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IN EDUCATION**

**INSPECTION OF
DUDLEY
LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY**

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INTRODUCTION

1. This inspection was carried out by OFSTED in conjunction with the Audit Commission under Section 38 of the Education Act 1997. The inspection used the *Framework for the Inspection of Local Education Authorities* which focuses on the effectiveness of local education authority (LEA) work to support school improvement.
2. The inspection was based on data, some of which was provided by the LEA, on school inspection information and audit reports, on documentation, and on discussions with LEA members, staff in the education and lifelong learning department and in other Council departments, representatives of the LEA's partners, representative groups of headteachers, and specific discussion with the headteacher and chair of governors of a school not selected for a visit. In addition, a questionnaire seeking views on aspects of the LEA's work was circulated to all schools. The response rate was 86 per cent.
3. The inspection also involved studies of the effectiveness of particular aspects of the LEA's work through visits to 12 primary, five secondary and two special schools, and discussions with the headteacher and chair of governors of another secondary school. The visits tested the views of governors, headteachers and other staff on the key aspects of the LEA's strategy. The visits and discussions considered whether the support which is provided by the LEA contributes, where appropriate, to the discharge of the LEA's statutory duties, is effective in contributing to improvements in the school, and provides value for money.
4. Evidence was also drawn from recent visits to Dudley schools and analysis of LEA documentation by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools (HMI), undertaking national monitoring work. The inspection also took account of the Local Government Act 1999, insofar as it relates to work undertaken by the LEA on Best Value.

COMMENTARY

5. Dudley is an urban metropolitan borough on the southwestern edge of the West Midlands. Its socio-economic profile and levels of unemployment and deprivation match the national average, although there are great variations within the borough.
6. The overall performance of Dudley's primary schools is broadly in line with that nationally and in similar LEAs. Secondary schools perform slightly better than average at Key Stage 3 and GCSE results are generally above the national average. The proportion of secondary schools judged to be good in the first cycle of OFSTED inspections was above the national average. However, evidence from the second cycle of OFSTED inspections suggests that Dudley secondary schools are not maintaining this performance in comparison to schools nationally. The LEA gains a substantial number of secondary age pupils from neighbouring authorities.
7. The LEA's weaknesses outweigh its strengths. In the past the LEA enjoyed an enviable reputation for its support to schools. The culture of the LEA was, and is still acknowledged to be, one where schools and officers expect close contact, even on minor issues, and that schools' needs are met by the LEA. There is still a high level of support to schools by services, often not sufficiently differentiated by need. Nevertheless, schools are generally more critical of the LEA's performance of its functions than in the majority of LEAs surveyed so far. In half the schools visited, the inspection judged overall support to be ineffective in helping the school to improve.
8. The LEA performs the following functions or provides the following services well:
 - support to raise standards of numeracy and literacy in primary schools;
 - support to raise standards of information and communication technology (ICT) and its use in the curriculum;
 - support to governors;
 - health, safety, welfare and child protection;
 - financial support to schools; and
 - provision for education otherwise than at school.
9. The following functions are not performed adequately:
 - co-ordination, implementation and evaluation of corporate plans;
 - leadership and strategic direction given by senior officers;
 - progress on implementing the education development plan;
 - targeting of resources on priorities and developing a Best Value culture;
 - defining and effectively communicating 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;
 - identification, and support to schools causing concern;

- support for special educational needs;
 - support for children in public care; and
 - support for behaviour and attendance.
10. Other functions, including support for school management, for minority ethnic pupils and Traveller children, for lifelong learning, admissions procedures, the provision of school places and personnel support to schools are performed adequately.
 11. The LEA has some capacity for successful innovation and strategic planning. Examples include the Dudley grid for learning (DGfL), an ambitious and successful project attracting national attention, and a recently introduced initiative to improve teaching and learning. These are not typical however. Many schools visited during the inspection commented more generally on a lack of vision and strategic direction from the LEA. The inspection confirms that they are right.
 12. The LEA has not moved quickly or decisively enough in establishing the new relationship which the Government seeks to promote between local authorities and schools. Senior officers, schools and elected members must share the responsibility for the continuing existence of a culture which has attempted to minimise change and continue to maximise support. The direction from senior elected members is now clearer and firmer but, in too many functions, the LEA is attempting to preserve a status quo which is inconsistent with the Code of Practice for LEA-school relations, and increased delegation and responsibility to schools under Fair Funding. This lays the LEA open to the accusation that it is seeking to safeguard services rather than rigorously evaluating needs, provision and performance. Education services are not well prepared for the implementation of Best Value.
 13. The absence of an integrated system for data retrieval, analysis and performance management across services is hindering the LEA, and its schools, in evaluating performance effectively. A lack of benchmarked performance data, an absence of transparency in many funding mechanisms, and very limited objective brokering information, all combine to restrict the ability of schools to develop as informed purchasers. For too many, this maintains an over-expectation that their needs will be automatically met by the LEA, rather than taking increasing responsibility for their own improvement.
 14. The LEA has many good quality and committed staff within its service. Their work is often rendered less effective by weaknesses and inconsistencies in strategic planning across the education department, slow strategic decision-making, the absence of clear inter-relationships between key strategic plans, and weaknesses in the LEA's strategic management of cross-divisional and multi-agency working. These are serious weaknesses which need to be addressed urgently. The current absence of strategic direction raises doubts about the LEA's ability to address outstanding issues quickly and effectively enough. The inspection team is not confident that, at the highest level, the senior management of the LEA has shown itself able to address these weaknesses without external support for strategic planning and management.

SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Context

15. Dudley is a large metropolitan LEA on the southwest edge of the West Midlands and forms the western part of the Black Country industrial region. It is predominantly urban in character. In the past the local economy relied on heavy metal manufacturing; despite diversification and growth in service industries, 54 per cent of employment is still in metal-related industries. The overall socio-economic profile and levels of unemployment and deprivation match the national average. However, this masks great variation within the borough. The south and west fringes are relatively affluent, but six of Dudley's 24 wards are amongst the most deprived nationally.
16. The overall proportion of pupils in primary and secondary schools entitled to free school meals (FSM) is below the national average and similar LEAs. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups (10.3 per cent) is broadly in line with the national average (11.7 per cent), but above that in similar LEAs¹ (8.7 per cent). LEA figures indicate that the percentage of pupils with statements of special educational needs (SEN) has risen recently and is now in line with the national average for primary aged pupils and though it remains well below average for secondary aged pupils. The proportion of pupils in special schools in and outside the borough is well above average, whilst numbers of pupils with statements in mainstream schools are low.
17. Dudley currently has 43,771 pupils of compulsory school age educated in 82 primary schools, 22 secondary schools, seven special schools and three pupil referral units (PRUs). There are 5,401 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 outset of Key Stage 3. Post-16 education is principally provided by a tertiary system involving the three colleges of further education in the borough; nineteen of its secondary schools are 11-16. One primary and five former grant maintained secondary schools have adopted foundation status on their return to the LEA. The 'Dudley Partnership for Achievement', a school-led education action zone (EAZ) comprising 21 schools in the middle of the borough, has been in development over the last year and operating since April 2000.
18. Key features of schools and overall pupil performance are:
 - Pupils' attainment on entry to primary schools is broadly in line with the national average.
 - Overall, attainment in Key Stages 1-3 is broadly in line with national averages, though this masks some slight but important differences:

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

- Attainment at Key Stage 1 is broadly in line with the national figure for reading and writing tests but below for mathematics. The rate of improvement has been slightly faster than nationally.
 - Attainment at Key Stage 2 is slightly below the national average and below similar LEAs. The rate of improvement in English has matched the national rate, but has been slightly below national rates in mathematics and science.
 - Attainment at Key Stage 3 is slightly above the national average and that for similar LEAs. The rate of improvement in English and mathematics has been faster than nationally.
 - GCSE results are generally above the national average. The proportions of pupils gaining one or more grade A*-G and five or more grade A*-C are just above the national averages. The rate of improvement in five or more A*-C grades was greater than nationally, due largely to the performance of girls.
 - At 18+, the points score for pupils entered for two or more A-levels, and for GNVQ (Advanced), were well above the national averages.
 - The attainment of pupils from minority ethnic groups ranges widely; Indian pupils, the second largest group, achieve above the LEA average but African-Caribbean and Pakistani pupils score well below.
19. 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 (69 per cent) is slightly below that nationally (72 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 (55 per cent) 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 average in secondary schools. Unauthorised absence is below national levels, but levels of authorised absence are above average in primary schools. Permanent exclusions are broadly in line with national levels.
20. Two schools are currently in special measures and six schools have been declared by OFSTED to have serious weaknesses. Three schools have been removed from special measures, although one is still designated as having serious weaknesses and another has recently been identified by the LEA as causing it concern. The LEA has identified a further seven schools that are causing concern and 'at risk'.

Funding

21. Dudley has consistently spent well above its education standard spending assessment (SSA). In the last two years it has passed on to the education budget marginally less than the full increase in SSA. It will, however, meet the Secretary of State's targets for delegation and central retained expenditure in 2000/2001, as well as taking up its full allocation of matched standards funding.

	SSA for Education £m	Net expenditure on education £m	Surplus against SSA	Expenditure as % of SSA
1998/99	114,313	120,402	6,089	105.3%
1999/00	120,380	126,295	5,915	104.9%
2000/01	125,584	131,352	5,768	104.6%

(Source: Section 122 out-turn and Section 52 budget statements)

22. Overall, the SSA per pupil allocated to Dudley is low alongside other metropolitan authorities and statistical neighbours. However, as a result of spending above SSA and high delegation, the individual school's budget (ISB) shares compare favourably. The authority understated its expenditure on the education budget in its returns to the DfEE by omitting youth service expenditure from its Section 52 statement; this equates to an additional £1.7m a year. Expenditure as a percentage of SSA is, therefore, higher than indicated by the LEA's figures for 2000/01.
23. Patterns of central expenditure in Dudley are difficult to compare conclusively with other LEAs because of its approach to categorising funding; this limits its capacity to benchmark expenditure and performance.
24. In 2000/2001 Dudley has delegated 86 per cent of the local schools budget (LSB) compared with 84.9 per cent for metropolitan authorities and its statistical neighbours. However, the 'all or nothing' buy back by schools on services for school meals, DGfL and corporate information technology systems mean the degree of flexibility given to schools is often more apparent than real. Retained funding for regulatory and statutory functions in 2000/2001 (£41 per pupil) is below the statistical neighbours' (£52) and metropolitan authority averages (£48). However, this includes a disproportionately high percentage of the costs of advisory and inspection service (over 30 per cent). As a result, the true cost of activities devoted to the area of school improvement are under-reported.
25. Spending on SEN is not well defined or balanced between central and devolved funding. Centrally retained SEN funding, including significant expenditure on out-of-borough placements, is high (eight per cent of LSB in 1999/2000) compared with statistical neighbours' and metropolitan authority averages of 6.9 per cent. The high level of resourcing supporting individual statements, insufficient SEN linked resources resting with schools, and the costs of the counselling and home and hospital services, places pressure on central budgets. Allocations to schools specifically for SEN, including the special schools ISB, are low (7.1 per cent of LSB compared with 8.4 per cent for metropolitan authorities and 9.5 per cent for statistical neighbours). The Council has increased SEN central expenditure by £1m in the current year but, despite

its efforts to communicate its approach to SEN and its funding dilemma to schools, it has failed to notify them how it has deployed this increase.

26. Balances held by schools are large and in aggregate represented 6.1 per cent of the overall ISB at the end of 1999/2000. Reported overspends are rare. Dudley administers a scheme to underwrite schools' overspend where specific local circumstances such as falling rolls unavoidably impact upon a school's budget. However, the process is insufficiently well defined and lacks transparency.
27. The Council has been successful in attracting external funding, including Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) funds, and has successfully launched a major private funding initiative (PFI) to develop the Dudley Grid for Learning (DGfL). In addition to successes in securing New Deal for Schools grants, it is now at an advanced stage of implementing a further PFI scheme involving two school replacements for 2003/04. Schools visited during the inspection were consistently complimentary about the support they received from the authority in attracting external funding.

Council structure

28. Dudley Council has 72 members, of whom 43 are Labour, 11 Liberal Democrat, and 18 Conservative. In 1999 the Council reorganised itself to meet government proposals for 'Modernising Local Government'. An interim structure set up a policy cabinet of 13 members, four select committees to undertake a scrutiny role and five new area committees to extend local accountability, address local views and administer local budgets. The Council has recently reformed its structure further to create a ten member cabinet with six associated select committees to streamline processes, re-focus committee work on strategic and corporate priorities in the community plan, and enable more members to experience the scrutiny role. Political responsibility for schools and education is carried by the lead member for lifelong learning. Select committees have all-party membership. Early scrutiny reviews undertaken by select committees have varied in their effectiveness, particularly in the extent to which they have identified clear enough targets or timelines for action and have taken the action proposed.

The education development plan

29. The strategy for school improvement outlined in the education development plan (EDP) is for the most part sound. It is based on a thorough and useful audit of schools' performance and OFSTED Section 10 inspection reports. National and local priorities are well covered. Schools generally approve of the priorities, although little account has been taken of schools' development plans. The actions in the plan are clearly and logically set out and support the purpose of the priorities. The advisory and inspection division (AID) developed the plan, but strategic links are only gradually being forged with other plans, such as the lifelong learning plan, the race equality plan and the EAZ action plan.
30. The EDP priorities are:

- to raise standards in literacy and numeracy;
 - to raise standards overall and bring about particular improvement in those schools giving cause for concern;
 - to secure and support high standards of leadership and management;
 - to maximise progress in learning by improving planning, teaching and assessment processes;
 - to increase inclusive education through behaviour management, reducing non-attendance and exclusions and improving provision for those who are excluded;
 - to reinforce and improve achievement through partnerships with families and the wider community; and
 - to meet the targets of the National Grid for Learning.
31. The 2002 targets set out in the EDP for Key Stage 2 are demanding, particularly for literacy, and the LEA is making good progress towards achieving them. The 1999 numeracy results exceeded the 2000 target, but a nine-percentage point increase is still required in order to achieve the 2002 target, indicating a suitable degree of challenge. The indicative targets set for Key Stage 4, however, are not sufficiently demanding. The 1999 results exceeded the 2000 target and virtually equalled that for 2001. The LEA has not identified any schools in the EDP where the LEA and the school disagree on the targets set.
32. There are challenging targets for reducing unauthorised attendance. The targets for reducing the numbers of pupils who are permanently excluded from school were challenging when set, but were based on less secure data and have already been met. The targets for children in public care were also based on insecure data and are unrealistic.
33. Progress in implementing the plan has been uneven. Good progress has been made with implementing the priorities on literacy, numeracy and ICT, but otherwise progress has been uneven between and within priorities. This reflects weaknesses in the overall management of the EDP. The staff concerned did not always give enough priority to the implementation of the EDP owing to a lack of leadership and direction on priorities. Funding allocated was insufficient for some activities. The greatest progress was made in priorities with dedicated staffing.
34. Most schools visited had found the EDP to be relevant to them, primary schools more so than secondary or special schools. The process of allocating and agreeing activities for each school, mediated by the school's link inspector, worked satisfactorily in most cases, but not all EDP activity managers made contact with schools to discuss the allocation of activities and criteria for allocation were not always clear. Generally schools were unclear about what was to happen next.
35. The plan has been monitored, although the process has not been entirely satisfactory and there is no overall report on the first year. Some important and helpful conclusions have been drawn, which have been used to inform planning for year two and to amend activities where appropriate. Nevertheless, some

weaknesses remain in that success and evaluation criteria are still very uneven throughout the plan. Also, schools were not consulted on the changes proposed for year two. A proposed cycle for monitoring of progress and planning represents a considerable improvement on the processes used in the first year.

The allocation of resources to priorities, and Best Value

36. Dudley's cumulative spending broadly reflects its priority for education and lifelong learning, including early years and continuing education. Nevertheless, whilst the Council's overall spending on education is relatively high, it has annually warned that its budget is based upon diminishing reserves. Allocation of resources within the education department is not sufficiently aligned to clear and specifically defined priorities. Schools are involved in consultative procedures, including the review of the funding model. However, this involvement has not extended to more critical decisions about the overall deployment of the Council's budget and its impact on schools.
37. A process of employee development interviews is in place but no systematic performance management has been developed across Council services. The Business Excellence model has been piloted in the schools division within the education department. This builds upon the education service's recent award of Investors in People, offering the potential for a more rigorous and structured approach to performance review, and there are plans to adopt this formally across the department as a whole.
38. The approach to Best Value issues has been inconsistent and on the whole demonstrates an inadequate understanding of the key principles of the 1999 Act within the education service. The Council's published Best Value performance plan excludes its traded services for schools, although these have now been programmed into the education department's plans. A limited and narrow pilot review of its counselling service was undertaken in 1999/2000. A select committee review of the advisory and inspection division (AID) was incomplete and incorrectly presented as Best Value. Additionally, information to schools on traded AID services which identified the packages on offer, went on to illustrate the number of posts that would be lost if there was reduced buy back by schools, contravening Best Value principles.
39. Work remains to be done to raise schools' awareness of Best Value issues. The Council's brochures for its own traded and core services are generally good, but arrived too late this year to assist schools in their buying decisions. The LEA's local management of schools (LMS) scheme requires schools to submit a statement with their annual budget about how they will apply Best Value principles, but the application of the authority's associated guidance has lacked sufficient challenge. Schools have been given some support in seeking external providers of services and two headteachers are members of the traded services management board. However, there is an absence of systematic surveys and reviews of services, or benchmarked information on services, for schools. Overall, therefore, the local authority has not assisted schools to be informed purchasers and there is a presumption in favour of in-house provision.

Recommendations:

In order to improve the implementation of the EDP:

- reasons for slow progress in implementing specific priorities and actions to make up lost ground should be clearly identified;
- relevant staff should be given sufficient time to manage priorities and implement activities, and be accountable for progress made; and
- arrangements should be made to consult headteachers and governors over proposed changes to the EDP and a report provided to schools and elected members on progress to date.

In order to improve the evaluation and effectiveness of the Council's education spending and ensure more transparency about the deployment of funding:

- the approach to coding education spending and budget statements should be amended so that it is more consistent with that nationally and enables a rigorous analysis of comparative spending patterns;
- schools' involvement in corporate resource decisions should be increased;
- the criteria for additional funding to schools with specific needs should be clarified urgently, agreed, and reported to all schools; and
- consistent access to benchmarking information should be provided to schools to enable them to deploy their resources more effectively.

In order to meet the requirements of Best Value and embrace its principles more consistently:

- a consistent model for performance management should be developed and implemented consistently across services as quickly as possible; and
- the principles of Best Value should be urgently implemented by the LEA.

SECTION 2: LEA SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Support for school improvement

40. Overall, support for school improvement is unsatisfactory. The LEA is not providing sufficiently effective support to meet the needs of almost half the primary schools and the majority of secondary schools. Whilst the LEA has many talented individuals who work to support school improvement, the lack of clear strategic direction from the top has had an adverse effect, and lessens their impact.
41. Weaknesses in support for SEN and behaviour and attendance also detract from the LEA's overall support for school improvement. Personnel and financial services generally contribute positively, but support from the key service, the advisory and inspection division (AID), is unsatisfactory overall. There is effective support provided via the LEA's school improvement strategy for ICT, numeracy, literacy and governance but the strategy for schools causing concern has weaknesses. Whilst many schools in the most deprived areas are receiving effective support, problems in implementing the EDP mean the LEA is behind schedule in meeting its targets for disseminating good practice.

Monitoring, challenge, support, intervention

42. There are weaknesses in the management of the AID, and in the provision to schools of monitoring, challenge, support and intervention. The service has recently been through a very difficult period, characterised by conflict, the decision to lose staff quickly because of a deficit budget, and the unavoidable absence of the new Principal Inspector for a six-month period.
43. The LEA previously operated very large services for advice and inspection, sustained in part by the income generated by carrying out Section 10 inspections under contract to OFSTED, and other work outside the authority. Within the authority, this large team gave support to schools virtually on demand. New legislation, Fair Funding and the Code of Practice for LEA-School Relations necessitated wide-ranging changes. Both schools and the service are finding it hard to come to terms with the required change in culture. Although some changes have been made, the LEA has been slow to adapt to the new requirements and a great deal remains to be done.
44. Deployment of staff is not satisfactory. Priorities, although outlined in the Divisional plan are not clear enough in practice. This has led to difficulties in implementing the EDP, and in uneven distribution of work for staff, some of whom have been overloaded. Inspectors and advisers are not always strategically deployed to areas where they are most needed. Plans for the development of the service are not written down and are not adequately reflected in the current divisional plan.
45. There are many good quality personnel within the service, who are well regarded by schools; some have national reputations. Schools visited

particularly praised support for mathematics, science, humanities and for teaching and learning, and the early work on school self review. However, quality is not entirely consistent. In particular, schools are concerned about the effects on some staff of lack of recent classroom experience, and about a lack of secondary management experience in the service as a whole. The quality of link inspectors is also variable; though praised in some, it was criticised in a quarter of schools visited. The service's appraisal system is well embedded but is not an effective substitute for more formal performance review.

46. There are weaknesses in the provision to schools of monitoring, challenge, support and intervention. Primary schools responding to the school survey judged the usefulness of the LEA's monitoring, its capacity to support schools, and the dissemination of good practice to be generally satisfactory, but were more critical than schools in the majority of other LEAs surveyed so far. About a third of primary schools considered each of these functions to be poor. Secondary schools were less satisfied and each of these functions was judged poor by between a half and two-thirds of those schools who responded.
47. The service produced a 'Monitoring and Development Framework' about a year ago, which has been circulated and discussed at a conference for all headteachers. However, this does not clearly spell out the rationale for monitoring or make clear exactly what schools can expect to happen; schools visited varied in their understanding. The framework does not respond sufficiently to the Code of Practice for LEA-School Relations; for example the principles of providing support in proportion to schools' needs are not clearly articulated and monitoring is not sufficiently targeted. There is provision for routine visits to schools to monitor curriculum areas, other than literacy and numeracy, which is difficult to justify under the Code.
48. The mechanisms for providing support, through the EDP or through schools buying in support, are clearer. However, the legacy of 'support on demand' persists in the minds of both schools and officers, and is reflected in the present arrangements for those schools choosing to put all their delegated monies back into the AID. This leads to some lack of clarity and contributes to the difficulties inspectors have in prioritising their workloads. Occasionally schools with a real need for support have not received it. Schools value much of the support that they choose to buy in. So far the LEA has had little involvement in brokering support from elsewhere, though there are plans for increasing collaboration with neighbouring authorities and with the University of Wolverhampton.
49. Intervention is provided in accordance with the policy on schools causing concern, which is published in draft form in the EDP. Although schools understand the general principles involved, the detail is not clear enough, especially in connection with schools deemed to be 'at risk'.
50. Each school's link inspector provides routine monitoring, including analysis of data. Four visits per year are scheduled, totalling about one and a half days. There is a set agenda, which is now sent to the school in advance. In general, schools visited had found the discussions concerning target setting, the EDP and their school improvement plan useful. However, the level of challenge

provided is variable and in some cases insufficient; some aspects of the visits serve little purpose other than information gathering. At present these visits are insufficiently targeted and focused. Neither schools nor governing bodies receive a written record of the visits or of judgements made. This weakens their impact and lessens their effectiveness as a basis for rigorously monitoring and, where necessary, challenging a school's progress.

51. The Principal Inspector is aware of the need to reduce further the size of the service, to target its work more precisely, and to convince both staff and schools of the need for change. However, the AID is still relatively large and expensive. In view of the weaknesses outlined and the variation in effectiveness of support, it does not give satisfactory value for money.

Support for the collection and analysis of data

52. The collection and analysis of data and the process of target setting by the LEA are unsatisfactory. They have improved, but are not yet making sufficient impact on school improvement. The process of providing data on school performance is sound and some useful training and support has been provided to assist schools to interpret the information provided. However, the LEA does not provide sufficient support to all schools to translate that data into consistently challenging targets or into effective action and strategies to secure improvement.
53. Development of the collection and analysis of data is hampered by the lack of appropriate ICT. As a result, much of the work on target setting is done manually or by spreadsheet by staff in the LEA and in the schools. The Assessment Unit produces useful baseline and Key Stage 1 data for primary schools, but does not routinely provide data to make possible comparative evaluation of pupil performance and any 'value-added' by schools. Primary schools judged the provision of data and guidance on its use to be satisfactory, although they were slightly more critical than in other LEAs surveyed; secondary schools judged these aspects to be poor.
54. The LEA identifies a range of potential performance targets for the school. The link inspector discusses and agrees the targets to be set within that range with the headteacher and the governing body. However, the degree of challenge injected into the target-setting process has not always been sufficient, particularly at Key Stage 4. Evaluative criteria to judge the effectiveness of the target-setting process, identified as a key task in the EDP, have not been defined. Dudley receives a significant number of pupils from neighbouring LEAs at Key Stage 3, but has not undertaken any detailed analysis of how this may influence performance levels across the LEA or in individual schools, or related targets. Identifying targets for specific groups of pupils such as children in public care, has improved, but is still not founded upon sufficiently secure data. Performance data and target setting for special schools are at an embryonic stage. Additional achievement targets for individual EAZ schools, and how these relate to the LEA's target-setting process, still need to be clarified.

Support for literacy

55. Support for literacy has been satisfactory overall with some significant strengths. Initially, the LEA did not consult effectively with schools over literacy targets, but the quality of support has increased steadily, particularly in primary schools, and is now good. Support for secondary schools is less extensive but sound. Pupils' attainment is broadly in line with the national average at all key stages. The rate of improvement is similar to that found nationally, and better than this at Key Stage 3. The LEA is confident that, given the results of schools receiving intensive support, overall results will improve by 10 per cent in the next two years, and it will meet its challenging 2002 Key Stage 2 target of 83 per cent of pupils attaining Level 4 or better.
56. Support for raising standards in literacy in the EDP covers a wide range of activities, including targeting Key Stage 3 pupils, pupils from ethnic minorities and boys. The literacy team works closely with the minority ethnic achievement service (EMAS) and the home and hospital tuition service, focusing resources on areas of greatest need. Targets are set for every minority ethnic group at each key stage; individual progress is monitored regularly and the progress is tracked to identify both under and over-achieving groups.
57. The literacy team is highly competent and well managed. Primary and special schools surveyed rated support for literacy as good. In the majority of schools visited it was satisfactory and sometimes good. The monitoring undertaken by the consultant was identified as a significant factor in improving classroom practice. Support for secondary schools is more dependent on link advisers securing the support and advice needed, and is regarded by most schools as satisfactory. The team provides a wealth of practical advice to schools, including demonstration lessons and publications relating specifically to EDP activities. Curricular objectives have been refined and the team's work is now focused on raising writing standards, especially for boys at Key Stages 2 and 3. The LEA has not run summer literacy schools, but has run joint training for Key Stage 2/3 teachers and has encouraged Year 7 teachers to visit local primary schools to observe the strategy in operation.

Support for numeracy

58. Support for numeracy is good in primary schools and satisfactory in secondary and special schools. Pupils' attainment in mathematics is below the national average at Key Stage 1 and in line with the national average at Key Stages 2,3 and 4. The rate of improvement is similar to that found nationally, and slightly better than this at Key Stage 1. The LEA is on course to meet its 2002 Key Stage 2 target of 75 per cent of pupils attaining level 4 or better.
59. Support for raising standards in numeracy in the EDP appropriately covers providing training for schools in connection with the National Numeracy Strategy (NNS), providing intensive support for schools under-performing in numeracy, and ensuring continuity and progress from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3. Detailed actions and suitable success criteria are specified.

60. The introduction of the NNS in primary schools has been well supported. Training has been very good. Schools identified for intensive support have been well supported by the numeracy consultants. Those not identified for intensive support have still received support from the advisory teacher, and more is available through the LEA's buy-back arrangements. Demonstration lessons taught by the consultants, and the provision of leading teachers, have had a positive impact. Primary and special schools surveyed rated support for numeracy as good; secondary schools rated it as satisfactory. The numeracy team has been affected by staff illness, but satisfactory cover arrangements are now in place.
61. Numeracy provision and the quality of implementation in classrooms has been monitored in some schools, and the feedback has been helpful. Special schools have been invited to the training and have also received useful support, for example from the leading teacher programme. Secondary heads of departments have been kept informed of NNS developments. Two recent conferences focused on Key Stage 3. Secondary schools have introduced mental mathematics sessions in Year 7 in advance of requirements.

Support for schools causing concern

62. Overall support for schools causing concern is unsatisfactory. Progress in the different EDP activities, which cover policy and support for schools causing concern, has been uneven. A draft policy on support for schools causing concern is in the process of being updated, but the process has been slow and the document is not yet finalised. Although much of the strategy is appropriate, it is not clearly enough set down, and it is not supported by adequate operational guidance. Headteachers reported their frustration at the lack of clear procedures and there are instances where established procedures have not been followed.
63. Although schools deemed by the LEA to be 'at risk' had been identified informally for some time, formal categorisation only took place at the end of 1999, and the schools were officially informed in January 2000. This process was not managed well by the LEA. At least one school has since received good support, but not all the schools are clear about the reasons for identification, how they access appropriate support, or what will happen subsequently. At least one school had received insufficient warning that it might be deemed 'at risk'.
64. Excluding foundation schools, six schools have been placed in special measures (SM) or deemed to have serious weaknesses (SW) since the start of 1998, including four during 1999. The LEA has not had sufficiently robust procedures to identify such schools and provide enough support to stop them becoming a serious cause for concern. Although procedures are improving, the lack of clarity concerning schools 'at risk' indicates that there are still shortcomings. Schools in special measures and with serious weaknesses have generally received effective support, although even here it is a mixed picture. The LEA separates support and monitoring for these schools. In some instances, care has been taken to complement and not duplicate HMI

monitoring and the school found the associated feedback useful. In other cases the LEA monitoring has added little to the Section 10 inspection evidence but has added to stress on staff, and has not been used effectively to support headteachers in developing monitoring skills.

65. Schools in special measures and with serious weaknesses have been generously supported and there has been a willingness to pour resources into them. Nevertheless, although much of the support has been effective, it has not always been well enough targeted or coordinated. A steering group, which includes a senior officer, oversees the implementation of the LEA's action plan. The LEA has appointed special measures governors, and in some cases this has been very effective. Good use has been made of seconded staff in several schools. However, there is still a lack of clear timelined exit strategies following a school's removal from special measures. The LEA has now improved its mechanisms for coordinating support across the authority. It is starting to consider the cost effectiveness of support, but at present this lacks rigour and detail.

Support for school management

66. Overall, the LEA provides satisfactory support for school management, including support for the curriculum and for improving the quality of teaching. The EDP identifies appropriate activities for securing and supporting high standards of leadership and management. Support for management and the curriculum in each school is identified primarily through the analysis of inspection reports and the school's own improvement plan (SIP). However, the LEA does not systematically analyse information contained in each school plan to identify needs across all schools and to inform the professional development programme.
67. Primary schools judge support for management and professional and curriculum development to be at least satisfactory or better; in secondary schools, support was judged to be satisfactory overall. All headteachers and potential heads are encouraged to follow national programmes for new and serving headteachers via NPQH and LPSH². Specific support for heads experiencing difficulty is negotiated individually by the LEA and new heads receive additional support from the school link inspector. The LEA's plan to offer new headteachers access to a mentor has been delayed by a shortage of mentors; the steering group for this development has not yet been established. Deputy heads have access to a mentoring scheme and the Dudley Deputy Headteachers' Forum provides appropriate and valued opportunities for professional development. The LEA has taken initial steps to link better the strands of management development, including exploring cross-LEA development with other Black Country LEAs and the University of Wolverhampton.

² The National Professional Qualification of Headteachers (NPQH) and the Leadership Programme for Serving Headteachers (LPSH).

68. At the time of the inspection, headteacher and teacher appraisal was not operating in Dudley schools and therefore the LEA is not fulfilling its statutory obligation in this respect. Some schools have established a system of staff interviews with a focus on professional development. A Dudley model for performance management in schools is being developed.
69. The successful implementation of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies has helped to improve the quality of teaching in individual schools. A recent initiative to improve teaching and learning, jointly developed by headteachers and the LEA and using external providers alongside LEA staff, has been very well received, and is being effectively linked to other LEA developments in school self-review. This work is at an early stage of development but a helpful document on school effectiveness setting out models for self-review has been produced. Support for newly qualified teachers is comprehensive and is well regarded. A well-structured model policy for induction, assessment and support has been supplied to schools. The LEA's 'pool' arrangement for vetting applications by newly qualified teachers is valued by schools.
70. Some aspects of course provision and curriculum support are highly regarded by schools. There is, however, a high level of course cancellations. Whilst all courses are evaluated by participants, there is no systematic summary of course evaluations to assist future planning. The LEA provides a wide range of good quality curriculum documentation; a revised curriculum policy statement has been drafted. The authority meets its responsibilities in relation to the Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) and has produced a very good document on the development of spirituality. A very useful document gives guidance on identification of gifted and talented pupils, signs of under-achievement, and advice by key stage and by subject. The LEA has advised schools to identify and create a register of gifted and talented pupils, but has not yet completed the collation of that data.

Support for governors

71. Governors are well supported by the LEA. Schools surveyed judged the information and advice to support governing bodies to be more than satisfactory. The Governors' Support Service (GSS) is highly regarded by governing bodies.
72. All governing bodies are consulted by the LEA on major developments and statutory changes. An appropriate range of good quality training courses is provided for governors. Needs are identified via school link governors and the Advisory Committee for School Governance. There is a relatively low take-up of central training, with governors preferring customised school-based training. The LEA offers additional training and support to a governing body once a school has been identified as causing concern. However, there is little formal routine liaison between the GSS and the AID to enable early identification of schools where issues of governance may lead to cause for concern.

73. Ninety-four per cent of schools buy the governors' support package and the clerking service provided by LEA employees. The LEA acknowledges that there are some anomalies in the pay and employment conditions of clerks, resulting in a lack of transparency on the full costs of the service. Governors generally appreciate the support of the school link inspector at meetings of the governing body but, in the absence of any stated LEA policy, attendance varies between schools and the costs of this support are not sufficiently clear to the LEA or governing bodies.

Support for ICT in the curriculum

74. The LEA provides very good support for the curriculum use of ICT through the Dudley Grid for Learning (DGfL) initiative. This PFI supported initiative between Dudley LEA and Research Machines (RM) PLC will provide a managed ICT service to schools until 2009. All but two schools have signed agreements committing to pay back the monies delegated to them for curriculum ICT for the lifetime of the project. DGfL is intended to deliver the LEA's EDP priority to meet central government's National Grid for Learning (NGfL) targets.
75. The project is innovative, based on clear educational aims and objectives and, so far at least, unique in the degree to which it ties performance and payment to the impact of the project on pupils' learning and teachers' competence in their use of ICT. DGfL targets, with associated financial penalties, cover levels of service availability and use, and educational impact on pupil and teacher attitudes, including the application of ICT across the curriculum and related attainment levels. The initiative has been effectively planned to link into wider corporate priorities for community education and lifelong learning. School-based drop-in centres are already operating effectively and Dudley has bid for related funding to extend the initiative to community centres.
76. This highly complex initiative is being effectively managed. Monitoring and evaluation of the project and its performance targets are sufficiently robust. The installation of hardware has gone smoothly and was efficiently managed. Training provided for schools has been principally delivered by staff from the LEA's former Dudley education computer centre (DECC), who now operate as curriculum advisers to RM and the AID, and has largely been well received by schools. The Dudley virtual learning centre (DVLC) provides good quality Intranet access, though it is not yet used regularly by all schools.
77. Overall, support was at least satisfactory in all the schools visited and was good in just over half. The project has had significant impact on teachers' and pupils' confidence in the use of ICT in all these schools, and almost all were unequivocal that the project was helping to raise standards of attainment. The project's costs are around the average for other NGfL managed services. Given the investment, high levels of resourcing, and the evidence of improved performance in schools, the DGfL support for ICT in the curriculum is providing good value for money.

Support for lifelong learning

78. Lifelong learning is one of the six priorities for development in the Council's community plan, and the EDP includes reinforcing and improving achievement through partnership with families and the wider community amongst its priorities. There are long-standing networks for community and adult education within the borough. LEA support for lifelong learning is generally sound, but the impact of lifelong learning initiatives on most schools is still limited.
79. There are good working relationships between the Community and Lifelong Learning Unit (CLLU) and the Partnerships for Early Years Development, and Childcare and Lifelong Learning. The LEA has made good progress in recent years in developing services for the under-fives. It has increased places to meet demand, developed quality standards for early years settings, successfully developed the EYDC plan and produced a well constructed bid for the Sure Start programme. Effective partnerships with the local Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) and the three further education colleges in the borough have led to several successful initiatives involving Key Stage 4 pupils. These include, for example, an effective pupil mentoring scheme, and successful work-related initiatives providing opportunities for vocational career development or alternative curriculum for disaffected or excluded pupils. LEA figures indicate early success, for example in its 'Jigsaw Project', in helping to keep potentially excluded pupils engaged in education.
80. Twenty schools provide some community and adult education, co-ordinated by the CLLU, and act as outreach centres for further education college courses. Six schools, supported by the LEA, provide education initiatives and facilities specifically for local parents and the community. Over the next three years the LEA intends to encourage all schools to develop a lifelong learning strategy and extend educational opportunities within their community. However, its 'Framework for Developing School and Community Education', has not yet been reviewed or updated.
81. The LEA has made a successful bid for the national 'Out of School Hours Learning' initiative to extend access to education for pupils and parents. Effective Family Learning courses are already established in a number of the Council's designated priority wards. For example, seven primary schools in the EAZ are currently running START (Stories, Talking and Reading Together) in conjunction with the LEA and Dudley College, to help improve the reading skills of parents and tackle early literacy problems for children. EAZ schools have been designated by the LEA to spearhead the EDP priority to increase the parents' involvement in education. Integration of this EDP strand and the zone action plan has been slow, but several zone schools visited have made a solid start to raising parents' and pupils' expectations of attainment, attendance and behaviour.

Recommendations:

In order to improve the LEA's provision of monitoring, challenge, support and intervention:

- a strategy for the future development of the AID should be produced, which reflects the Code of Practice for LEA-School Relations, spells out what is intended and how it is to be achieved, and covers how staff are to be deployed;
- monitoring should be more tightly focused and targeted, and more strongly linked to providing differentiated challenge and support;
- written records of monitoring should be consistently produced, and sent to schools and governing bodies; and
- arrangements should be made to advise schools on external suppliers of support, including drawing up criteria for identifying the best providers.

In order to improve the impact of data analysis and target setting:

- the degree of challenge in the targets set by the LEA and schools should be reviewed, and evaluative criteria to judge the effectiveness of the process of target setting process agreed and applied; and
- comparative and value-added data should be developed and supplied to assist schools and the LEA in the target setting process.

In order to improve the support for schools causing concern:

- the policy on schools causing concern should be finalised and clarified and should provide precise procedures for identifying and working with schools in the different categories;
- further steps should be taken to assess the cost effectiveness of the monitoring and support provided; and
- the support provided to headteachers for monitoring teaching and for developing school autonomy should be improved.

In order to improve support for management and professional and curriculum development:

- school improvement plans and evaluations of in-service training should be analysed systematically in order to inform the programme of management and curriculum support.

SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Corporate planning

82. The Council and senior elected members have a commitment to supporting education and have recently strengthened the corporate view of the role of education within Dudley's overall strategic priorities. However, elected members have not always challenged the performance of officers in the education department rigorously enough. The leadership provided by the most senior officers in the education department is not providing sufficient strategic direction to the overall work of the LEA. Key decisions have too often not been made, and where made, have not been implemented quickly enough or with sufficient rigour. A significant number of schools, and just over half the schools visited, commented on a lack of vision and strategic management from the LEA. Schools feel the need for clearer direction on how the LEA intends to develop the new relationship which the Government seeks to promote between schools and the LEA. Inspection evidence confirms schools' views. The LEA has yet to define precisely the respective roles of the LEA and schools, the degree of responsibility it expects schools to take for their own improvement, the future role of the LEA in developing and maintaining this relationship, and the timescale in which this is to be achieved.
83. Overall corporate planning by the Council is sound. The recently published Community Plan sets out clearly and concisely the priorities for the borough, including lifelong learning. It provides a sufficiently clear vision and structure which defines broad aims, outcomes and targets to judge progress, and has the full support of all the borough's major partners. Nevertheless, the plan only outlines broad objectives. It will require detailed and effective planning by the strategic partnerships responsible for its delivery and by relevant departments and services. To date, the contribution of the education department to this corporate planning varies from good to poor.
84. Planning directly associated with Lifelong Learning has improved. Related key plans such as the early years development and childcare plan (EYDCP), the lifelong learning partnership plan, and the dudley learning plan 2000-2001 are all sound examples of effective strategic planning. The appointment of specific officers to oversee and manage the development of related partnerships and integration of strategic plans is beginning to have some effect. Nevertheless, the identification of working relationships and organisational links across services and agencies remains very variable. The LEA's strategic plan for school improvement has not been woven effectively into all other relevant key strategic and partnership plans, including the EAZ action plan.
85. The LEA strategic plan 1999-2002 has several significant weaknesses, both in its contribution to corporate plans and as a basis for planning and strategically managing the work of the education department. The plan does not map individual divisional priorities or overlapping contributions by divisions against LEA and corporate strategic priorities. Related divisional plans also fail to link consistently the work of divisions to the department's key strategic priorities.

Plans vary in format, in the identification of suitable success criteria, and in criteria for monitoring and evaluating progress. The department acknowledges that it lacks sufficient benchmarked evidence on its relative performance; this has adversely affected earlier performance reviews and leaves the department under-prepared for Best Value. It is, therefore, a cause for concern that not all divisional plans include review and evaluation as priorities.

86. Both officers and members are adjusting to the new organisation and decision-making processes of the Council. Members generally feel they receive sufficiently clear information and advice, enabling them to make informed decisions. However, some key decisions have not been based on sufficiently informative data and evidence, or evaluation of comparative performance by services. Recent examples include the LEA strategic plan, the structure of the AID, and increased finances for special educational needs (SEN). The great majority of schools visited were satisfied that they had access to the decision-making process, particularly through the headteachers' consultative committee (HTCC). Nevertheless, the LEA has not yet formally agreed protocols for consulting all its partners in the light of changed political and decision making structures. The LEA provides a good deal of information for schools but does not always communicate strategic and policy decisions clearly enough. Protocols for communicating with foundation schools still have to be established and adhered to across all LEA services.
87. A number of constructive actions have been taken to reorganise and restructure the work of the education department to reduce compartmentalism and better co-ordinate the work of individual services. The creation of an integrated Community and Lifelong Learning Unit has ensured that the department as a whole is better aligned with revised corporate structures. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of cross-divisional working within the department varies. Co-ordination across divisions and staff contributing to the EYDC and lifelong learning partnerships has been effective; the co-ordination of services for behaviour support has proved less successful. Weaknesses and inconsistencies in strategic planning across the divisions are undermining the development of more effective cross-divisional management. Effective cross-divisional working is often the result of individual efforts by capable and dedicated individuals rather than a systematic approach to allocating resources to clear priorities and the identification of sufficiently clear and consistent criteria to enable individuals and services to prioritise and organise their work.
88. The authority has taken an active role in a wide range of social regeneration and lifelong learning initiatives with, for example, the Dudley partnership board. The Dudley partnership for lifelong learning is now also taking a leading role in co-ordinating provision. The LEA has taken a positive approach to the involvement of officers in the steadily expanding number of partnership groups and multi-agency groups supporting local initiatives. However, a more formalised structure to manage partnerships and cross-agency working is needed. The LEA has not yet produced its proposed matrix of partnerships as the basis for more effective planning and management of cross-agency working.

89. Schools in general are highly critical of liaison between the LEA and other key services and with employers and community organisations. Inspection evidence does not support this blanket criticism. It does suggest, however, that the LEA is not successfully communicating, or disseminating, the success of these initiatives to schools that are not currently involved in existing lifelong learning links, or social regeneration initiatives.
90. Liaison with the Health Authority and the police is sound. There is generally effective cooperation between education and Social Services at an operational level. However, joint protocols and planning at a strategic level have been slow to develop. The views of the two departments on the extent and effectiveness of partnership at senior levels differ. At a practical level, the absence of compatible data is adversely affecting access by all relevant services to comprehensive information on the most vulnerable children in the authority's care. The LEA provided positive support to the EAZ during its inception, but has not been proactive enough in planning how to co-ordinate zone initiatives with its own developments.

Management services

91. Management services, which until last year were offered as a single level linked service to schools, generally perform well and provide satisfactory value for money. From April 2000 these are offered as individual services. However support to schools from property services is unsatisfactory.
92. Personnel support is satisfactory. Links with the AID in supporting work with schools causing concern have improved and are now satisfactory. The service is offered to schools through the education department as a single standard service. Schools surveyed judged the service to be satisfactory. It has since been strengthened through the appointment of a specialist educational personnel officer.
93. The functions performed by accountancy, payroll and financial services are comprehensive and highly regarded by schools. School visits confirmed the high ratings in the school survey. Services are provided by the Council's financial services section. In order to track finances, schools use a link to the Council's mainframe ICT system, although schools also have cheque book arrangements. Schools receive up to four school visits a year from their account manager. Many schools have developed a high level of dependence on this central support. The LEA has more to do to reduce this level of dependency, for example, by giving schools financial benchmarking information that is currently only provided on request. The Council has plans to move to school-based financial systems requiring greater financial independence and a longer-term financial planning perspective.
94. Dudley schools have access to a potentially very impressive ICT administration system, integrated with schools' 'curriculum' networks through the DGfL initiative. Financial, personnel and payroll data operate on the Council's corporate ICT systems, while information on pupils, attendance and assessment is able to pass from schools to the centre on the management

information systems (MIS) within the DGfL. Overall, provision is sound, but there have been some operational difficulties in establishing a fully co-ordinated system.

95. Systems are still in the process of development and assimilation in schools. However, schools in general are still critical of the transfer of electronic data between schools and the LEA. The related EDP target to develop an enhanced MIS has slipped. Some basic training has been repeated to accommodate delays in the installation programme. DGfL intends that schools will have full access to the MIS from September 2000, but related training in interpreting and using pupil and school performance data has not yet been organised. A long established corporate e-mail system and the new DGfL system do not connect. The consequent parallel running of two systems is inefficient. The authority has, rightly, declared its intention to minimise the exchange of paper-based information with schools, but has yet to develop associated communication protocols to assist both it and schools to track information and reduce bureaucratic demands on schools.
96. The Council offers satisfactory routine support through Dudley property consultancy (DPC), but overall support from the buildings repairs and maintenance service is unsatisfactory. Schools can have a full buy-back service or a service level agreement, including an emergency out-of-hours service. Nevertheless, responses by DPC to schools to assist in the deployment of capital funding have been unsatisfactory and insensitive to the needs of schools. The increasing likelihood of schools employing outside agencies for minor capital work will stretch the limited monitoring resources in the education department. The grounds maintenance service is uneven in quality and effectiveness.
97. Schools visited during the inspection who were using the service, were complimentary about the central purchasing service.

Recommendations

In order to improve strategic planning and management:

- the LEA, in consultation with schools, should decide and define its role, setting a clear timescale and staged targets for the relationship it will maintain with its schools, the nature of support it will provide, the degree of responsibility it expects schools to take, and the role of the LEA in supporting this change;
- priorities and activities to promote school improvement should be effectively integrated into other key strategic plans;
- performance measures should be urgently developed and all divisional plans within the education department should include rigorous monitoring, review and evaluation procedures;
- the LEA strategic plan and associated divisional plans should be revised to ensure they:
 - provide a more consistent basis for cross-divisional planning and management;

- inform the effective delivery of the LEA's own strategic and wider corporate priorities; and
- are based on a rigorous evaluation of the LEA's relative performance;
- the Council's decisions on education should be underpinned by more rigorous application of Best Value principles and by more rigorous performance and service review;
- clear, joint protocols for working should be established between the Education department and Social Services;
- a common and compatible pupil database should urgently be established, enabling all Council services to effectively monitor and evaluate the provision for, and progress of, disaffected and vulnerable children and those in public care; and
- the proposed matrix of partnership and multi-agency work should be produced and developed into an effective framework for monitoring, planning and managing cross-agency working.

In order to improve support from management services:

- the quality and effectiveness of the grounds maintenance services should be improved.

In order to ensure a more efficient and effective basis for communications with and between schools:

- the duplication of electronic mail systems should be eliminated and systems and protocols developed to ensure that schools and the local authority are better able to track the flow of communications; and
- training in the interpretation and use performance data on the DGfL management information system should be developed and provided to schools as quickly as possible.

SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL PROVISION

Strategy

98. The LEA's strategy for supporting pupils with special educational needs (SEN) is unsatisfactory. Whilst there is now a basis on which to develop a sound overall strategy, progress has been too slow. Following several years of sustained consultation with local headteachers and external consultants, the authority has made significant changes to personnel and a revised SEN policy with procedural guidance is now in its final stages of production. It is a coherent document and relates closely to a draft inclusion policy currently being consulted upon. However, although it has now defined the principles of inclusion, the LEA has failed to communicate the implications of inclusion for schools and no targets have been set to promote inclusion. The LEA has not identified the overall timescale or stages by which it will implement the changes, or how it will support schools in taking greater responsibility for meeting the needs of pupils with special educational needs.
99. Seven special schools cater for over two-thirds of pupils with a statement for special educational needs, with the remaining third in mainstream resource bases, individual needs centres, mainstream schools and out-of-borough placements. Special schools have not evolved according to original plans to provide separate primary and secondary schools for pupils with severe and challenging disabilities. This has left inconsistencies and, in some cases, inappropriate all-age provision. The vast majority of schools visited expressed their dissatisfaction with the LEA's inability to articulate a clear vision and comprehensive strategy for promoting inclusion. A range of services provides expertise to support teachers in mainstream and special schools at Stages 3-5 of the SEN Code of Practice. Many of these services are well received by schools, parents and other external networks but further inclusion will require a review of service provision to ensure fair and equitable access to services.

Statutory obligations

100. The LEA satisfactorily meets its statutory functions. Weaknesses remain but, for the most part, are being tackled. Staff shortage and difficulties in relationships within the education psychology service (EPS) have seriously affected provision in schools and the completion of statutory assessments within time limits. A new principal educational psychologist has been appointed and a restructuring of the service on an area basis is planned; the LEA intends the service to be at full complement by September 2000. The service has made considerable progress and 83 per cent of statements are now prepared within the statutory period. However, the redirection of EPS resources to achieve this has been at the expense of in-school support.
101. The evidence is that pupils who require support through statementing receive it. The LEA has taken a firm approach to managing its limited resources and provision of statements. Support services negotiate time allocations with schools on a formula basis, including LEA-funded support for pupils at Stage 3.

The LEA has had some success with earlier intervention and support for pupils at Stage 3, with a consequent reduction in the need for statementing. It is now attempting to build on this intervention to include more pupils in mainstream settings. The LEA acknowledges that its policy has not been communicated adequately to schools, who have interpreted the process as 'capping' resources and limiting access to the assessment process.

102. Statements are becoming more prescriptive and tailored to individual need. Nevertheless, the criteria for statementing are not sufficiently clear to enable schools and parents to understand the process of statementing, to select other appropriate earlier intervention, and to be confident there is consistency across schools. The authority has been slow to review effectively the progress of pupils with SEN and, in consequence, has a poor record of recycling resources and reviewing provision through ceasing to maintain statements for pupils in both special and mainstream schools. The authority has recently appointed a conciliation officer to improve relationships with schools and parents, and has had some significant initial success in reducing the high number of costly tribunals.

School improvement and value for money

103. There are strengths in some services and in elements of training, but overall SEN support to help schools improve is unsatisfactory. SEN is not adequately covered within the LEA's overall strategy for school improvement and schools surveyed rated the LEA's strategy and current provision for SEN as poor. There are significant weaknesses in the LEA's provision which adversely affect schools' capability to plan and manage SEN support effectively. Many schools are doubly frustrated at the absence of a clear enough strategy for promoting improvement through inclusion, and the lack of transparent criteria for all stages of the Code of Practice. This has created a climate of confusion and mistrust.
104. Primary schools visited were unanimous in praise for the quality of support provided by the learning support service (LSS); secondary schools expressed mixed views. Schools valued the high quality support provided by the sensory impaired services, the counselling service and the pre-school service. A highly successful SENCO training course is validated and led by Birmingham University for Dudley and Sandwell LEAs. The SEN inspector provides supportive and complementary training for mainstream and special schools through the SENCO forum which includes good quality training in the writing of IEPs. However, despite the LEA's involvement in a regional project, target setting is under-developed in special schools.
105. Expenditure on special needs is not yet sharply focused on priorities and offers poor value for money. Because funding has not been set out explicitly enough in schools' budget shares, there is a continuing expectation of more central funding. Many schools are unclear about the SEN component of their budget and there is inconsistent monitoring of SEN funds and resources. The LSS and sensory impaired services monitor individual pupils provision, but there is no comprehensive and cohesive evaluation of school or borough-wide SEN provision by the LEA. SENCOs are being trained to use recently developed

self-review checklists and a framework for school policy review in order to design SEN development plans, but these are not consistently used as a basis for monitoring by the LEA. The LEA has not taken an overview of what is needed and there is too much incremental activity. The LEA is not helping schools to develop their ability to manage support for SEN effectively and to prepare for possible increased delegation. The high costs of out-of-borough provision are a concern to officers who are beginning to move towards further in-borough provision, initially with a mainstream resource for physical disabilities. However, the LEA has not yet set targets to reduce these escalating costs.

Recommendations

In order to improve provision for pupils with special educational need:

- a long-term SEN strategy, with specific targets, and stages to move the authority progressively towards inclusion, should be completed and implemented;
- special school provision and out-of-borough provision should be reviewed to establish a continuum of provision across the spectrum of severe and challenging disorders, and to ensure that resources are most effectively used;
- in consultation with schools, the formula funding for SEN, including the criteria for assessment and the provision of statements of special educational need, should be clarified, published and its effects monitored; and
- methods of monitoring and evaluating practice in schools, and support services, should be developed in consultation with schools.

SECTION 5: ACCESS

106. For the most part the LEA is ensuring that pupils have satisfactory access to education and that statutory requirements are met. However, in a number of key areas, most notably support for behaviour, attendance and for children in public care, the LEA's support is not effective and is not providing value for money.

Planning of school places

107. Dudley's school organisation plan (SOP) is sound, though there are weaknesses in its coverage of SEN. It provides a reasonable basis for tackling the 1,500 surplus primary school places in the borough and provides scope for the possible removal of temporary accommodation, which comprises six per cent of primary capacity. A cross-departmental planning group is building effectively on criteria in the SOP to assess capacity, sustainability and pupil attainment in order to tackle primary surpluses. However, this process and information have not been shared with schools. The element in the plan covering special educational needs provision is largely descriptive and fails to give a clear indication of the intended balance between supply, demand and location of SEN provision.

108. The SOP provides a clear analysis of developing over-subscription in some sectors of the borough at secondary level. Although Dudley has established good links with neighbouring authorities, it has not exploited these to explore the potential for collaboratively addressing the challenges to admissions, planning of places and value for money posed by over-subscription.

109. Dudley's education capital programme is well managed and monitored. The necessary elements of its asset management plan (AMP) are in place, including full school condition surveys and their future programming. Priorities for repairs and maintenance, and capital and grant are appropriately assessed by a joint officer and school's group. The process is fair, but schools' understanding of the process is variable. This is not assisted by slow communications.

110. Condition surveys have identified necessary work of around £35m, the bulk of which should take place within five years. Suitability assessments, which the schools and the authority are currently completing, will add to the overall bill. Although the Council has analysed the type of work needed, it has not yet split the costs between school and local authority responsibilities in order to ensure that appropriate medium-term funding strategies are developed. The LEA has appropriate plans to undertake its landlord responsibilities through termly school visits by building surveyors. These visits will also involve updating the AMP. Initially, the LEA was slow in assigning building surveyor time to foundation schools, but this is now in place.

Admissions to schools

111. Overall arrangements for the management of school admissions are satisfactory. They are being strengthened both by restructuring of the department and the use of ICT. The quality of the Council's admissions booklets is sound, and is improving. The draft secondary booklet uses community languages, and provides details of the admission arrangements for every secondary school, including the pattern of demand, appeals and success rates. For the most part the primary booklet is equally effective, although it is misleading about the timing of applications for first preference schools. Dudley is on target to implement its Key Stage 1 class size plan in September 2000. Nevertheless, its admissions policy on two-point entry to community schools can result in an inefficient use of resources, and leaves some schools with apparent capacity but not able to respond to parental requests for early full-time admission.
112. The incidence of secondary appeals in Dudley has been high. As a result of the popularity of Dudley secondary schools, fewer than 90 per cent of parents secure their first preference. The authority is, rightly, introducing a simplified single application form to reduce the number of multiple applications to Dudley schools, reduce the number of appeals and the level of parental uncertainty. All but one of the secondary schools now participate in the process. Procedures for appeals to community schools have also been simplified and appeals are completed in appropriate time. However, literature sent to parents advising them of the appeals procedures is too complicated.

Provision for education otherwise than at school

113. The LEA's overall provision for education otherwise than at school is good and provides sound value for money. Since July 1999, the number of children and young people without educational provision has been drastically reduced. The number of permanent exclusions has reduced from 52 in 1998/99 to 23 in the current year. Pastoral support plans (PSPs) have been instrumental in reducing both fixed term and permanent exclusions. Ninety per cent of permanently excluded Key Stage 4 pupils now receive relevant provision in excess of 20 hours a week. At Key Stage 3, although the LEA falls a little short of the government's target to find alternative provision within 15 days, plans are in place to achieve this by September 2000, ahead of the government's target.
114. The revised behaviour support plan (BSP) provides detail of co-ordinated activities including re-integration, inter-agency liaison, and support for teenage school girls who are pregnant. Sound partnerships have been established with local colleges, the National Children's Home, the Housing Department, and the Community and Lifelong Learning Unit. There is a good range of provision, particularly at Key Stage 4. The LEA's emphasis, and the work of support services such as home-tuition and the pupil support unit, is on integrating pupils back into school and enabling them to attain educational qualifications. Monitoring of provision is a shared responsibility between AID and behaviour support service (BSS), and the quality and co-ordination of information is not yet good enough.

Support for behaviour

115. Support for behaviour is unsatisfactory. The LEA's strategy to support pupils with behaviour problems and to enable schools to manage these problems lacks strategic coordination. There are gaps in provision and value for money is unsatisfactory. The BSP states priorities clearly but is not sufficiently specific on measurable outcomes and how these will be achieved. The potential of the plan has not yet been realised because its implementation has been hampered by a lack of coordination of the work of the BSS, the educational psychology service (EPS) and the behaviour management support service (BMSS).
116. The newly appointed heads of the three respective services are working very constructively to develop procedures at an operational level. However, the LEA has not articulated its overall strategy for behaviour support clearly enough and many schools visited were unsure where to obtain advice and support. EPS support for individual pupils has not been effective overall, largely because of the priority given to reducing the backlog of statements. Where schools have been involved in behaviour support projects, they judged them to be generally effective. Those schools who had used the BMSS valued the service. The BSS has provided schools with valuable advice on exclusions, but support in school has not always been followed through to a satisfactory conclusion. Most schools have yet to feel the impact of the new BSS service.

Support for attendance at school

117. Despite recent improvements, overall support to help schools improve attendance continues to be unsatisfactory. Developments are still too new for the service to be demonstrably providing value for money. A report from external consultants, commissioned by the LEA, was highly critical of support for attendance. The recently appointed head of service has begun to implement a clear and comprehensive action plan to provide a more responsive and flexible service to schools. The service is in transition, and good progress has been made in a relatively short time. The head of service has begun to implement sound internal monitoring and reporting systems. Data is now available on referrals for poor attendance, home visits and prosecutions, and their impact on attendance. Protocols have been developed with the police to conduct regular and sustained truancy sweeps.
118. Rates of attendance are above the national average for secondary schools and broadly in line in primaries. Secondary schools are on line to meet targets for reduced unauthorised absence, whilst primary schools have already met the present year's target. However, these figures mask the fact that many more days are lost through condoned absence in both phases. The LEA has developed an unambiguous policy statement on extended leave from school and, through the work of EMAS, study packs have been developed to support pupils at Key Stages 1 and 2 who spend time travelling in this country and abroad.

119. Nevertheless, the strategies to support improvement identified in the EDP are behind schedule because of delays in bringing the service up to its full complement, and the time it is taking for policy to be agreed in consultation with the Headteachers' Consultative Committee. LEA strategies to develop integrated data retrieval systems and provide schools with reliable access to information are also behind schedule and have impacted on developments. Schools surveyed were significantly more critical of support for attendance than in other LEAs. School visits confirmed a picture of inconsistent support. The majority of schools visited indicated that the service was improving and a number reported valuable support received from individual education social workers (ESWs). Nevertheless, an unacceptable level of inconsistencies remains in the support which some schools receive; several schools reported being without an ESW for over a year.

Children in public care

120. Provision for children in public care is improving and, on the ground, children are generally receiving sufficient support. Nevertheless, weaknesses at the strategic level mean that support overall is unsatisfactory. Improvements are largely the result of recently established operational procedures for joint working between education and social services staff, and a strong commitment to make it work for the sake of the children. At a strategic level, however, joint planning has been slow. The flow of information and the ability to monitor all children's progress have been significantly hampered by the incompatibility of departmental databases. The quality of available data has meant that targets in the EDP are aspirational, and that too much time is spent retrieving the necessary information to drive the initiative forward. The LEA does not collect data on all children at present and the EDP activity does not specify how the targets will be achieved. Children in public care achieve comparatively well at Key Stage 1, but the gap widens significantly between these children and the rest of the school population as they progress through school. The targets for 2002 are unrealistic.

121. Most schools have identified designated teachers, many of whom have recently received training jointly provided by the two departments. However, not all schools visited were clear about their responsibilities. Personal education plans (PEP) are being piloted; all children will have one in place by 2002, enabling individual progress to be monitored more effectively in LEA schools. Currently, only those pupils with IEPs, PEPs and statements are monitored regularly. There is no consistency at present in monitoring and evaluating the provision, particularly when children living in Dudley are placed out-of-borough. Overall, the service is not providing value for money.

Health and safety, welfare and children protection

122. The authority has appropriate health and safety guidance, monitoring and reporting arrangements in place. It maintains close liaison with the police over site security issues and has undertaken a full risk assessment of all school sites and buildings. Schools are required to maintain an up-to-date health and safety file to be presented to all contractors working on-site. The authority has also

made arrangements this year to assume the necessary health and safety assessment of work experience placements.

123. The LEA fulfils its statutory duties in relation to child protection. Good quality provision is well established, and training and support are highly valued by schools. An action plan is in place in order to maintain momentum and to further improve the provision within the borough. However, policy and guidance on the protection of pupils placed out of the borough is not sufficiently well defined. The education department is well represented on the area child protection committee. A Child Protection in Education working group was established in 1999 to bring together all relevant education groups in one body. Good progress has been made with support for schools, but there is still work to be done to improve working protocols and procedures and address the training needs of services within education.

Support for minority ethnic children, including Travellers

124. Support for minority ethnic pupils and Travellers is satisfactory overall, and has a number of strengths. The work of the Ethnic Minority Achievement Service (EMAS) is wide-ranging and linked clearly to need. The service manages the authority's funding through the minority ethnic and Traveller's achievement grant (EMTAG). The transition from Section 11 funding has proceeded relatively smoothly and 15 per cent of funding is retained centrally to provide a service to those schools who do not qualify for a grant. There is a wide range of achievement amongst minority ethnic groups. Indian pupils attain well above the LEA average, whereas Pakistani pupils, who form the largest group, and African-Caribbean pupils, achieve well below.
125. The LEA has developed a long-term strategy to address these issues and the service has been very effective in providing imaginative solutions to the low achievements of particular groups of pupils. The Breakthrough Initiative Project, funded jointly by the LEA and the SRB, has increased parental involvement and enhanced pupils' motivation and self-esteem by opening an increasing number of Saturday schools and evening classes for Pakistani, African-Caribbean and Yemeni pupils. At Key Stage 2 most groups met their LEA targets in English and exceeded them in mathematics. At Key Stage 4, there was a significant improvement on the previous year's performance with 36.2 per cent gaining five A*-C grades. Notably, Pakistani pupils exceeded their target by over nine per cent. The performance of Black-Caribbean pupils remains a concern. However, the proportion of exclusions of minority ethnic pupils, particularly African-Caribbean boys, is not only lower than it is nationally but is proportionately less than that of white pupils in the LEA.
126. There is a good policy and clear guidelines to meet the needs of bilingual pupils who also have special educational needs. Effective links have been forged between EMAS, the assessment and literacy teams, and the EWS. The progress of minority ethnic pupils is now more regularly and effectively monitored, though the absence of suitable electronic systems means that retrieval and analysis of attainment data are not wholly efficient. The LEA was a founder member of the West Midlands Consortium Education Service for

Travelling Children, based and managed within Wolverhampton LEA; the support for meeting the needs of these pupils is well organised and effective. However, support for Traveller children is not included in the EDP, either in the context of the LEA or, more particularly, in relation to raising achievement, nor is it included in the EMTAG action plan.

Measures taken to combat racism

127. The LEA has recently instigated satisfactory measures to combat racism in schools, including the appointment of a Race Equality Officer within EMAS to work with pupils, governors and all staff in schools. In the last year the LEA, working with Dudley Race Equality Council, has consulted with headteachers and produced guidance and clear criteria for schools to record racial incidents and to enable the LEA to comply with the recommendations of the Macpherson report into the death of Stephen Lawrence.
128. There are, however, weaknesses in strategic planning. Developments in the borough are underpinned by action plans for Equal Opportunities (Race) and Race Equality in Education. Neither plan maps out sufficiently specific targets to enable the LEA to monitor the effectiveness of its actions and there is insufficient coherence between these plans and the EDP.

Social exclusion

129. The LEA's efforts to ensure that pupils have satisfactory access to education and to actively combat social exclusion vary in their overall effectiveness. The need to co-ordinate support for disaffected young people for crime prevention and for community and lifelong learning is at the heart of the Community Plan and Council priorities. The authority has used SRB and other sources of grant funding effectively to provide multi-agency support for community regeneration projects aimed at tackling social exclusion in many areas of the borough.
130. The majority of LEA's partners within the authority and regionally, including the TEC, report positive links at operational levels and positive attitudes at strategic levels. However, despite improving liaison and management of a number of strategic partnerships, weaknesses in the LEA's strategic management have affected progress in developing and managing effective cross-divisional and multi-agency working. Links with social services vary in their effectiveness; they are sound in the area of child protection, but strategic planning at senior levels still needs to be strengthened. There are weaknesses in support for behaviour and attendance, but support for excluded pupils is good. Although the LEA's formal monitoring of data on the attainment of minority ethnic pupils and Traveller's children has weaknesses, the support provided is effective. Nevertheless, the LEA has failed to ensure that comprehensive information and data on its most disaffected and vulnerable children are available across all relevant services and agencies. This key weakness fundamentally undermines other efforts; the LEA is not yet effectively tackling social exclusion.

Recommendations

In order to further improve strategies for management of school places and appeals arrangements:

- the process and timescales involved in the removal of surplus places should be communicated to schools more explicitly;
- a more specific appraisal of the planning of special education places should be included in the school organisation plan; and
- appeals information should be revised and sent to parents.

In order to improve support for behaviour and attendance:

- the BSP should be updated to include specific outcomes and clear strategies for how they will be achieved;
- the roles and responsibilities of all the services who support behaviour should be clarified and communicated to schools; and
- inconsistencies in the quality of EWS support to schools should be addressed.

In order to improve provision for children in public care and for Traveller children:

- specific activities should be incorporated into the EDP to address the targets for children in public care at Key Stages 2 and 4; and
- targets for the attainment of Traveller children should be set in the EMTAG action plan and EDP.

APPENDIX: SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to improve the implementation of the EDP:

- reasons for slow progress in implementing specific priorities and actions to make up lost ground should be clearly identified;
- relevant staff should be given sufficient time to manage priorities and implement activities, and be accountable for progress made; and
- arrangements should be made to consult headteachers and governors over proposed changes to the EDP and a report provided to schools and elected members on progress to date.

In order to improve the evaluation and effectiveness of the Council's education spending and ensure more transparency about the deployment of funding:

- the approach to coding education spending and budget statements should be amended so that it is more consistent with that nationally and enables a rigorous analysis of comparative spending patterns;
- schools' involvement in corporate resource decisions should be increased;
- the criteria for additional funding to schools with specific needs should be clarified urgently, agreed, and reported to all schools; and
- consistent access to benchmarking information should be provided to schools to enable them to deploy their resources more effectively.

In order to meet the requirements of Best Value and embrace its principles more consistently:

- a consistent model for performance management should be developed and implemented consistently across services as quickly as possible; and
- the principles of Best Value should be urgently implemented by the LEA.

In order to improve the LEA's provision of monitoring, challenge, support and intervention:

- a strategy for the future development of the AID should be produced, which reflects the Code of Practice for LEA-School Relations, spells out what is intended and how it is to be achieved, and covers how staff are to be deployed;
- monitoring should be more tightly focused and targeted, and more strongly linked to providing differentiated challenge and support;
- written records of monitoring should be consistently produced, and sent to schools and governing bodies; and
- arrangements should be made to advise schools on external suppliers of support, including drawing up criteria for identifying the best providers.

In order to improve the impact of data analysis and target setting:

- the degree of challenge in the targets set by the LEA and schools should be reviewed, and evaluative criteria to judge the effectiveness of the process of target setting process agreed and applied; and

- comparative and value-added data should be developed and supplied to assist schools and the LEA in the target setting process;

In order to improve the support for schools causing concern:

- the policy on schools causing concern should be finalised and clarified and should provide precise procedures for identifying and working with schools in the different categories;
- further steps should be taken to assess the cost effectiveness of the monitoring and support provided; and
- the support provided to headteachers for monitoring teaching and for developing school autonomy should be improved.

In order to improve support for management and professional and curriculum development:

- school improvement plans and evaluations of in-service training should be analysed systematically in order to inform the programme of management and curriculum support.

In order to improve strategic planning and management:

- the LEA, in consultation with schools, should decide and define its role, setting a clear timescale and staged targets for the relationship it will maintain with its schools, the nature of support it will provide, the degree of responsibility it expects schools to take, and the role of the LEA in supporting this change;
- priorities and activities to promote school improvement should be effectively integrated into other key strategic plans;
- performance measures should be urgently developed and all divisional plans within the education department should include rigorous monitoring, review and evaluation procedures;
- the LEA strategic plan and associated divisional plans should be revised to ensure they;
 - provide a more consistent basis for cross-divisional planning and management;
 - inform the effective delivery of the LEA's own strategic and wider corporate priorities; and
 - are based on a rigorous evaluation of the LEA's relative performance;
- the Council's decisions on education should be underpinned by more rigorous application of Best Value principles and by more rigorous performance and service review;
- clear, joint protocols for working should be established between the Education department and Social Services;
- a common and compatible pupil database should urgently be established, enabling all Council services to effectively monitor and evaluate the provision for, and progress of, disaffected and vulnerable children and those in public care; and
- the proposed matrix of partnership and multi-agency work should be produced and developed into an effective framework for monitoring, planning and managing cross-agency working.

In order to improve support from management services:

- the quality and effectiveness of the grounds maintenance services should be improved.

In order to ensure a more efficient and effective basis for communications with and between schools:

- the duplication of electronic mail systems should be eliminated and systems and protocols developed to ensure that schools and the local authority are better able to track the flow of communications; and
- training in the interpretation and use performance data on the DGfL management information system should be developed and provided to schools as quickly as possible.

In order to improve provision for pupils with special educational need:

- a long-term SEN strategy, with specific targets, and stages to move the authority progressively towards inclusion, should be completed and implemented;
- special school provision and out-of-borough provision should be reviewed to establish a continuum of provision across the spectrum of severe and challenging disorders, and to ensure that resources are most effectively used;
- in consultation with schools, the formula funding for SEN, including the criteria for assessment and the provision of statements of special educational need, should be clarified, published and its effects monitored; and
- methods of monitoring and evaluating practice in schools, and support services, should be developed in consultation with schools.

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- specific activities should be incorporated into the EDP to address the targets for children in public care at Key Stages 2 and 4; and

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