed satisfactory at the last inspection and remains so. The proportion of schools judged through external inspection as well or very well managed has risen in both primary and secondary schools. The proportion of primary schools needing some or much improvement in management and efficiency is broadly in line with the national average and the average in similar authorities. Fewer secondary schools than either nationally or compared with similar LEAs require improvement.

86. The LEA provides a satisfactory range of training opportunities for senior managers in schools and the national leadership and management programmes are supplemented well by the LEA's own provision. Some of this is being delegated, appropriately, to the Dudley Regional Staff College, which has expertise in providing continuous professional development.

87. At the time of the last inspection, LEA advisers working alongside external contributors had provided well-received self-evaluation training, based on the OFSTED model. Since then the work has lost impetus, largely as a result of discontinuity of staffing within the advisory service. The LEA recognises a need to offer further support and guidance to schools.

Recommendation

In order to improve support for school management:

- provide further support to schools in applying self-evaluation techniques.

88. The LEA's training provision for middle managers in schools is overall satisfactory, although it is not sufficiently systematic for those middle managers leading developments in the foundation subjects. There is a mentoring system that links middle managers in schools causing concern to successful middle managers in other schools. Assessment co-ordinators have been provided with training on data analysis, assessment strategies and on the electronic data distribution system.

89. There is a clear commitment to support schools in adopting Best Value principles, although only limited support and guidance have so far been offered. The provision of advice on services from other providers is increasingly becoming a priority. Preparations are in hand to provide schools with benchmarked financial and other data so that headteachers can make comparisons with similar schools and use the information to identify good practice. With the agreement of all primary headteachers, the performance data of each school is available to all schools. This is leading to increased co-operation and self-help between schools in dealing with common issues related to school improvement, and thereby assisting them to develop greater autonomy. Dissemination of good practice has not been a sufficient priority to date, but is a key feature of EDP 2.

Support for governors

90. This area was judged to be satisfactory in the last inspection report. Considerable progress has been made and support for governors is now good. There has been a fall in governor vacancies since the last inspection to a level below the national average.

91. Support for governors' strategic role has assumed a higher profile within the LEA since the last inspection. Improving governance is a key area within EDP 2. The expansion of the governor support service, located in the school effectiveness division, has resulted in a single point of reference for governors and much improved training and support. Training courses have been well-received and reported as being tailored closely to schools' needs. The LEA is developing a self-evaluation initiative for governing bodies and is running a pilot scheme; the full scheme will be launched in 2003.

92. Relationships with the LEA are good and governors feel valued. Governors interviewed welcome their increased involvement in areas of policy-making and

action planning. The governors advisory group comprising governors, headteachers, LEA officers, and diocesan representatives meets once a term to discuss the development of LEA policies and other initiatives. The Dudley association of governing bodies meets with the director on a termly basis. This group helps to promote cluster activities and assists in the design and delivery of governors' courses.

93. There is effective communication between governors and LEA officers although, on occasions, governors find the timescales for response to consultation documents too short. Governors have access to high quality information. A telephone help line, directly linked to the governor support team, provides a prompt response to questions and queries.

The effectiveness of services to support school management

94. Services to support school management are satisfactory overall, as they were at the last inspection. Property services and grounds maintenance are, however, unsatisfactory.

95. The previous inspection concluded that the LEA had not assisted schools to be informed purchasers and that there was a presumption in favour of in-house provision. That presumption no longer exists. There is a clear commitment, supported within the new LEA structure, to change the focus of LEA work and plans are formulated to develop a brokerage service. There has, however, been no impact as yet on schools. The traded services brochure was this year little changed from previous years. It appeared late and gave schools a very short deadline for a response.

96. The LEA's support for **financial services** was assessed as good in the last inspection report. This continues to be the case, and is corroborated by the LEA's own evaluation, the evidence of the school survey, school focus groups and the continued high level of buyback. No detailed inspection work was carried out.

97. Likewise, no detailed inspection work was carried out on LEA support for **human resources**. This was judged highly satisfactory in the previous report and evidence from the school survey and focus groups confirms that this remains a highly valued service.

98. Support for **property services** is unsatisfactory and is considered as such by the LEA. While the last report assessed routine services as satisfactory, attention was drawn to some weaknesses. The main problem is the variability in the quality of service provided by Dudley Property Consultancy. A number of schools visited spoke highly of the provision in terms of promptness and value for money. More commonly though, schools report a high level of dissatisfaction because of: slow response times, poor quality control, inadequate supervision of contracts, and unreliability. In order to strengthen support to schools in terms of property management, the education directorate has sensibly enhanced the capacity of its own buildings and estates team, though the responsibilities of this team are not defined clearly enough.

Recommendation

In order to improve management services to schools:

- ensure greater consistency of property services support to schools.

99. Support for **information and communication technology in administration** is satisfactory and improving and is based in part on the powerful Dudley Grid for Learning (DGfL) management information system. Operational difficulties in establishing the new system and a lack of co-ordination resulted in an unsatisfactory judgement at the last inspection. The LEA has taken action since then to deal with the problems; the DGfL management information system is linked to the rest of the council and there is now one e-mail system. This, along with a well-developed council Intranet, 'InsideDudley', is increasingly the vehicle for interaction between the LEA and schools. A protocol has been drawn up on e-communication, but schools still feel seriously overloaded with the weight of such communications.

100. Generally, systems for hardware and software support and training are sound, though schools have concerns about the efficacy of some of the software systems provided. The council is clear about its corporate strategy for information and communication technology development and a complementary strategy for the education directorate is currently out to consultation. The LEA carried out the electronic transmission of pupil data to the DfES very efficiently in January 2002.

101. Both **cleaning** and **catering** services are satisfactory and are now managed within a combined team. The services are well regarded by schools, with a high level of buyback. Planning and quality control systems are sound. The catering service is successfully involved in developing new initiatives, such as breakfast clubs and milk bars.

102. The **grounds maintenance** service remains unsatisfactory, as reported in the last inspection and as assessed currently by the LEA itself. There are particular weaknesses in monitoring and planning processes and variability in quality across schools. Satisfaction ratings in the school survey placed the authority in the bottom quartile of those LEAs surveyed, although the service's own customer feedback presents a more positive picture and a significant minority of secondary schools regard the service as good or very good. Only half of secondary schools, however, buy grounds maintenance from the council and the education directorate is concentrating efforts, through its new procurement team, on supporting schools who wish to purchase the service from an alternative contractor.

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

103. Support in assuring the supply and quality of teachers is satisfactory. The LEA does not have significant teacher shortages, but schools are experiencing increasing difficulties in attracting well qualified teachers with the appropriate expertise in some subject areas, notably information and communication technology, design and technology and mathematics. Strategies to support recruitment of teachers are more firmly established than those designed to help retention.

104. The LEA has instigated several well-based strategies for recruiting teachers. In partnership with neighbouring boroughs, it has established the Black Country School Improvement Partnership (BCSIP) and appointed a recruitment strategy manager to support work in this area. Recruitment drives have been extended to target trainee teachers across a wider area of the country. Through the annual 'Information and Communication Technology in Action Week' trainee teachers are invited to work with pupils in the authority's schools on projects and to experience the type of support that they could expect through DGfL if they chose to work in Dudley. All newly appointed teachers are also offered advice and assistance with finding housing. With the support of the BCSIP, an increasing number of classroom assistants are now progressing into teaching.

105. There are also some well-established strategies that aid retention. For example, there is an appropriate programme of induction and support for newly qualified teachers, all of whom are provided with a laptop by the LEA. The newly qualified teacher programme is accredited by a local university as part of a two-year higher degree course. The well-planned induction and mentoring programme for headteachers involves effective collaboration between school development advisers, the personnel section, the headteacher forum and professional associations.

106. There are areas of weakness. The LEA has limited data on recruitment and retention and has not analysed sufficiently the data that does exist. For example, although the LEA knows that it retains 87 per cent of newly qualified teachers for a second year, it does not know the reasons why the remainder leave. Similarly, it does not track progress from advertisement to appointment, to assess the effectiveness of the existing recruitment system. There is no systematic support for middle management or subject-specific training for foundation subjects. However, there are plans to develop programmes to address these issues, in collaboration with the Dudley Regional Staff College, which is currently being reorganised.

SECTION 3: SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

Summary of the effectiveness of the LEA's Special Educational Needs provision

107. In the last inspection, the LEA's arrangements for meeting special educational needs were judged to be unsatisfactory and providing poor value for money. Under strong leadership, this area is now being tackled with commitment and energy. Satisfactory progress has been made, although much of it is recent. There are now sound systems for meeting statutory obligations, supporting school improvement and raising standards. Substantial improvements have been made to special educational needs policy and aspects of provision. The new team has not had sufficient time to develop a satisfactory special educational needs strategy, although the general direction of change is clear. Links between the access and inclusion plans and EDP 2 are inadequate.

The LEA's strategy for Special Educational Needs

108. The last inspection found the LEA's strategy for SEN to be unsatisfactory. This remains the case, despite recent improvements.

109. After a faltering start when, in some respects, the situation deteriorated, there was a major restructuring, resulting in the establishment in September 2001 of a new division for access and inclusion, under new leadership. Since then progress has been considerable. Policies have been prepared for inclusion and additional educational needs and for delegated funding. An external consultant has been commissioned to work closely with officers and schools to produce practicable solutions. Extensive work has been done in consultation with schools on modelling an integrated pattern of inclusive provision. While the shape of future developments is clear, there is as yet no logistical plan, underpinned by an appropriate financial strategy, showing the implications for schools and services. This contributes to continued anxiety in schools.

110. The pattern of special school provision continues much as before. There is an imbalance in favour of provision for moderate learning difficulties and a shortage of provision for emotional and behavioural difficulties, the latter exacerbated by the need currently to free places in pupil referral units for pupils with no school place. A complete solution is dependent on the logistical plan that the LEA is determined to produce by the end of this school year.

Recommendation

In order to develop the LEA's strategy for special educational needs and inclusion:

- agree firm plans for the future of special schools, units and relevant central services.

111. Firm action has been taken on other fronts. The LEA has pressed ahead with the delegation of funding for special educational needs from the start of April 2002, giving schools a funding regime in keeping with the Code of Practice and meeting the government's targets for transferring spending power to schools. It has tightened the protocols for placing pupils so that best use can be made of the facilities already available. It has dealt with the backlog of assessments and statements arising from a period of staff shortage and change. It has made significant progress in reducing the proportions of pupils with statements taught in its own special schools and in special schools outside the LEA. By investing, as part of the strategy, in a strong and independent parent partnership service it has greatly improved the capacity to resolve disputes.

112. The sustained consultation, referred to in the last report, was in danger of becoming an endless cycle and the LEA has been right to show resolve. Many schools acknowledge the need for change and see in the LEA's actions a greater transparency and even-handedness than in the past. To this extent, the climate of confusion and mistrust noted in the last report has largely dispersed. However, the timescales for schools to consider and respond to proposals and initiatives have sometimes been too compressed, creating the impression that the LEA is behaving peremptorily.

Statutory obligations

113. As at the last inspection, the LEA meets its statutory obligations satisfactorily. Some of the weaknesses identified at that time, due largely to staffing problems, continued, and indeed worsened, for some time after the inspection, since when the LEA has made strenuous efforts to correct the situation. The proportion of statements completed within 18 weeks, including those delayed for reasons beyond the LEA's direct control, fell to 12 per cent in the last school year. By establishing the causes of delays and committing additional resources, an average of around 60 per cent is now being achieved which compares favourably with performance in other LEAs.

114. Effective action has been taken to prepare schools for implementing the new Code of Practice by means of training for special educational needs co-ordinators and published guidance, incorporating appropriate criteria for assessing pupils. Further support has been given to an active parent partnership which makes comprehensive information and support available to parents. Although the number of appeals remains relatively high, the majority are now resolved without recourse to a tribunal or formal conciliation procedures. Statements are reviewed regularly and the LEA is normally represented. There are indications that there is now a greater readiness to take action and discontinue a statement where appropriate.

115. The LEA has continued to build on its mechanisms for early intervention, at the pre-school and foundation stage, as well as in the mainstream. Early education settings have identified special educational needs co-ordinators and the educational psychology service has developed strong links with the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership and with the family centres.

School improvement

116. The contribution the LEA makes to school improvement was judged to be unsatisfactory at the last inspection. It is now satisfactory. The strengths in the good levels of support from the learning support service, the counselling service, the sensory support service and the pre-school service continue. The educational psychology service, despite restricting its activities to statutory assessment for a time, is now returning to a broader kind of support that is often praised by schools. Training courses are still well received and sound support provided for special educational needs co-ordinators. There is every sign that staff changes have not diminished the quality of advisory support; the new adviser is, among other things, helping special schools to address assessment and target setting, which has been under-developed hitherto. There is justifiable dissatisfaction in schools with support for behavioural difficulties; this is considered further under the heading of *Behaviour support*.

117. A useful analysis has been made of mechanisms for monitoring by the LEA of practice in the schools but it leaves important detail to be worked out. The new criteria are useful and the LEA intends to refine them progressively. However, with budgets now delegated, the monitoring of progress made by special educational needs pupils, formerly available in every school by members of the learning support service, can no longer be depended on.

Recommendation

In order to support schools in applying the Code of Practice for special educational needs consistently:

- develop mechanisms for monitoring and moderation of schools' support for, and assessment of pupils with, special educational needs.

Value for money

118. Expenditure on special educational needs represented poor value for money at the last inspection. There are still weaknesses, but they are now outweighed by strengths. Value for money is now satisfactory. Spending on special educational needs is now in line with that of other LEAs and the formerly escalating costs of statementing and placements outside the LEA have been brought under control. The parent partnership is helping to avert costly tribunals. More is being done to meet the needs of children at an earlier stage. Recent steps have been taken to optimise the use of the existing specialist provision and to make the placement process open and consistent. The efficient continuum, or 'matrix of provision' to which the LEA aspires is still some way off, and can only be introduced gradually. In the meantime, the restructured central services improve efficiency and the generally favourable findings on special educational needs in OFSTED school inspection reports demonstrate that there is reasonable value for money.

119. The LEA has ensured that expenditure on special educational needs is explicit, that the special needs component of schools' budgets is clear and that allocations are transparent, none of which was the case at the last inspection. The decision to press ahead with delegation of the special educational needs funding gives schools the capacity to obtain the best value for the money. Some difficulties are being encountered at this early stage. Schools understand and generally approve the move to make more provision without recourse to statements. However, early experiences of the newly delegated budgets have been variable and the needs-led formula is not discriminating sufficiently between different levels of need. The way in which budgets have been presented has given rise to some misunderstandings about schools' freedom to deploy them and the capacity to maintain existing provision. The LEA has built in safeguards which allow time for these misunderstandings to be corrected.

Recommendation

In order to match special educational needs funding more closely to need:

- refine the funding formula in consultation with schools.

SECTION 4: PROMOTING SOCIAL INCLUSION

The strategy to promote social inclusion

120. The LEA's overall effectiveness in promoting social inclusion was unsatisfactory at the time of the last inspection. Progress has been made and Dudley's performance in combating social exclusion is now satisfactory but with some significant weaknesses remaining; most notably in the provision for children with no school place and in the way support is provided to help schools improve behaviour. The LEA has the capacity to secure further improvement.

121. A key strength is the strong corporate drive for improvement and the overriding principle of social inclusion that underpins major corporate plans, including the main strategic and statutory plans for education. All plans include challenging targets for improvement. Effective joint working across departments is developing. This has led, for instance, to much improved provision, practice and attainment for children in public care. Significant strides have been made in ensuring that comprehensive information and data on its most disadvantaged and vulnerable children are available, and in setting challenging targets for underachieving groups. The LEA has only recently, however, amalgamated the data on school placements and on exclusions; pertinent information has yet to be made available across all relevant agencies and services.

122. The LEA is engaged in a number of relevant initiatives to support inclusion, which are managed effectively. For example, the Breakthrough Project, jointly funded by the LEA and the Single Regeneration Budget, has helped improve educational underachievement of minority ethnic groups through supplementary schools, homework clubs and, increasingly, parental involvement in their children's education. The founding of an interagency group including the health service, environmental services, the education welfare service and the Traveller Education Service has led to the provision of a part-time health worker for Travellers, to more formalised links to address accommodation needs of Traveller families and to improved levels of attendance of Traveller pupils. There is also evidence of productive mutual co-operation with other agencies; for example, in conducting truancy sweeps in conjunction with the police and in developing policies, plans and provision for education in the early years.

123. These initiatives do not yet add up to a coherent strategy. Progress in developing a special educational needs and inclusion strategy is slow, despite some rapid progress over the last two terms. The directorate strategic plan (2002 – 2005) provides a framework for developments and sets definite timescales for the completion of the work. Appropriate attention is given within EDP 2 and other key plans to raising the attainment, provision and support for vulnerable pupils.

The supply of school places

124. The LEA's planning of school places was judged as satisfactory at the last inspection and it remains so, though there are weaknesses in planning for secondary provision.

125. Forecasting demand for places is satisfactory, with an improving methodology, and the results overall are within an acceptable margin of error. The LEA is now using new computer mapping techniques which should improve forecasts at individual school and area level.

126. Levels of surplus places are not exceptional, standing at 9.5 per cent in the primary sector, a little above the statistical neighbours' average, and at 3.6 per cent, below that average in the secondary sector. Primary rolls are projected, however, to fall steadily over the coming years and action is now being taken on a major primary school review. The authority's approach is sound and elected members are centrally involved. Schools and governing bodies have been made aware of the programme but have yet to be fully engaged in the process.

127. The school organisation plan is satisfactory and meets statutory requirements in terms of content and publication arrangements. More information on special educational needs provision has been included in response to the last inspection but it is still largely descriptive of present arrangements rather than setting out a strategy.

128. Planning for secondary provision has not recently been given a high priority and is a relative weakness. While there are sufficient secondary places overall, schools in some areas of the borough are under significant pressure. This resulted in insufficient places being available initially for the September 2002 Year 7 entry in the township of Dudley itself.

Recommendation

In order to improve the authority's planning of school places:

- produce a clear short- and medium-term strategy for the provision of sufficient secondary school places in all areas of the borough.

Admissions

129. The management of school admissions was judged highly satisfactory at the last inspection; it has improved further and is now good.

130. The admissions team is well organised and has established effective links with other authorities. An Admissions Forum is firmly established, meets regularly and is engaged actively in the development of policy. In this regard the LEA has recently been active in setting out procedures to improve prospects for the re-integration of excluded pupils and to reduce, if possible, unnecessary mid-year pupil transfers. Appeals are still at a comparatively high level, but the LEA has a good record in settling appeals to mutual satisfaction before they reach the independent panel. Appeals are administered efficiently and completed in good time for pupils to be inducted into their new schools.

131. The information provided to parents is clear and well presented, though guidance for parents on choosing a school is limited. As recommended in the last

inspection report, appeals information for parents has been revised and is now concise and comprehensive.

132. The number of first preferences met by the LEA has improved to 91 per cent in 2001, close to the national average. Given the pressure on school places from outside Dudley and significant numbers of pupils having to travel long distances to secondary school, the LEA is consulting on a Local Schools Policy. One element of this, already agreed for 2003 admissions and the subject of separate consultation, is a revised secondary admissions policy, based on a system of giving equal weight to all preferences. This is expected to increase the number of parents gaining at least one of their preferences, if not the first.

Asset management

133. Asset management planning is satisfactory, although some deadlines were missed in 2001.

134. Sound progress has been made in determining priorities. Improvement targets are in place and explicit links are made with other authority plans. The prioritisation of building projects involves a consultation group with broad and appropriate representation, including governors and headteachers. The methodology is being improved further through a refinement of the 'scoring matrix' but schools' understanding of the process remains at a general level.

135. The Department for Education and Skills assessed the original collection of data on building condition as unsatisfactory. The problems are being rectified through a programme of school re-surveying that is nearing completion. The collection of data on building suitability was successfully carried out, involving headteacher assessments, moderated by advisers.

136. Previous investment has resulted in a backlog of condition work of average proportions. Present programmes are expected to cover about half of the backlog, estimated currently at £38 million. This figure excludes the impact of suitability assessments, which have yet to be fully costed and included within the overall strategy. The LEA has a good record, however, in pursuing external funding from a variety of sources and a Private Finance Initiative scheme for the replacement of a secondary school and a primary school, both in poor condition, is well underway.

Recommendation

In order to improve the authority's asset management planning:

- ascertain the resource implications of suitability assessments and take account of them in determining priorities.

Provision of education for pupils who have no school place

137. The last inspection found the provision for pupils with no school place to be good. The LEA's self-evaluation for this inspection judged the support as no better

than satisfactory. It has brought forward information which demonstrates that the statutory obligation to arrange suitable provision for pupils without a school place has not been met for a substantial group of pupils and for a considerable time in some cases. Rigorous measures are already under way to address the weakness but these will take time to be fully effective. The current provision is unsatisfactory.

138. The considerable strengths identified at the last inspection still hold good. All the pupils for whom placements are made at Key Stages 3 and 4 receive at least 20 hours of tuition and over 90 per cent of those with alternative courses at colleges of further education receive 25 hours. The pupils at the primary pupil referral unit do not strictly fall into the category of having no school place since, until now, virtually all have remained on the registers of their mainstream schools. The great majority of these pupils receive at least 20 hours. Around half attend for 25 hours, dividing their time between institutions during the course of reintegration programmes. The hospital and home tuition service continues to provide well for pupils with medical conditions and there is a particularly sensitive and effective programme for schoolgirls who become pregnant, worked out in co-operation with the health service and a family centre. There are robust arrangements for monitoring the education of home-educated pupils and supporting their parents in providing the curriculum.

139. At the last inspection it was reported that the quality and co-ordination of information were not good enough. That situation persisted for far too long and it is only recently that a single, reasonably comprehensive, database has been assembled and analysed. It reveals that there are some 45 pupils for whom the LEA has a statutory responsibility who are unplaced and others for whom the precise extent of the provision is unclear. For instance, there are indications that arrangements are sometimes made for pupils to attend colleges of further education with minimal transfer of information and little subsequent monitoring. Pupils have slipped through the net as a result of insufficiently firm protocols and systems, poor co-ordination between officers and schools, ad hoc or expedient solutions which subsequently lapsed, arrangements made by schools without the LEA's knowledge, and inadequate monitoring and review of placements.

140. The LEA now has a firm grasp of the situation. Among its corrective measures are the centralising of all information within children's services, the setting up of a strong placements panel to review cases regularly and the appointment of an exclusions officer to reinforce the new policies and procedures and to liaise between parties. A further officer is being appointed specifically to co-ordinate the agreement of curriculum packages at Key Stage 4, including alternative curricular arrangements with further education. Each case is now being systematically investigated. A set of standard operating procedures for placements and comprehensive guidance for schools, covering both prevention and exclusion practice, have been published. In the circumstances, the short timescales for consultation on these documents were justified, provided that the LEA is open to constructive debate and amendment in the light of schools' experience.

Attendance

141. The support for attendance is now satisfactory and this reflects the LEA's own view. At the last inspection it was found to be unsatisfactory. All the weaknesses in strategy and management identified at that time have been addressed, although it is

too early for the benefits to be fully realised in schools. Attendance in both primary and secondary schools is consistently in line with national averages. The LEA has set reasonable targets for improvement. A tendency for primary schools, in particular, to authorise absences too readily has been identified and is being tackled, school by school.

142. Progress was slow for some months, pending the appointment of a new principal officer for the educational welfare service, after which it gained momentum quickly. The role of the service has been clarified and a new service level agreement established. Comprehensive and useful guidance has been published. The former isolation of the service has ended; it now makes significant contributions to several other services.

143. The main focus of the education welfare service remains on attendance. The service is now allocated to schools in proportion to need. Educational social workers use visits to schools to check registers and identify cases needing support and investigation in co-operation with school staff. The proportions of home visits, warnings and prosecutions have all risen sharply. Many schools praise their education social worker unstintingly, but there are still some individual education social workers whose performance is poor. The LEA is well aware of this and has increased supervision, established a performance management system and begun to seek the help of schools in making regular evaluations.

Behaviour support

144. The LEA's support for behaviour was unsatisfactory at the last inspection and, despite significant improvements, it remains so. The LEA recognises this. The services involved have now been unified in a new in-school inclusion service (ISIS) and support is now well co-ordinated, strategically and at the operational level. The new Behaviour Support Plan defines the LEA's strategy and sets out the support mechanisms clearly.

145. The key weakness lies in the quality and sufficiency of support to schools in managing behaviour. Schools identify strengths within the ISIS team but, in general, have found its support, at least in its former guise, to be of uneven quality and variable in its impact. Some of its staff have been ill-prepared for a broad role which includes advice and training to teachers and school staff, as well as individual support for pupils. A rigorous system of performance management, supervision and training has now been instituted but at this moment it is uncertain whether the schools' buyback of the service will be sufficient to ensure its viability. The brokering of external sources of support is underdeveloped. Educational psychologists give good support where they can, but their contribution is limited by the demands of their wider responsibilities. It has been further limited until recently by the continuing need to catch up on the backlog of statutory assessment.

146. Permanent exclusions have reduced steadily over the last five years in both phases. At the time of the last inspection, secondary rates were better than in similar LEAs and comparable to the national average. Primary rates were better by both comparisons. The LEA's figures show a further reduction in permanent exclusion since then, achieving the LEA's targets. The collection of data is

considerably improved. It is now sufficiently comprehensive to allow patterns among different groups of pupils, such as those from minority ethnic communities or children in public care, to be identified and it is monitored monthly. A well-qualified inclusion officer has been appointed to further prevent and reduce exclusion. She is available to schools with the minimum of bureaucracy and the evidence of the last two terms is that her guidance is proving successful.

147. Two of the pupil referral units have functioned effectively as, in the primary phase, a de facto special school for emotional and behavioural difficulties, and in the secondary phase, a respite and reintegration facility. Both these useful functions are imperilled by the urgent need to provide for pupils with no school place. Without them there is a shortage of specialist provision for supporting pupils with complex behavioural needs and the effects are already being felt. The LEA is urgently reviewing the admissions criteria to the special schools and the pupil referral unit and is supporting the new learning support units in secondary schools.

Recommendation

In order to strengthen support for behaviour:

- implement a support programme that matches schools' needs closely; and
- develop the brokering of additional external sources of support.

Health, safety, welfare and child protection

148. The LEA's provision for health, safety welfare and child protection was previously assessed as satisfactory. No detailed fieldwork was conducted in this inspection. Schools' views and the LEA's own view indicate that it is still satisfactory. The last inspection report indicated that there was appropriate monitoring and guidance for health, safety and security issues and that statutory duties in relation to child protection were fulfilled. The quality of training was good. The documentary evidence presented for this inspection and the OFSTED reports of school inspections since then indicates that these strengths continue. Furthermore, the documents illustrate that sound protocols and procedures for contractors and various services within the LEA are in place.

Children in public care

149. Support for children in public care was deemed to be unsatisfactory at the last inspection but improvement is evident and it is now highly satisfactory. This reflects the LEA's own view. Most of the weaknesses reported have been addressed satisfactorily, though some require further work. There is now a firm protocol for joint working between the education and social services departments with clear arrangements for the funding and management of the service, now located with education. The data relevant to the pupils is comprehensive and easily accessible to all parties, though transfer of data is rendered more difficult by incompatible software. Checks are made to ensure that personal education plans contain sufficiently challenging targets for individual pupils and the LEA analyses performance data at the end of each key stage. It has yet to derive group targets to

serve as a benchmark in discussions with schools. Last year, the attainment of Key Stage 2 pupils in public care in English was in line with the national average and the average in similar LEAs. Attainment of Key Stage 2 pupils in mathematics was lower than in similar authorities and LEAs nationally. The proportion of Key Stage 4 pupils gaining one or more GCSE passes at grade G and above was markedly higher, representing a sharp upward trend.

150. All schools have designated teachers for children in public care, which was not previously the case, and all are trained. Good progress has been made in preparing personal education plans for the majority of pupils though in some cases the LEA and schools consider some of them to be too narrowly focussed on academic achievement and over-dependent on information already existing in school. This is to be the subject of future monitoring visits.

151. The lead member for education has helped to lend impetus to the improvements and has played a prominent part in the regular events to celebrate achievements of all kinds. Other elected members are conscientious in their visiting of care homes and they receive regular reports on children in public care. There is a willingness to become closely involved; a recent awareness-raising session for elected members was well-received and more such events are planned.

Measures to combat racism

152. At the time of the last inspection, the LEA had recently instigated satisfactory measures to combat racism in schools. Guidance and clear criteria had been provided for schools to record racial incidents and to enable the LEA to comply with the recommendations of the inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence. Provision remains satisfactory, despite initiatives losing pace between the two inspections. Discontinuity of staffing has meant that procedures for monitoring racial incidents are insufficiently tight, although good support and follow-up are provided for individual schools who have experienced and reported racist incidents. The LEA has received returns from about a fifth of schools.

Recommendation

In order to improve support for combating racism:

- instigate procedures to ensure records of racist incidents and nil returns are sent to the LEA from all schools.

153. New appointments have been made and staff have been nominated to lead developments in this area. Rapid progress has been made over the last two terms, especially in supporting schools in meeting the general and specific duties of the Race Relations (Amendments) Act 2000. The LEA is using the Commission for Racial Equality standards and is taking positive steps to raise schools' awareness of 'Learning for All'. A race equality audit for all schools is underway and projected to be completed by the autumn term. Relationships with the Dudley Race Equality Council and local minority ethnic communities are good, but speed of developments has meant that arrangements for consultation have not always been systematic.

SECTION 5: CORPORATE ISSUES

Introduction to corporate issues

154. The previous inspection judged corporate planning, procedures for implementing and evaluating corporate plans and decision making to be unsatisfactory. The quality of leadership of senior officers was judged to be poor. In too many functions, the LEA was attempting to preserve a status quo that was inconsistent with the Code of Practice for LEA-school relations, and the principles of increased delegation and responsibility to schools under Fair Funding.

155. The LEA has made satisfactory progress in implementing the recommendations from the last inspection and key weaknesses have been tackled with determination. There are now more strengths than weaknesses in the way the LEA carries out its functions. Elected members and officers have together developed a clear vision and sound plans for education that build effectively on corporate developments and regeneration strategies. A policy framework has been established, which ensures that decision making and actions are based on principles of openness, transparency and accountability. The LEA has demonstrated, through its own self-evaluation, a clear insight into its strengths, weaknesses and areas for development.

Corporate planning

156. Corporate planning for education has been strengthened considerably since the previous inspection and is now highly satisfactory. Good progress has been made in implementing recommendations that related to revising LEA strategic and divisional planning and in developing robust performance measures.

157. There is a coherent approach to planning and a good match and clear relationships between a hierarchy of plans. The over-arching community plan outlines a clear vision and six broad themes for delivering a fairer society. The council plan strengthens the common purpose, defines the values that guide decision making and sets out key priorities that help shape the various services. Education is implicitly involved in most areas of development. It takes the lead in the key priority area relating to creating a 'Brighter Borough', which is focused sharply on improving educational standards and securing appropriate access to education. The common principles and purposes of corporate plans are reflected visibly in the recently agreed directorate strategic plan, which sets out the planning context, the strategic priorities and targets for the education directorate over the medium term. The strategic plan contains clear statements of intent and is suitably ambitious, as befits an authority advancing from a low base with much remaining to do. It is underpinned by a series of sound divisional action plans and statutory plans such as the Education Development Plan (EDP 2), the Behaviour Support Plan and the School Organisation Plan. Statutory plans help translate vision into practical actions but are not always sharply focused and, as with the EDP 2, are sometimes targeted too widely.

158. There are sound procedures for implementing, reviewing and evaluating corporate plans. There is a strong belief in improvement through self-review and systems for the monitoring and evaluation of plans are developing but not yet

embedded. Clear processes for accountability have been built into the directorate strategic plan and EDP 2. These include quarterly reporting to the education select committee and to schools of the progress on key performance indicators as well as an annual summary report. Elected members are increasingly well placed to monitor the performance of schools and the progress of educational developments in the LEA. The select committee for life long learning fulfils its brief of scrutinising OFSTED section 10 reports and monitoring standards of attainment. Best Value principles have been adopted in the successful re-organisation of the directorate and more especially in the restructuring of the advisory service into a school effectiveness division.

159. Nevertheless some relative weaknesses remain. The council has not had a history of medium-term financial planning and links between the overall planning regime and the financial planning cycle are not strong, although yearly action plans are affordable and achievable. There is not yet a consistent framework within the education directorate for producing team plans that illustrate how the directorate's strategic objectives are to be met and against which progress can be measured and cost-effectiveness judged.

Leadership of officers and elected members and decision making

160. Decision-making procedures are based on clear principles of openness and accountability and are satisfactory overall. In contrast to some ad hoc decision making of the past, there are now transparent systems for delegating revenue support and deciding on capital projects. There is a satisfactory budget setting process that begins sufficiently early and allows schools to receive final budgets in good time. Many longstanding difficulties in areas such as surplus places are being tackled appropriately.

161. The political structures assist the speed of decision-making. Within education, senior officers and lead elected members use delegated decision-making powers wisely and appropriate records are kept of all formal discussions about significant decisions. Elected members and officers have shown that they are prepared to take necessary, sensitive and not always universally popular decisions, such as the delegation to schools of the funding for the non-statutory elements of the special educational needs services. Elected members are ably supported by officers and are given clear and well-structured advice. The select committee for lifelong learning has a scrutiny function as part of its remit, but this role remains under-developed.

162. The leadership provided by elected members is good. Elected members have a clear vision for education and a well-developed understanding of their strategic role. There is an appropriate scheme of delegation to chief officers with suitable checks and balances in place. Elected members have a clear sense of the significance of education and there is broad agreement across the different political parties on important educational matters. All statutory plans have been approved and are revised on a regular basis.

163. The leadership provided by senior officers is satisfactory. The current director came into post in January 2001 and the assistant directors in June and August 2001. The immediate context for the new team was the poor OFSTED report of June 2000

and the need to rebuild a fragmented education department. The new senior team has acted quickly and decisively and significant progress has been made; for example, in increasing delegation and responsibility to schools and in developing a secure policy framework and a protocol for work with schools. However, quick action and the drive for improvement has meant that communications with schools have not always been handled sensitively and this has led to strained relationships with some headteachers.

164. The pace of change has been challenging for elected members, officers and schools. Timescales for consultation, often from necessity, have been short. This has led to a majority of headteachers expressing strong feelings about imposed change and some serious doubts about the LEA's commitment to meaningful consultation. In fact, some effective decisions have been taken about problems that could not wait and tough issues have been tackled with resolve. Most schools welcome the improved policy framework and the clear structure and direction that this brings. However, not all of the new arrangements are embedded in working practices. Schools have yet to see sustained impact of recent decisions. Senior officers rightly recognise a need to take stock and revise arrangements for working with schools. There have already been a few moves in the right direction. For example, headteachers consider that recent consultation about EDP 2 was handled satisfactorily with sufficient opportunity for schools' views to be taken on board. However, these small steps have not yet been sufficient to inspire the total trust and confidence of the majority of headteachers in the new management structure.

Recommendation

In order to improve partnership working with schools:

- improve arrangements for consultation and communication on strategic issues;
- ensure that all letters and e-mails sent to schools conform to a directorate standard; and
- involve schools in the reviewing and evaluation of strategies and plans.

Partnership work with agencies

165. The planning and management of partnership working with agencies were judged unsatisfactory in the previous inspection. Since then, weaknesses and inconsistencies in strategic planning have been addressed and clearer systems have been put into place to allocate resources to priority areas. Partnership working with agencies is now highly satisfactory.

166. Structures for ensuring co-ordinated action are clear. A senior officer has been nominated to ensure strategic commitment across the directorate. Senior managers have been identified to lead on various strands of partnership work and a development manager has been identified to drive innovation. However, despite well-developing structures and systems, there is recognition that the education directorate still needs to work more strategically with other council divisions and other stakeholders. A growing number of initiatives have put pressure on the small

central LEA staff. Through its various partnership groupings, the LEA is seeking to ensure that its limited resources are used to the best effect.

167. Sound relationships between the LEA and other agencies have led to some successful partnership working. For example, there is a productive partnership with the diocesan authorities. The Early Years Development and Childcare partnership is making good progress towards the targets in its development plan. The Dudley Learning Partnership, in conjunction with the Black Country Learning and Skills Council, have identified productive joint training initiatives based on raising aspirations and encouraging young people to stay on in learning. Links with the Connexions service are developing well. The education business partnership is working closely with the literacy team on a range of work-related initiatives that benefit schools. There has been a high level of involvement by the LEA and its schools in the Healthy Schools Initiative.

168. Collaborative work between the LEA and the Education Action Zone is developing well and increasingly based on a common agenda, joint planning and the co-ordination of zone initiatives with LEA developments.

APPENDIX: RECOMMENDATIONS

This report has made a number of fundamental recommendations, which are key to the further progress of the LEA. Work should begin on them immediately. They are:

In order to improve partnership working with schools:

- improve arrangements for consultation and communication on strategic issues;
- ensure that all letters and e-mails sent to schools conform to a directorate standard; and
- involve schools in the reviewing and evaluation of strategies and plans.

In order to develop the LEA's strategy for special educational needs and inclusion:

- agree firm plans for the future of special schools, units and relevant central services.

In order to support schools in applying the Code of Practice for special educational needs consistently:

- develop mechanisms for monitoring and moderation of schools' support for, and assessment of pupils with, special educational needs.

In order to match special educational needs funding more closely to need

- refine the funding formula in consultation with schools.

In order to strengthen support for behaviour

- implement a support programme that matches schools' needs closely; and
- develop the brokering of additional external sources of support.

In order to improve the authority's planning of school places:

- produce a clear short- and medium-term strategy for the provision of sufficient secondary school places in all areas of the borough.

In order to improve support for gifted and talented pupils:

- develop appropriate criteria for the identification of such pupils;
- develop a clear strategy for gifted and talented pupils; and
- set clear timescales for actions and identify how resources are allocated to activities.

In order to improve support for school management

- provide further support to schools in applying self-evaluation techniques.

The report also makes the following recommendations. The are:

In order to improve the effectiveness of EDP 2

- make the plan more focused and define target groups more clearly; and
- develop robust success criteria for all actions to enable effective monitoring and evaluation.

In order to improve support for schools causing concern:

- determine the amount and kind of extra support schools in each band may expect to receive;
- identify clear exit criteria; and
- develop clear indicators of the effectiveness and efficiency of the LEA's support.

In order to improve management services to schools:

- ensure greater consistency of property services support to schools.

In order to improve the authority's asset management planning:

- ascertain the resource implications of suitability assessments and take account of them in determining priorities.

In order to improve support for combating racism:

- instigate procedures to ensure records of racist incidents and nil returns are sent to the LEA from all schools.

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