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IN EDUCATION**

**INSPECTION OF
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LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY**

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APPENDIX: RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

1. This inspection was carried out by OFSTED in conjunction with the Audit Commission under Section 38 of the Education Act 1997. The inspection also took account of the Local Government Act 1999 insofar as it relates to the work undertaken by the local education authority (LEA) on Best Value. 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 partly based on data, some of which was provided by the LEA, on school inspection information and audit reports, on documentation and discussions with LEA members, staff in the Education Department and in other council departments and representatives of the LEA's partners. In addition, a questionnaire seeking views on aspects of the LEA's work was circulated to all schools. The response rate was 75 per cent.

3. The inspection also involved studies of the effectiveness of particular aspects of the LEA's work through visits to 19 schools. The visits tested the views of governors, headteachers and other staff on the key aspects of the LEA's strategy. The visits also considered whether the support which is provided by the LEA contributes, where appropriate, to the discharge of the LEA's statutory duties, is effective in contributing to improvements in the school, and provides value for money.

COMMENTARY

4. Croydon is the largest of the London boroughs and is located on the southern edge of London. It serves a culturally diverse population. It is a borough of stark contrasts, with areas of considerable social deprivation juxtaposed with very affluent areas. In 1998 it was ranked as the 88th most deprived local authority district in England, out of 366. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is above the national average. There are substantial and growing numbers of children whose parents are asylum seekers or refugees.

5. There is a substantial movement of pupils into and out of the borough at secondary transfer. There is a net loss of higher attaining pupils to selective schools in neighbouring authorities and to independent schools and this is reflected in test and examination results. Performance in English and mathematics at Key Stage 2 is broadly in line with national averages. The proportion of pupils passing five or more GCSEs at grades A*-C is below the national average but slightly above it for passes at grades A*-G.

6. The LEA takes reasonable steps to meet statutory duties and performs most of its functions at least satisfactorily. Strengths outweigh weaknesses and there are relatively few weaknesses. Particular strengths of the LEA include:

- support for schools causing concern;
- support for governors;
- services to support pupils with special educational needs (SEN) in schools;
- support for early years education;
- support for ICT in administration;
- provision for education other than in schools; and
- behaviour support and the work of the pupil referral units (PRUs).

Weaknesses include:

- aspects of personnel and payroll services;
- the time taken to produce statements of special educational need; and
- advice on the maintenance of buildings.

7. The LEA has made considerable progress in the past few years, particularly in identifying and supporting schools in difficulty and in its relationships with schools and other partners. At the time of the inspection, no school was subject to special measures and few had serious weaknesses. Inspectors and advisory staff are highly regarded and are expert in monitoring, challenging and supporting schools. Relationships with schools, including the former grant-maintained schools, professional associations and other partners are good. The LEA is effective in fully involving schools in developing policies and strategies to raise standards and improve access to education.

8. Elected members and senior officers provide very sound leadership and there is strong corporate support for education. There is considerable cross-party agreement on the main priorities for education, which have been pursued

consistently during the past few years. The director has been prepared to take appropriately tough action when necessary to ensure improvements. All statutory plans have been approved and produced on time. These are sound, revised on a regular basis and extend beyond the current financial year. The LEA has traditionally delegated a relatively high proportion of funds to schools and currently exceeds government targets. The broad objectives for education and the short term priorities are set out in the LEA's one year business plan. However, there is insufficient central planning of longer-term strategic priorities and their resource implications.

9. The Education Development Plan (EDP) has been improved as a result of the revisions for years two and three. Schools have a good understanding of it and see the priorities as relevant to their own development. The EDP provides a sound basis for school improvement and progress in implementing it has been reasonable. However, there is still room for improving the EDP by reducing its breadth, targeting support more effectively and improving the coherence of some of its strategies. The LEA's statutory targets for 2002 are demanding and the LEA has rightly challenged a significant number of schools that have set insufficiently ambitious targets. Raising teacher and pupil expectations remains a key task for the LEA.

10. Most services provide satisfactory support to schools but there is variation in performance both within and between services, indicating some weaknesses in quality assurance procedures. There has not always been a sufficiently rapid or robust response to clearly identified difficulties, particularly where these involve cross-service working between management services. A more rigorous application of Best Value principles and reviews is needed to ensure continuous improvement in the performance of services.

11. Overall, the LEA is performing well but still faces very considerable challenges. Improvements in national test and examination results are generally no better than national rates and substantial improvements are needed if statutory targets for 2002 are to be met. Standards in some schools and for some groups of pupils remain too low. Difficulties in recruiting and retaining teachers pose an increasing threat to raising performance. However, the LEA has the capacity to improve and to implement the recommendations made in this report.

SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Context

12. Croydon is located on the southern edge of London and is bordered by the boroughs of Lambeth, Southwark, Merton, Bromley and Sutton and the County of Surrey. It has the largest population of the 33 London Boroughs. In 1998 Croydon was ranked the 88th most deprived local authority district in England and Wales (out of 366). The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is approximately five per cent above the national average in primary and secondary schools. Thirty four per cent of pupils are of ethnic minority heritage, a significantly higher proportion than nationally. There are substantial and growing numbers of refugees and asylum seekers. It is a borough of considerable socio-economic contrasts. The northern part of the borough shows similar features to inner city areas. The southern part of the borough has considerable areas of affluence but also has a large council estate with high levels of social deprivation.

13. There are approximately 49,000 pupils in maintained schools in Croydon. Approximately 22 per cent of primary pupils are below compulsory school age. About one third of primary pupils transfer to secondary schools in other LEAs or to independent schools and there is also a significant movement of pupils into the borough from surrounding LEAs. There is a substantial net loss of higher attaining pupils from the borough at the end of Key Stage 2. In 1999, 2.7 per cent of primary pupils and 2.9 per cent of secondary pupils had statements of special educational need, both significantly below the national average.

14. There are: four nursery schools; 94 primary schools; 21 secondary schools; six special schools and three pupil referral units (PRUs). Five secondary schools and 18 primary schools are voluntary aided. Ten secondary schools and three primary schools were formerly grant maintained. One secondary school has joined the LEA from the independent sector. The age of secondary transfer is 11. All schools are comprehensive but four former grant-maintained schools apply partial selection. Only four schools have sixth forms, accounting for less than one-fifth of education and training for 16-18 year olds. There are two city technology colleges, two sixth form colleges and one college of further education, all of which are outside of LEA control. One secondary school and eight primary schools on the New Addington estate form an education action zone (EAZ) which was established in 1998.

Performance

15. The LEA's baseline data and OFSTED inspection data indicate that attainment on entry to primary schools is broadly in line with national figures, although there are considerable differences between schools.

16. Key Stage 2 test results in English are broadly in line with the national average but below those of statistical neighbours. Key Stage 2 test results in mathematics are in line with national averages and statistical neighbours. The proportion of pupils attaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A*-C is approximately five per cent below the national average and those of statistical neighbours. However, the proportion passing five or more GCSEs at grades A*-G and the proportion attaining

at least one pass are slightly above national averages. The rate of improvement in test results at Key Stage 2 between 1996 and 2000, using three year rolling averages, is marginally below the national trend. Rates of improvement for GCSEs are broadly in line with the national trend for pupils attaining five or more passes at grades A*-C and above it for pupils gaining at least one pass. The improvement between 1999 and 2000 at Key Stage 2 and higher grade GCSEs was slightly below the national rate.

17. There is some evidence of under-performance of boys, particularly black Caribbean and African pupils. However, there has been a recent narrowing of the gap between boys and girls in English at Key Stage 2, bringing it close to the national difference. There is wide variation in the performance of schools, for example, in 2000, the proportion of pupils attaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A*-C ranged from less than 20 per cent to over 80 per cent. Some low performing schools have made relatively little progress in improving their higher grade results in the last three years.

18. The most recent OFSTED inspection data shows that nursery and early years education is a strength and pupils make good progress by the age of five. Standards, the quality of provision, climate and management are judged as similar to the national average in primary schools and slightly below in secondary schools. Second cycle inspections show an improvement in both primary and secondary sectors, with an increasing number of very good schools and a reduction in the number of schools requiring much improvement. Average grades for teaching are broadly in line with national figures in primary and secondary schools and have improved in line with national trends. At the time of the inspection no school was subject to special measures and two schools had been awarded Beacon status.

19. Rates of attendance and unauthorised absence in primary and secondary schools are similar to those found nationally. Attendance has improved in line with national figures in primary schools and slightly above it in secondary schools. Exclusions in primary and secondary schools have shown a recent fall but still remain above national rates.

Funding

20. Croydon LEA funded the education service at above Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) until 1999/00. In both 1999/00 and 2000/01 it funded the service at exactly the level of its SSA. Following a major sell-off of publicly-owned land in the early 1990s and considerable investment in buildings, the LEA has limited capital receipts and relies mainly on grants and borrowing to finance its capital programme. Capital expenditure in education has increased unevenly since 1995/96. In 1999/2000 total capital expenditure on schools, at £3.7 million, was well below the average for similar authorities and nationally but the 2000/01 budget was considerably higher at £9.6 million.

21. Standards Funding is fully match-funded according to LEA policy.

22. The LEA exceeded the DfEE targets for delegation in 2000/01 and at 84.9 cent it delegated slightly more than the average for London authorities and nationally.

The gross delegated funding per pupil in Croydon was higher than the national average for primary and secondary schools (see table 1) but similar to the average for outer London authorities.

Table 1: local and delegated schools budgets 2000/01

	LEA	Outer London authorities	England
2000/01:Gross ISB per pupil: primary	£2,076	£2,024	£1,869
secondary	£2,657	£2,746	£2,559
special	£9,956	£10,588	£9,357

23. Croydon LEA's expenditure on centrally provided services is generally similar to or below the national average except for spending on special education provision and statutory and regulatory duties, which are both higher. Expenditure on special educational provision, little of, which is delegated, is especially high at £234 per pupil, 67% higher than the national average (£157). Central spending on access, home to school transport and other strategic management is relatively low.

24. Taking account of both delegated and centrally-held funding, Croydon spends slightly above the average for similar LEAs and nationally on special educational needs. The relatively highest spending areas are specialist support for pupils with statements, referral units/behaviour support plans, fees for pupils at independent special schools and pupil-led SEN funding in primary and secondary schools. The LEA spends relatively less on provision for statemented pupils in mainstream schools. This pattern of expenditure reflects the LEA's policy of limiting statements to the most severe needs and providing substantial support for pupils at stage 3 of the Code of Practice for SEN.

Council structure

25. Labour have been the majority party in Croydon since 1994. In response to central government's intentions to modernise local authorities' decision making structures, the council agreed new transitional constitutional arrangements in April 2000 which became effective in May 2000. The new arrangements created a cabinet and shadow cabinet which meet jointly as a policy committee. The policy committee makes executive decisions and is supported by five sub-committees, including education. The scrutiny function has been strengthened and extended to two scrutiny committees; the Best Value scrutiny committee and the service scrutiny committee. There are five cabinet consultative panels, including one for education, culture and leisure. The panels each have a cross-service brief and are intended to enable the executive to consult on major policy issues before decisions are taken.

26. Education is one of ten corporate services. Services within the department are structured into three groups, each with its own director: planning and client services; quality development and student services.

27. The current transitional arrangements are complex but generally work well, and do not impose any major constraints on the functioning of the education service and enable members to fulfil their duties effectively.

The Education Development Plan

28. The LEA's education development plan (EDP) is sound.
29. The first EDP was approved by the Department for Education and Employment for three years in April 1999. At the time of the inspection, year two of the EDP was in place and there were draft action plans for year three. The priorities have remained the same:
- A Improve literacy at all key stages.
 - B Improve numeracy at all key stages.
 - C Raise overall standards at KS3 and KS4 by addressing under-achievement at all key stages and raising the attainment of under-achieving groups across all schools.
 - D Improve the learning culture; minimise disruption; maximise opportunities for all learners.
 - E Improve the quality, breadth and balance of the curriculum.
 - F Improve the quality of leadership and management.
 - G School improvement programme, support and challenge for schools causing concern.
30. The LEA has identified 'key targets' within the existing priorities for 2000-2001:
- Raising the achievement of boys;
 - Raising the achievement of vulnerable groups of pupils;
 - Raising standards at KS3;
 - Focus on self-improving schools; and
 - Using data to set challenging targets.
31. The audit carried out for the first EDP was thorough. The priorities take account of the national agenda and to some extent reflect local needs. Support for literacy as a priority in Croydon pre-dates the national initiative. Priority E is mainly funded through schools buying back advisory services. The justification for including it is not clear from the LEA's audit of strengths and weaknesses but was strongly supported by schools.
32. The actions underpinning the priorities in the first EDP were too broad and insufficiently targeted on specific groups of schools or pupils. There was also an overlap between the priorities. The year two EDP and draft year three proposals are a considerable improvement. The priorities are more sharply defined and there is better cross-referencing between them to avoid overlap, for example between priorities A and B with C. The EDP remains wide ranging and can be further improved by reducing its breadth and targeting actions more effectively to where they will have the greatest impact on raising standards.
33. The quality of the action plans has been improved in the year two EDP and again in the draft year three plans. Actions are now linked more specifically to priorities. However, there is still some variation in the quality of the plans supporting

the priorities. For example, the activities supporting priorities A, B and G are presented as clearly sequenced strategies. Elsewhere, for example in priority C, the plans are less coherent. Time scales are generally realistic and responsibilities for implementing the actions are clearly specified. Success criteria are relevant to the specified actions and appropriately quantified. The resource implications of the activities are clearly specified and realistic.

34. A section in the first EDP established the links between the EDP and other plans, such as the early years development plan, the ethnic minority achievement grant action plan and the Education Action Zone (EAZ) plan. While the EDP is reflected in these plans, they are not always embedded in the EDP. For example, there is little mention of the contribution of the EAZ to raising standards and improving social inclusion.

35. Consultation on the EDP has been widespread and thorough and it has been adjusted in the light of comments received from schools. The school survey and visits to schools confirmed that there was a good understanding of the EDP and strong support for its priorities. Nearly all felt it was directly relevant to their own priorities.

36. Arrangements for monitoring progress on the EDP are good. Each priority is the responsibility of a senior officer who reports to the department's management team each term. Elected members receive regular reports on progress towards meeting the success criteria. Headteachers and governors are included in on-going monitoring and evaluation through termly meetings and the leadership groups

37. Overall, the EDP is feasible and provides a sound basis for the school improvement strategy. Progress on implementing the EDP has been reasonable. There is evidence from second cycle OFSTED inspections of improvement in the schools where the LEA has targeted its support. However, Key Stage 2 and GCSE targets are challenging and were not met in 2000, except in mathematics at Key Stage 2, and the rate of improvement will need to increase if targets for 2002 are to be achieved.

The allocation of resources to priorities

38. Croydon LEA operates within a tightly cash-limited budget which is effectively controlled. Members have made a clear commitment to funding education at SSA. This certainty, together with the devolved nature of budget decision-making within the LEA, has allowed the education department to make progress in allocating resources to the priorities of the service, although there is still considerable reliance on past patterns of expenditure, as is the case in the council as a whole. Levels of delegation and the amount of delegated funding per pupil in Croydon are both higher than average. Scarce centrally-held resources are directed, through the EDP and other major plans, towards supporting SEN in mainstream schools, supporting schools causing concern and expanding nursery provision.

39. Schools reported that financial information has become significantly clearer over the last few years and consultation with schools on delegation and changes in the school funding formula has improved with the creation of the resources

leadership groups. The school funding formula is simple and understood by schools, although there does not appear to be a clear rationale for the relatively low level of support at Key Stage 2, compared to Key Stage 1. The formula for funding special schools has been reviewed and is now transparent and fair, rightly underpinned by regular moderation of the support needs of pupils in the different bands.

40. Resource management and planning in the education department is too fragmented. Greater financial expertise is needed at a sufficiently senior level to plan expenditure strategically over the medium term, monitor its effectiveness and use the information obtained to ensure improvement.

41. Croydon has a clear corporate commitment to Best Value and has set up appropriate structures and systems to deliver this, building on a previously-existing quality programme. Its Best Value Performance Plan was produced on time and is a clear and well-presented document. The external auditor approved it without qualification but recommended the strengthening of performance monitoring, and a review of the corporate performance management system.

42. The council has learned from the shortcomings of its pilot Best Value reviews (BVRs) and now scopes reviews more carefully, ensures users are involved in the review teams and focuses more clearly on outcomes. Members are increasingly involved in the review process and the scrutiny function is developing and becoming more challenging. It is too early to evaluate the impact of the BVRs in education. However the programme of education BVRs lacks detail, leaving too many of the reviews to be determined by this inspection.

Recommendations

In order to improve the effectiveness of the EDP:

- further reduce the breadth of the EDP activities and target them more effectively; and
- ensure that all action plans provide coherent strategies for improvement and take account of other major school improvement initiatives.

SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Implications of other functions

43. The LEA exercises the majority of its relevant functions effectively in order to improve standards in schools, and they are closely linked to the priorities in the EDP. There is scope for helping schools to make more effective use of data to set targets and to focus their efforts more effectively on areas of greatest need. There is variation in the progress schools are making in developing their own self-evaluation and review. Support for pupils with SEN is sound but the speed of producing statements is too slow. Support for improving access to education is sound overall. Support for pupils educated otherwise than at school and support for pupils with behavioural difficulties are good. However, there are some shortcomings in personnel and payroll services and in asset management planning. There is also scope for improving the deployment of education welfare officers and for targeting support for ethnic minority pupils more effectively on raising standards.

Monitoring, challenge, support, intervention

44. The LEA performs its functions of monitoring, challenging, supporting and intervening in schools satisfactorily. The LEA has clearly defined what it means by monitoring, challenge, intervention and support and shared this with schools through effective consultation. Visits to schools, meetings with headteachers and governors and the school survey showed strong approval for the way in which the LEA is interpreting the Code of Practice for LEA-school relations. The LEA has been successful in reaching agreement with all sectors, including former grant-maintained schools, on its role in monitoring and supporting schools.

45. The LEA uses its monitoring of performance and other information to place all its schools into one of six categories. The level of monitoring and support is clearly defined for each category. The categories are regularly reviewed and schools are moved according to their performance and the level of concern. This enables the LEA to target its work on schools with greatest needs and make appropriate adjustments to the level of monitoring and support each school receives.

46. The LEA has substantially reduced the number of centrally funded days allocated for monitoring by the assigned inspectors in the past two years. Schools are allocated a maximum of three days of assigned inspector time for monitoring, including office-based work, and monitoring the implementation of national initiatives. Schools in the top three categories are required to buy back any additional time they need from their assigned inspectors. Schools in the lower three categories, involving approximately 10 per cent of schools, receive additional centrally funded time from the advisory and inspection services according to their needs.

47. Monitoring is thorough and effective but there is scope for encouraging greater autonomy in schools and reducing further the amount of visiting to 'light touch' schools, especially as the quality of data is improving. Assigned inspectors produce a detailed analysis of the performance and progress of the school, including questions for the school to consider. Notes of visit are well written and useful. They

are automatically copied to governors. A summary at the end of the year produces key points for action.

48. In the schools visited there had been a considerable amount of classroom visiting by inspectors and advisers. Some of this was necessary to monitor the implementation of national initiatives, but a stronger emphasis on school self-evaluation would have reduced the need for classroom visiting and allow more time to focus on strategic management. The link between the LEA's monitoring and school self-review was not always clear. Nevertheless, the LEA does place a strong emphasis on encouraging school autonomy and has recently introduced a more formal method for assessing the extent to which schools have self-evaluation procedures in place. The LEA was able to provide evidence of self-evaluation being well established in a considerable number of its schools.

49. The performance of schools is challenged through the analysis of performance data and other monitoring reports, including progress on post-inspection action plans and school development plans. Targets for Key Stage 2 and GCSE are challenged where the LEA considers they are not high enough. Despite this, a considerable number of schools exceeded their 2000 targets by more than 10 per cent. The LEA has improved its procedures for identifying schools where there are concerns and is now quick to intervene where there are problems.

50. The LEA maintains separate inspection and advisory services, although they are both within the same division and work closely together. The combined services are relatively large but much of the work is funded through schools buying back services and the LEA does not retain more funding for its advisory and inspection services than similar sized authorities. The advisory and inspection services are well led and are generally highly regarded. The work of assigned inspectors was praised by nearly all types of schools, including the former grant-maintained schools. This is unusual and reflects the high calibre of staff. Some special schools felt the need for an assigned inspector with more specialist knowledge of their specific issues. However, they do have recourse to a specialist SEN inspector and adviser, both of whom are highly regarded.

51. The performance of inspectors and advisers is evaluated through regular job reviews, the monitoring of written reports and feedback from headteachers and governors. Steps have been taken to strengthen the quality of the services in recent years through training and changes of personnel. Visits to schools confirmed the effectiveness of the inspection and advisory services and that they were providing good value for money. The services have not been subject to a Best Value review but are applying the principles of Best Value in considering their future development. The services have the expertise and capacity to improve further.

Collection and analysis of data

52. The LEA provides effective support to schools on the use of performance data for the monitoring and raising of standards and focussing planning. There are well-developed systems for assessing pupils' attainment at all stages and for predicting targets. Baseline assessment on entry to school, non-statutory interim tests in Key Stage 2, end of key stage assessments and standardised tests are all well

established. Using these systems as a basis, the LEA provides a comprehensive range of value added performance and local benchmarking data which allows pupil level predictions to be based on prior attainment. Schools find the data useful for comparative purposes and in identifying underachievement of different pupil groups. The LEA has been slow in the past to collate and use data on the performance of minority ethnic groups but this has recently been much improved and is now secure.

53. Training courses have helped develop schools' confidence in the understanding and use of data. For many schools these courses have been sufficient. Others, especially some primary schools, are still too dependent on assigned inspectors in helping them to analyse and use the data effectively.

54. Despite the wide range of data and support available, many schools are still not proficient at setting robust but realistic targets. This is recognised by the LEA and over one in ten schools had their targets challenged and identified as such in the EDP. Over half of schools exceeded their Key Stage 2 targets for 2000, with over a quarter exceeding targets by more than 10 per cent. As a way of providing further challenge to schools in setting targets for 2002, the LEA has issued indicative targets for schools which are based on a sophisticated analysis of a range of different factors, such as prior attainment, pupil mobility and free school meals. This appropriate move has not been universally welcomed in schools, but most of those visited valued the increased rigour that it has brought to the process of setting statutory targets. As a consequence, most schools have set more ambitious and realistic targets for 2002. Some have accepted LEA targets, whilst others have been able to argue alternative, but still challenging targets, based on an analysis of individual pupil level data. However, a minority of schools remain reluctant to accept that their targets are too low and raising headteacher and teacher expectations in these schools remains a key task for the LEA.

Support for literacy and numeracy

55. Support for both literacy and numeracy is very sound. English and mathematics inspectors, advisers and consultants are knowledgeable about their subject and have the necessary expertise to bring about school improvement. Literacy and numeracy are separate priorities in the EDP. Revisions of the EDP have resulted in the action plans becoming better focused and targeted more appropriately. Consultants have contributed effectively to raising staff confidence and improving the quality of teaching in the schools in receipt of intensive support.

56. In the 2000 national Key Stage 2 English tests, 73 per cent of pupils achieved level 4 or above. Although this represented an increase of three percentage points from the previous year, progress was not as great as that found nationally and the actual result fell short of the LEA target. Further improvement of nine per cent is needed to achieve the target of 82 per cent target for 2002. This represent a considerable challenge for the LEA. The English Key Stage 2 aggregate of schools target for 2001 is about 3 per cent below the LEA target. The LEA now has appropriate plans in place to address this shortfall through better targeting of support on specific schools and groups of pupils. The plans also specify the training that will be on offer to the headteachers and staff of the schools as well as the nature of follow up work by consultants and assigned inspectors.

57. The LEA's support for reading pre-dates the national strategy and this is reflected in the standards attained at all key stages. Appropriate emphasis has been given to supporting writing skills. This has included disseminating findings from a successful writing project undertaken by a small group of Croydon teachers, led by an LEA adviser. The EDP gives emphasis to improving the attainment of boys in literacy. Recent results show that boys are making better progress at Key Stage 2 with the gender gap narrowing from 15 percentage points in 1999 to 10 in 2000, which is much closer to the national average difference. Good use is made of consultants and leading teachers to trial developments, provide demonstration lessons, train staff and produce high quality support materials. Those schools visited value the network meetings for literacy consultants and headteachers. Training and supporting EAL pupils is an integral part of the LEA strategy. Work within the EAZ also supports and complements LEA work.

58. Productive steps have been taken to support secondary schools in the implementation of the literacy strategy at Key Stage 3. For example, a small team of leading literacy headteachers and co-ordinators has been established to develop and disseminate good practice in the formulation of whole school literacy strategies at Key Stage 3.

59. In 1999, results in Key Stage 2 mathematics tests rose in line with the national average increase. In the 2000 tests, 70 per cent of pupils achieved level 4 or above. This represented an increase of two percentage points from the previous year and the actual result exceeded the LEA target, although progress was slightly below that found nationally. Further improvement of six per cent is needed to achieve the 76 per cent target for 2002. This is achievable, if a challenge.

60. The mathematics team has prepared well for the introduction and implementation of the numeracy strategy. Training is of good quality. Effective use is made of centrally prepared materials, for example those developed to support ICT in primary schools. Locally prepared guidance materials are well received by schools. Good use has been made of leading mathematics teachers by those schools visited. Cluster meetings, newsletters and updates are valued by numeracy co-ordinators.

61. Effective groundwork has been set in place to improve numeracy at Key Stage 3. Initial training conferences have been completed successfully and mathematics departments are integrating the Y7 framework and draft teaching programmes into Key Stage 3 schemes of work.

62. Assigned inspectors also provide useful support for both literacy and numeracy. In a third of schools visited, good quality feedback following lesson observations and practical advice were significant in bringing about school improvement. However, insufficient attention in a minority of the schools visited had been given to developing the competencies needed by senior and middle managers to monitor and evaluate curriculum developments. Adequate emphasis had generally been given to setting broad curriculum targets, but about a quarter of the schools visited were not sufficiently adept at using data to identify and target support on specific groups of pupils.

Support for information and communication technology (ICT)

63. Support for ICT is satisfactory. The LEA's broad intentions for information and communication technology (ICT) are clear and understood by schools. The strategy to implement the National Grid for Learning (NGfL) is sound and builds on a number of previous local projects. ICT is not a separate priority in the EDP, but permeates the priorities. The LEA action plan for developing ICT has appropriate targets and gives emphasis to developing management and efficiency, standards, curriculum, assessment and teaching. The plan is suitably cross-referenced to the EDP. Evidence from recent OFSTED inspections shows that standards in ICT are broadly in line with expectations.

64. Schools were provided with adequate exemplar materials in order to formulate their own ICT development plans. Whilst the majority of plans seen were broadly satisfactory, this was not universally the case. They varied, especially in the prominence given to raising standards and developing the ICT curriculum. The LEA has provided schools with objective advice and information to enable them to choose NOF training providers.

65. Sound arrangements are in place for monitoring ICT developments. The ICT inspector monitors the impact of NGfL expenditure and ICT developments through focused visits to a sample of schools, including those where ICT forms part of key issues for action following OFSTED inspections. In addition, assigned inspectors comment on ICT developments through routine monitoring visits.

66. Much of the support for ICT is planned through the provision of courses. There is a wide-ranging programme of in-service training for teachers in ICT which has been well received by those schools visited. The small ICT team is stretched to capacity and schools tend to be dissatisfied by the quantity rather than the quality of support. Co-ordinator meetings and cross-phase groups help to share good practice. However, the LEA currently makes insufficient use of the ICT expertise already in existence in its schools to provide support and promote good practice.

67. Sound support has been provided to individual schools for hardware purchase, installation and maintenance of equipment. A major emphasis in primary schools has been placed on installing clusters of computers and many of those schools visited now have the facilities that enable access to computers by large groups and whole classes. Appropriate assistance has been given to schools in developing ICT policies and suitable emphasis has been given to encouraging schools to plan sensibly over the medium to long term for a rolling programme of hardware replacement. Good guidance has been given on the use of the internet in the classroom. Authority wide developments in the use of ICT in the curriculum are developing appropriately alongside that for the use of ICT in school administration.

Support for schools causing concern

68. Support for schools causing concern is good. In the past, seven primary schools and two secondary schools have required special measures. Four of these schools were closed, with two of them subsequently being re-opened as amalgamated primary schools. The other schools have all been removed from special measures. In addition, one secondary school and three primary schools have been identified as having serious weaknesses.

69. In the past there were some weaknesses in the LEA's support for schools causing concern, reflected in the number of schools in special measures and the length of time before they were removed from it. Two primary schools remained in special measures for more than two years and one secondary school for more than five years. However, support within the past three years has improved considerably and is now good. No school was in special measures at the time of the inspection.

70. The LEA has a clearly defined strategy for intervening and supporting schools causing concern. Support is well co-ordinated across services through the assigned inspectors who have become increasingly expert in this role. The LEA has been active in removing ineffective senior managers and weak teachers in schools causing concern. Effective use has been made of advisory staff, seconded headteachers and other senior managers, as well as the appointment of additional governors. The LEA has appropriate systems in place to monitor the impact of its own support and the actions taken by the school. Elected members take a keen interest in the progress of schools causing concern.

71. The LEA has effective systems in place for the early identification of schools starting to cause concern and responds rapidly by intervening and providing support. Visits to schools in this category, as well as schools with serious weaknesses and schools previously in special measures, confirmed that the LEA was providing appropriate and high quality support. There is a well thought out exit strategy once schools have been removed from special measures. This involves regular reviews of progress and the gradual reduction of the level of intervention and centrally funded support as they are moved to becoming more autonomous.

Support for governors

72. Support for school governors is good. Actions for improving training for governors and helping them fulfil their duties are clearly identified in the EDP. Governor training sessions are sharply focused on key priority areas such as social inclusion or on areas of significant change, for example special educational needs; courses and induction programmes are well received. The governor support team provides expert advice and support. Governors particularly value the helpline, which facilitates a prompt response to queries and concerns. There is a satisfactory clerking service for governors wishing to purchase a service level agreement.

73. There are effective mechanisms for ensuring good communications and consultation between governing bodies and the LEA and governors consider that the LEA is responsive to their concerns. Governors are kept well informed but would

appreciate more digests of key documents and executive summaries of the main issues and areas needing urgent attention.

74. The LEA gives timely procedural guidance on recruitment of governors and promotes broad representation on governing bodies. A recent governor recruitment drive has been especially successful in securing more interest and involvement from ethnic minorities and there is now a small waiting list of those keen to serve on governing bodies. There are few LEA governor vacancies and none that are long-standing. However, in approximately a quarter of schools visited, LEA governors were reported as being insufficiently involved in the ongoing work of the governing body.

75. Support to governors of schools causing concern is a strong feature of LEA work and it is in these schools where the LEA has been most successful in equipping governing bodies to monitor and evaluate the work of their schools and to take an active role in school improvement. This is consistent with the LEA's strategy for improving governance by targeting its support on schools most in need. The LEA has been effective in recruiting additional high calibre governors to strengthen governing bodies. Governing bodies are kept well informed about the work of assigned inspectors through copies of notes of visits and summary reviews.

Support for school management

76. Support for school management is satisfactory overall. There are strengths in the provision for supporting school senior management teams and evidence from those schools that have been inspected twice by OFSTED, and more especially those inspected more recently, show that management and efficiency are improving. The LEA recognises that more needs to be done to support middle managers, and the EDP includes appropriate plans to strengthen management development opportunities and induction arrangements for subject leaders.

77. There is a clear strategy for supporting senior managers which is consistent with the overall stated aim of developing autonomous schools. The strategy, which has been strengthened through discussions at the primary and secondary leadership groups, focuses appropriately on developing and validating school self review and ensuring managers have access to, and know how to, use performance data. Although good progress has been made in establishing LEA guidelines for self-evaluation, there is still some way to go before it is firmly established across all the schools in the borough.

78. Assigned inspectors have gained the trust and respect of schools and are acknowledged as playing an important role in supporting senior managers. Classroom observations by assigned inspectors and advisers were well regarded in the schools visited. However, there was some variation in how effectively this was used to develop senior and middle managers' competencies in school self-evaluation and review. Good practice included paired classroom observations, involving the assigned inspector and senior or middle managers, and joint feeding back to teachers.

79. Emphasis has been given to promoting the national training courses for senior

managers and take up of training places on the leadership programme for serving headteachers has been good. Sensible moves are being made to extend development opportunities for senior managers, for example through accredited courses and secondments. There is an appropriate induction-training course where new headteachers can use their learning programme for new headteachers (HEADLAMP) funding if they so choose. There is a good range of well-regarded courses, network meetings and briefings for middle managers. Arrangements for monitoring the support and assessment of National Qualification for Teachers (NQTs) are satisfactory.

80. A number of schools, particularly those causing concern, are facing increasing difficulties in recruiting and retaining teachers. Action to strengthen recruitment and retention is included in the EDP and the LEA has taken a number of steps to tackle this issue, including a major drive to recruit teachers from overseas and assistance with housing. These actions have addressed some of the difficulties but there is a recognition that much more needs to be done if progress in raising standards is to be maintained.

Early years

81. Support for early years is a strength. Council members have given a high priority to developing services for young children and have supported cross-directorate working between education and social services. In keeping with the level of priority given to the early years, spending on under-fives is above average. The LEA has secured places for all four year-olds and providers are admitting increasingly more three year-olds. To date, free part-time places have been secured for over eighty per cent of three year olds. Appropriate attention is being given to the rise in demand for full day placements and the number of places for out of school and holiday care is increasing.

82. Planning for the early years is good and based on a thorough audit which included surveying opinions of a very wide range of partners. SEN support in the early years is strong. There is a well considered pre-school improvement programme that enables attention to be focused on areas of greatest need.

83. Networks are firmly established between public and private providers, and there is an appropriate training and development programme. Foundation stage training is being used productively to strengthen relationships between providers at nursery level and to improve continuity and progression between nurseries and reception classes.

Recommendation

In order to improve target-setting:

ensure all schools make effective use of the data available to them to set challenging targets for specific groups of under-performing pupils and identify strategies for achieving them.

SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Corporate planning

84. There is a sound overall framework of corporate planning, based mainly on departmental objectives. This is set by the council management team, which includes the director of education, and is based on the council's statement of vision and values, the chief executive's annual priorities and corporate plans. Corporate planning also takes account of the outcomes of consultation mechanisms, such as the Citizen's panel, as well as external influences.

85. There is a strong commitment to education in the council. One of the council's six values is to equip young people with the learning, skills and security they need to thrive and prosper. The corporate plan includes the EDP priorities. Departmental plans work to a council wide timetable and are increasingly integrated with financial planning. Corporate decisions, including financial decisions, are made reasonably promptly and openly. There is a clear scheme of delegation to chief officers. Members trust officers to take appropriate decisions and there is no undue political interference in the management of services. Members provide very sound leadership and there is considerable cross-party agreement on the main priorities for education which have been pursued consistently in recent years. Members take a keen interest in the performance of individual schools.

86. Officers in education provide elected members with sound advice, useful guidance and summaries of key initiatives. Annual education quality and standards reports provide members with a thorough and detailed analysis of the performance of schools in the borough.

87. The department management team is the supervisory body for planning in education and receives monitoring reports on the key plans. The core plans are approved by the education sub-committee which then receives regular monitoring reports. These are generally of good quality. Performance monitoring uses a range of quantitative and qualitative measures. Members evaluate performance through the service and Best Value scrutiny panels. These are relatively new and still have some way to go before they are fully effective, for example, in the co-ordination of their work.

88. The education department produces an annual service plan setting out the business objectives which are then reflected through the aims of the operational plans. Short term planning is sound. The statutory plans extend beyond the current year, but there is no central plan which sets out the department's longer term strategic objectives and their resource implications. There is a framework for producing service plans within the education department, but this is not always followed and there is considerable variation in the quality of these plans. Most contain the key elements expected in a plan, but a minority are little more than descriptions of the work to be undertaken and lack clear strategies to ensure improvement. While nearly all services monitor the impact of their work, quality assurance arrangements are insufficiently robust in some.

89. The director and senior officers provide very sound leadership which is rooted in a strongly held belief in involving schools as much as possible in the decision making process. The director and senior officers have been instrumental in substantially improving working relationships with schools, including former grant-maintained schools. The good relationships which now exist are an essential prerequisite to enabling the LEA to carry out its role as defined in the Code of Practice for LEA-school relations. At the same time, senior management has taken difficult decisions, for example in removing ineffective headteachers and officers.

90. The LEA has developed a meaningful dialogue with its schools through its leadership groups of headteachers and officers. Nearly all headteachers are involved in one of the sub-groups which advise on an area of the LEA's work. Officers and headteachers are clear that the groups have a policy development role and are not simply there to be used by the LEA for consultation purposes. Headteachers are very supportive of the groups but are concerned about the amount of time they are spending out of school, and there is a strong case for rationalising the number of meetings headteachers need to attend. The secondary phase groups have been in existence for longer and have so far been more effective than the primary groups. The groups are seen as a key component in the drive to raise standards but careful consideration needs to be given to how they can function more efficiently and effectively.

Partnerships

91. The LEA works effectively in partnership with other council services at the corporate level. There are still some weaknesses in operational arrangements at the school level, particularly with social services but these are becoming rarer. The LEA also has good links with other organisations which support the work of schools such as the police, the dioceses, the business community, career services, early years and groups supporting the ethnic minority community. Links with further education colleges have been strengthened in preparation for the introduction of learning and skills councils and there are good links with higher education.

92. The LEA's support for the Education Action Zone (EAZ) is good. The EAZ was originated by schools in the New Addington estate. The director of education is part of the EAZ forum and another senior officer represents the LEA on the strategy group. The EAZ priorities are closely aligned to those of the LEA's EDP. The LEA and EAZ initiatives to raise standards and improve social inclusion were complementary in the schools visited. The EAZ buys in extra time from LEA assigned inspectors to monitor the progress on EAZ initiatives. This strengthens further the links between the work of the EAZ and the LEA.

Management services

93. Overall, the LEA provides sound management services support to schools, although there is considerable variation in the quality of services. ICT support and financial support are particularly good. However, the small size of teams restricts their focus to day to day service delivery and the monitoring and development of service provision have been neglected in some areas, particularly where cross-team collaboration is required. The LEA has demonstrated a readiness to consider the

out-sourcing of services but this has not always proved effective, owing to past weaknesses in procurement. However, the LEA currently offers a full range of management services to schools under service level agreements (SLAs).

94. **Financial support:** budget advice to schools which buy into the highest level service is very good, proactive and highly valued. The service is bought back by most primary schools and half the secondary schools, the majority at the highest level. Ably supported by their budget advisers, schools generally manage their budgets well and there are few with deficit balances. However, few schools plan over more than a year and benchmarking information, which would allow them to compare their spending with similar schools, is not provided. All the special schools and nearly three-quarters of primary schools had a surplus of over five per cent at the end of 1999/00. However, the school visits confirmed that most of these often long-term surpluses have now been earmarked for spending.

95. Budget information is timely and schools are clear about their allocations but the day to day links with the financial systems within the LEA are weak, hampering schools' monitoring of their spending. Incompatibilities between the IT systems used by schools and the LEA for finance and the payroll mean that most transfers have to be notified on paper and errors, and delays in entering the data have been the cause of much unnecessary work in schools. The LEA has introduced an effective local record scheme in which the school holds the primary record of expenditure, but the errors in the payroll system have not yet been satisfactorily resolved.

96. The Best Value review of financial services to education was not complete at the time of the inspection but has already made useful recommendations to further strengthen schools' capacity to manage their finances.

97. **Personnel support:** Over the last year, the personnel service has lacked both adequate staff and effective management and this is reflected in the unduly variable quality of service received by schools. There is a high buy back of services from both primary and secondary sectors and the advice given by senior personnel officers is generally expert and valued by schools. However, personnel administration is unsatisfactory. Target times for issuing contracts are not met and there is an unacceptably high level of errors in payments, especially to part-time and weekly-paid staff. There were particular problems over the introduction of the changes to teachers' pay in September 2000, when a significant number of teachers were paid wrongly or not at all. There are also weaknesses at the strategic and corporate levels: the single-status agreement has not yet been implemented; sickness absence of school-based staff is not regularly monitored and the personnel handbook is in need of updating. Actions to improve the recruitment and retention of teachers have been only partially successful and the LEA is aware that more needs to be done if progress in raising standards is not to be impeded.

98. **Payroll:** The out-sourced payroll service offered to schools is adequate, but the links between personnel and payroll are weak and do not take sufficient account of schools' needs. Despite recent efforts to improve joint planning between personnel and payroll, the volume of pay-related problems reported by schools shows that communication remains poor. A Best Value review of the payroll and pensions administration service is currently in progress.

99. **Buildings maintenance:** Support on building maintenance is generally satisfactory but the availability of advice is insufficient for the needs of some schools. Funding for day to day repairs was delegated in April 1999. Croydon's corporate construction services offer a call centre-based SLA which will contact contractors to cover cyclical maintenance and responsive repairs on behalf of schools, but until 2001/02 did not include advice. While the responsiveness of the service is good, the quality of the contractors' work is sometimes unsatisfactory. Take-up by schools is low, with some preferring to buy a service from an external contractor while others organise repairs themselves.

100. The education premises team is the main source of advice to schools on repairs and maintenance, but the reduction in support from corporate services has meant it no longer has the resources to fulfil this function satisfactorily. Although they are designated as link officers for schools, the two buildings officers have neither the expertise nor the time to meet the needs of all schools. In general schools plan their budgets for routine maintenance adequately but some primary and special schools are still not clear about their responsibilities for building maintenance and many lack in-house building expertise. The planned inclusion of an advice component in the SLA will be welcomed by schools.

101. **ICT in administration:** The ICT support service is a good, highly responsive service about which schools were very positive. The current in-house service replaced a poorly-regarded out-sourced service in April 2000 and was planned in consultation with schools. The SLA offered is a one-stop shop with a menu of technical support, covering administrative and curriculum use of computers, and the linked support officers are proactive in visiting schools regularly.

Recommendations

In order to improve strategic management:

- put in place a development plan which sets out overall longer-term priorities for the education service and their likely resource implications;
- improve the consistency of service plans and quality assurance arrangements; and
- ensure the scope of the Best Value review of personnel covers the service to schools and the education department and the links with payroll services.

SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATION PROVISION

Strategy

102. The LEA's strategy for meeting special educational needs (SEN) is satisfactory. It is set out in a draft policy, building upon the former policy of 1996, and in a draft inclusion policy, both of which are fully reflected in the EDP. The pilot Best Value review of SEN, carried out in September 2000, has been useful in identifying areas for change and development in detail. The principles behind the policies have been subject to extensive consultation, and are well understood. The drive towards inclusion is well under way, with a growing proportion of pupils with statements being educated in mainstream schools. The proportion of pupils with statements, at two per cent, is low, in keeping with the LEA's policy of offering more centrally-funded support at stage 3 of the Code of Practice for SEN. A number of effective central services have facilitated the developments. There is a suitable range of more specialised provision in special schools. The policy of concentrating their work on fewer, more complex cases, while developing them as resource centres on which mainstream schools can draw is well considered, though still in the very early stages of being implemented.

103. The management of SEN support is sound. Appropriate adjustments have been made to the internal structures and administrative procedures and there is good capacity to improve further. Care is taken to move forward at a pace which allows schools and LEA personnel to internalise the principles, become aware of the agenda, and allow time for necessary training. The LEA should be more prompt in developing the logistical plans to support developments already taking place on the ground, as the findings of the review clearly indicate. The revised EDP Action Plan for 2001/2002, with precise targets and timescales, is a good plan which will help in this regard.

104. There is good guidance for schools, which is kept up to date. Sufficient published information is available for parents, although they are not always sufficiently aware of its existence. Steps have been taken to improve this by setting up an information centre and establishing the parent partnership service. However, more could be done to encourage schools to disseminate information.

Statutory obligations

105. Reasonable steps are taken by the LEA to meet its statutory obligations, but the proportion of statements issued within 18 weeks is low at 70 per cent. If those delayed for reasons beyond the LEA's direct control are included, the rate falls to 41 per cent, compared to the national average of 58 per cent. The delays are caused by educational psychologists and external agencies taking insufficiently prompt action at the appropriate stages in the process. Considerable dissatisfaction with the statementing process was expressed in the school survey and in meetings during the inspection. The LEA mitigates the effects of delays in the process by making provision ahead of the issue of a statement and it has also sometimes been anticipated in the support provided under stage 3. Nevertheless, the LEA needs to do more to enable educational psychologists and external agencies to play their parts in the statementing process more promptly.

106. The increased support at stage 3 generally works well and is welcomed by schools and parents; the only reservation they expressed was that the provision does not have the degree of continuity which they sometimes consider necessary. This encourages parents and schools to seek the guarantee of a statement, sometimes inappropriately. The recent establishment of a moderation panel, including school representation, is an improvement in ensuring fairness in the administration of the statementing process. The LEA has issued criteria for referrals for statutory assessment and is currently launching new criteria for referrals at stage 3. Together, these should help to avoid the frustration experienced in some of the schools visited when applications for support or statements are unsuccessful.

107. The educational psychology service is the first point of reference for most referrals and is in a position to moderate school practice. In both respects it does so with varying success. Some schools have found their educational psychologists very effective and quick to respond to referrals. Others have found them unable to meet the demand, shifting the responsibility for prioritising between deserving cases onto the school. A number of schools reported that the result of this was that assessments in less urgent, but nonetheless legitimate, cases were repeatedly deferred. A small minority of schools were discontented with the quality of the service or the role it sought to play. The educational psychology service has suffered from staff changes and shortages, and the LEA is well aware of the difficulty of its meeting its statutory obligations and its wider role.

108. The LEA supports schools well in managing annual and transition reviews efficiently. Appropriate officers attend as necessary by agreement with the schools. Parents' views are properly taken into account regarding placements and provision. The parent partnership service is well established and proving a valuable support in guiding parents through the system. While there have been instances of parental dissatisfaction, there is every sign that they are becoming rarer. The case managers who administer the statutory processes find the mediation of the partnership helpful and it has contributed to the low incidence of appeals reaching the tribunal stage. Parents of pre-school pupils are well supported through the early identification of children's needs and intervention.

Improvement and value for money

109. The support services which enable mainstream schools to maintain and improve their SEN provision are very good. The SEN services as a whole, including the special schools and units, are reasonably well matched to the borough's needs and, at a cost not dissimilar to the average for similar LEAs, offer sound value for money. Increases in costs are being kept under control through careful monitoring. The rise in the proportion of statements in recent years was small by national standards, and the LEA was relatively quick to fund support at an earlier stage. The number of out-of-borough placements is being reduced. The fundamental performance review has examined alternatives aimed at providing Best Value and the leadership groups of headteachers and officers have been set up to investigate some of them, such as the delegation of further SEN funding.

110. The special needs support service, including the behaviour support team and the Literacy Support Centre, and the Communication Support Service, are well

organised services, highly regarded by schools. The three pupil referral units provide effective outreach support to pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties and their teachers. Many of the educational psychologists were praised in the schools visited for consultative contributions going well beyond the statutory work described in the last section. Between them, the services do valuable work in supporting individual pupils directly and contribute to the training of teachers and ancillary staff. Such criticisms as there were for these aspects of the LEA's SEN provision were mainly to do with their capacity to respond quickly or, particularly, in secondary schools, with a flexibility which was restricted by their centralised nature.

111. Special education need co-ordinators (SENCOs) are well supported by the SEN inspector and adviser. They are chiefly responsible for the good SENCO training and the SENCO forums which are a key means of disseminating and moderating practice. The local SENCO clusters are also important in the latter respect, but they vary in effectiveness and some need more encouragement from the centre. The SEN specialists, as well as conducting INSET for the whole teaching force and for learning support assistants, train their colleagues in their role as assigned inspectors in schools. Useful data is gathered from all schools annually on SEN and there is a programme of school audits and sampling of cases. However, none of the schools visited was able to provide evidence of how this monitoring is used to bring greater consistency and a shared understanding to the work in schools. There is also potential for extending the case sampling to include the roles of case managers and other services.

112. The LEA's capacity to develop its support for SEN is good. It has analysed its provision carefully and is well aware of where improvements are needed.

Recommendations

In order to improve the statementing process:

- ensure that the educational psychology service gives priority to responding to referrals at stages 3 and 4; and
- seek better co-operation from outside agencies in meeting statutory deadlines.

SECTION 5: ACCESS

113. The LEA meets its statutory requirements in relation to providing access to education. Services supporting behaviour were part of the pilot Best Value review of SEN and have used the outcomes of this to develop policy. However, it is still early days and Best Value principles are not yet firmly embedded in the practice of most services.

The supply of school places

114. Croydon's planning of school places is sound and generally well-managed, although continued attention is needed to ensure primary school capacity is reduced in line with the projected drop in rolls. Forecasts are complicated by the varied choice of secondary schools and by the cross-borough flows but external audit reports judge them to be accurate, except for pupils under five. The school organisation plan for 2000-2005 is adequate and the school organisation committee has met once a term since September 1999. The class size plan has been implemented in line with requirements.

115. The number of surplus places is low, especially in the secondary sector. Demand for secondary places continues to rise, especially in the north of the borough, and the LEA has increased the admissions numbers of ten secondary schools to accommodate this. In recognition of the volume of cross-borough movement, Croydon has rightly been active in attempts to establish a regional forum to examine the shortfall of places across south London. Primary rolls have begun to drop since their 1998/99 peak and a number of schools visited were under-subscribed at Key Stage 1. The LEA has reduced surplus primary capacity in three planning areas by converting parts of schools to alternative use and sees scope for this elsewhere.

Admissions

116. Croydon is making good progress in co-ordinating the admissions process at secondary transfer, but has been less effective in notifying primary schools of their reception admissions.

117. The LEA has a complex secondary admissions situation due to the range of popular voluntary and foundation schools, some with partial selection, as well as movement of pupils across the borough boundaries. There are 17 different admissions authorities within the borough. The LEA has rightly ensured that all Croydon secondary schools now work to the same admissions timetable. The LEA has made effective use of the admissions forum, combined with submissions to the admissions adjudicator, to challenge possible sources of unfairness in admissions to foundation and voluntary secondary schools and to move towards a common admissions form for all Croydon schools. Most appeals for entry to community secondary schools are completed well before the end of the summer term.

118. The LEA co-ordinates admissions to reception classes of primary schools but decisions are made too late and appeals for entry in September 2000 were held in July and August 2000. This contributes to considerable uncertainty for families and

schools, particularly those which are under-subscribed. Plans for the introduction of a new IT system to tackle these concerns are well underway.

Asset management planning

119. Croydon's asset management planning is adequate, but the process is not clearly understood by many schools. The updated local policy statement was drawn up with the help of a working group including headteachers and governors and is brief but clear. The LEA had an existing programme of quinquennial condition surveys and condition information for the asset management plan is complete, though the DfEE appraisal found the plan had some weaknesses. Suitability assessments are also complete. Most school buildings are in reasonable condition. The lack of resources for major 'capital' repairs means that only about 40 per cent of the priority projects are funded and the LEA has made little progress in developing public-private partnerships as an alternative source of investment. Most schools could point to some recent investment in buildings but several had been given insufficient warning of when the schemes would take place.

120. Capital projects are co-ordinated by technical staff from the council's construction services, with significant input from the education-based premises team. The most successful projects are where schools with in-house expertise collaborate actively on their planning and management. However, communication between the council's corporate construction services and schools with less expertise on buildings is not always sufficiently customer-oriented and the otherwise well-regarded education premises team does not have the resources to perform this role effectively.

Provision of education otherwise than at school

121. There is very good provision for pupils who, for a variety of reasons, are educated out of school. About 70 children who are taught at home are visited by an inspector who writes a useful report and advises parents. All three pupil referral units (PRUs) appoint and manage home tutors for work with pupils unable to attend schools. For children with long-term illness, there is a well equipped base at a hospital and the teachers are appointed, trained and supported by one of the PRUs. A centre under the jurisdiction of another PRU provides a full academic programme for schoolgirl mothers, along with parenting training. The services are comprehensive and OFSTED inspections of the PRUs judge them to be well managed and effective.

Attendance

122. Support to improve attendance is generally satisfactory. Attendance figures are consistently close to national averages. A small and declining number of schools, mainly secondary, have unsatisfactory rates of attendance. The work of education welfare officers (EWOs) is generally praised, but their effectiveness varied in the schools visited. In most schools they provided good support through regular visiting, making prompt additional visits in emergencies, checking registers, identifying patterns of poor attendance, following up assiduously with home visits and working

closely with the school. A small minority of schools felt that they received inadequate support.

123. The allocation of EWO time is at present based on numbers on roll rather than the needs of individual schools which vary a great deal across the borough. EWOs are able to exercise some discretion as to how they use their time between their allocation of schools. However, none of the schools visited was aware of the exact basis of its time allocation. This is unsatisfactory. The education welfare service has conducted a survey of needs in preparation for a more sensitive allocation formula. It is reconsidering its role and is drafting a service level agreement as a basis for consultation but has so far not offered schools alternative models of provision to enable them to fully exercise choice.

Behaviour support

124. Croydon's support for behaviour in schools is good. The work of the PRUs is particularly effective. The behaviour support plan of 1998 was a sound document, but with some weaknesses which have now been addressed. The EDP gives high priority to reducing exclusions and improving behaviour. Exclusions are above national averages but there has been a sharp reduction in exclusions in primary schools and a small reduction in secondaries since the high point in 1998.

125. There is good provision in the primary and secondary PRUs for excluded pupils, which is full-time in most cases. Appropriate arrangements have been made with further education institutions for older students. The LEA has encouraged the PRUs to develop outreach into the mainstream schools, preventing exclusion and facilitating reintegration. There is fixed-term respite in the PRUs and rapid-response support in their own school when pupils are at immediate risk. Pupils are supported on return to school by PRU staff.

126. The PRUs and special education needs support service (SENSS) behaviour support team provide effective support to schools through training and helping them to develop strategies for behaviour management. The exclusions officer co-ordinates the database and provides good liaison between the different parties. These services are highly regarded by most schools. There is good co-operation between schools and the PRUs in taking excluded pupils. However, secondary schools with spare capacity visited during this inspection are rightly concerned about the high numbers of pupils with behaviour and attendance problems they are required to accept. The LEA is working with all secondary schools to try to find solutions to this whole LEA problem.

Health, safety, welfare, child protection

127. There is good support for health and safety and child protection.

128. The LEA policies, procedures and guidance on health and safety in schools are extremely well documented. There are useful instruments for conducting risk assessments and there has been good training for governors, school health and safety officers and other members of staff. The schools visited had received surveys

by LEA officers of special hazards and some governing bodies had received support for conducting wider risk assessments.

129. The guidance regarding child protection is similarly thorough. There is a comprehensive manual covering the procedures of all the agencies involved and clear guidance for schools. There are sound structures in place at a senior level to co-ordinate the work of the education service with social services and the health authority. However, the school survey revealed concerns about the effectiveness of these links at an operational level. While these are improving, severe difficulties in recruiting social workers have often resulted in a lack of continuity and disrupted otherwise sound joint working arrangements.

Children in public care

130. The LEA's support for raising the attainment of Croydon's 527 children in public care is satisfactory. Initiatives were a little slower to begin than in many authorities, but all the measures specified under the multi-agency quality protects action plan are now underway and good progress is being made. There have been conferences and initial training for all agencies, including schools and governors. Guidance has been issued to schools and designated teachers have been nominated. A great deal of data on the performance of individual pupils is available but it is located in different databases. The LEA is integrating these data bases to improve the effectiveness of its monitoring of attainment and progress. There are acknowledged to be gaps in the data, particularly where children move or cross LEA boundaries to school. An additional full-time officer has been appointed, among whose tasks is to track down information and improve liaison between all agencies regarding individual pupils.

Support for ethnic minority children

131. Support for ethnic minority children is satisfactory.

132. Over one third of pupils in Croydon schools are of ethnic minority heritage. Many of these pupils achieve well but there is significant under-achievement by some groups, particularly black Caribbean boys. A considerable proportion of pupils speak English as an additional language (EAL). There are significant and growing numbers of children whose parents are refugees or asylum seekers. The analysis of attainment data by ethnicity is developing well. The LEA is starting to work with schools to identify underachievement, set targets and monitor achievement from within the ethnic minority groups. Under the newly revised management structure, significant progress has been made in a short space of time. Data recently sent to schools includes comparative information on the performance of ethnic minority pupils and schools are aware of the need to set targets for underachieving groups. The LEA has the capacity to consolidate recent developments and improve further.

133. The ethnic minority achievement service is formulating a set of plans for ethnic minorities and refugees and asylum seekers that are based on sensible and appropriate priorities. The latest EDP gives more appropriate prominence than the earlier plans to raising the achievement of specific ethnic groups at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. There remains, however, a lack of specificity in relation to underachieving groups at Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2.

134. The LEA has fulfilled the requirements of the distribution of the ethnic minorities and Travellers achievement grant but not without facing acute problems. Schools were highly critical of the original formula which they considered to be faulty. The LEA now has a formula which facilitates more effective targeting of resources to meet the needs of different ethnic groups. While there is some evidence that the work of the LEA's African Caribbean service and outside agencies are helping to improve behaviour and attitudes, there is little evidence of it having any impact on raising attainment.

135. The EAL and bilingual support service is well organised and valued by the majority of schools visited. However, it is seen as expensive and a fifth of schools visited questioned its value for money. A number were intending making their own arrangements in the future.

136. The LEA's approach to catering for the needs of the refugee children is thorough and valued by schools. The small groups of travellers in the borough are given adequate support by the newly formed Traveller support service.

Gifted and talented pupils

137. Support for gifted and talented children is satisfactory. Over recent years, the LEA has funded a number of well-conceived initiatives to support more able pupils for instance, extension classes in a wide range of subjects and aspects and intensive courses for more able linguists and mathematicians. Although these have been successful enriching experiences for the pupils involved, they have had only a modest effect in embedding support for able pupils within the practice of schools. The LEA is currently carrying out an audit of schools to determine the extent of existing provision for gifted and talented pupils.

138. The proposed Excellence in Cities (EiC) initiative provides a suitable vehicle for building on established practice and strengthening provision to ensure the full involvement of schools. An EiC cluster co-ordinator has recently been appointed to support the work and a small team of advisory staff and associates is starting to drive the initiative forward. A number of training courses involving LEA subject specialists, schools and governors, have been held to raise awareness of the need to identify and focus support for gifted and talented pupils.

Measures to combat social exclusion and racism

139. The EDP gives priority to promoting social inclusion and the LEA provides good support to schools. The improved data enable it to identify underachievement in relation to social need with increasing precision and to target initiatives and resources to where they are needed. It works closely with other services, agencies and community organisations to give integrated support to groups which are underachieving, or in danger of doing so because of cultural reasons or difficult home circumstances. The PRUs and behaviour support team make a valuable contribution to combating exclusion. Several of the voluntary groups with which the LEA collaborates are helping to address concerns over the achievement of African and Caribbean boys and their over-representation in exclusion rates. They offer,

among other things, counselling, role models, mentoring and parent support. The LEA's own African Caribbean service also contributes effectively to improving attitudes and raising expectations through similar techniques.

140. Good equal opportunities policies and appropriate procedures for recording racist incidents have been in place for a number of years. The LEA has taken the opportunity to revisit these to develop and refine policies further in light of the findings of the Macpherson inquiry on the death of Stephen Lawrence. The resultant action plan proposes measures that are appropriately in line with the inquiry's recommendations. There are well-focussed intentions that go beyond strengthening procedures relating to racial harassment; for example, improving ethnic minority achievement, reducing permanent exclusions of ethnic minority pupils and promoting increased teacher and governor recruitment from within ethnic minority groups. There are already indications that the strategy to recruit more governors from within minority groups has been successful. All schools visited were aware of the measures being taken by the LEA to combat racism and well over half have already spent time revisiting and discussing their equal opportunities policies. However, the LEA's procedures for monitoring the impact of its policies on racism in schools are not yet influencing policy development and practice sufficiently.

Recommendations

To broaden the communication between schools and the LEA in relation to the funding and management of major repairs and capital schemes:

- ensure all schools have access to a link officer with a good knowledge of the school to act as an interface between the school and technical staff in construction services.

To improve support for attendance:

- match the allocation of EWO resources more closely to the needs of schools.

To improve measures to combat racism:

- monitor schools' recording of racist incidents and ensure appropriate action is being taken to combat racial harassment.

APPENDIX: RECOMMENDATIONS

SECTION 1

In order to improve the effectiveness of the EDP:

- further reduce the breadth of the EDP activities and target them more effectively; and
- ensure that all action plans provide coherent strategies for improvement and take account of other major school improvement initiatives.

SECTION 2

In order to improve target-setting:

- ensure all schools make effective use of the data available to them to set challenging targets for specific groups of under-performing pupils and identify strategies for achieving them.

SECTION 3

In order to improve strategic management:

- put in place a development plan which sets out overall longer-term priorities for the service and their likely resource implications;
- improve the consistency of service plans and quality assurance arrangements; and
- ensure the scope of the Best Value review of personnel covers the service to schools and the education department and the links with payroll services.

SECTION 4

In order to improve the statementing process:

- ensure that the educational psychology service gives priority to responding to referrals at stages 3 and 4; and
- seek better co-operation from outside agencies in meeting statutory deadlines.

SECTION 5

To broaden the communication between schools and the LEA in relation to the funding and management of major repairs and capital schemes:

- ensure all schools have access to a link officer with a good knowledge of the school to act as an interface between the school and technical staff in construction services.

To improve support for attendance:

- match the allocation of EWO resources more closely to the needs of schools.

To improve measures to combat racism:

- monitor schools' recording of racist incidents and ensure appropriate action is taken to combat racial harassment.

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**Office for Standards in Education
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE**

Tel: 020 7421 6800

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**Croydon LEA
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Taberner House
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