INSPECTION OF

BRISTOL

LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY

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

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INTRODUCTION

1.   This short inspection was carried out under Section 38 of the Education Act 1997.   The purpose of the inspection was to evaluate the progress made in responding to the findings and recommendations of the first inspection, which took place in September 1999.   The report also evaluates the progress made in implementing the Education Development Plan; the introduction of the Excellence in Cities initiative and the effectiveness of the Local Education Authority's (LEA's) contribution to the city's Education Action Zone.   The inspection took account of the Local Government Act 1999, insofar as it relates to work undertaken by the LEA on Best Value.

2.   The inspection was conducted by a small team of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) in conjunction with the Audit Commission. The inspection involved scrutinising documentation and interviewing elected members, the head of paid service and senior officers. Discussions were held with headteachers and teachers. Short visits were made to four schools. A questionnaire inviting comments on LEA support was sent to all schools and replies were received from 68 per cent of schools. Account was also taken of evidence from other divisions within OFSTED.

3.   Following the publication of the previous inspection report, the DfEE appointed a consultancy to advise the council. Advice was provided on:

- the adoption of a planning framework suitable for the current statutory framework for an LEA;
- the development of a performance framework;
- 'Education at the heart of the council' - how the education and lifelong learning department relates to the rest of the council;
- the format of service statements;
- the production of pupil performance data; and
- the current service agreement for corporate departments with service departments.

COMMENTARY

4.   At the time of its last inspection, in September 1999, Bristol City Council was found not to be successfully exercising its functions with a view to raising standards in schools. In addition, there was a lack of effective strategic planning in several areas: particularly those relating to school improvement, the removal of surplus places, and the provision of 16-19 education. The inspection report led to the appointment of consultants, whose advice on planning, performance management and the production of performance data for pupils has had some impact.

5.   Overall, progress on 14 of the 20 recommendations in the last report has been at least satisfactory. Good progress has been made on three. In particular, high quality leadership in the management of special education provision has led to marked improvements in the rate at which statutory assessments are completed within the required time limits. Good progress has also been made on the use of electronic communications and the development of a local intranet, which is increasingly used by schools. Improvements are slowly taking place in other areas. Some momentum has been achieved, for instance in property issues and performance management, and support to schools to raise standards is good in some areas, particularly numeracy.

6.   The LEA has met its Key Stage 2 performance targets for literacy and numeracy, and appears to be on track to meet its targets for 2002. While there is still no evidence of improvement in standards at Key Stage 4, the rate of improvement in attainment in writing and reading of Key Stage 1 pupils is well above the national rate. Progress on the implementation of all eight priorities in the LEA's Education Development Plan (EDP) has been at least satisfactory. There has also been some sharpening in the focus of the LEA's work in relation to school improvement, enhanced by recent involvement in the Excellence in Cities initiative and Key Stage 3 pilot project.

7.   Where less progress has been made, it is because planning has lacked focus or, simply, because action has been too slow. For example, there has been little improvement in provision for Key Stage 3 pupils excluded from school - these pupils continue to receive wholly inadequate provision; and comprehensive pupil-level data are still not available to inform target-setting. Support to schools to raise attainment in information and communication technology (ICT) is inadequate, and progress on providing cost effective sixth form provision has also been slow.

8.   While the LEA carries out the majority of its functions satisfactorily, and overall progress made on the recommendations from the last inspection and on the implementation of the EDP is also satisfactory, significant weaknesses remain.

9.   There are weaknesses in budget management and financial control. Significant overspends have occurred within the education budget, some of which are the result of weak monitoring and insufficiently robust forecasting; mistakes have also been made in the completion of budget statements resulting in reports to elected members containing inaccurate information. There is a lack of rigour in the allocation of resources to priorities, with no regular review of priorities or strategy for recycling resources. Medium-term financial planning is also limited, and this

undermines the strategic management of the service. Moreover, there has been insufficient involvement of school stakeholders in key resourcing decisions.

10.   Decisions have not always been informed by detailed consideration as to their likely impact on pupils' learning. In recent weeks, the council has chosen to hold a referendum on the amount of council tax to be levied in the forthcoming year (2001/2002), with education expenditure specifically targeted to absorb the impact of the electorate's vote. As a result, and at very short notice, the education service faces an overall cut of 1.6 per cent from its budget in the coming year. The lack of a long-term strategy for the funding of education has left the council inadequately prepared to target appropriately the reductions required.

11.   This is not the only poor decision. After consultation, a recommendation from officers and the executive member for education that two failing primary schools with over 25 per cent surplus places should close has been overturned by the council. Members themselves now admit that the future for the current review of secondary education in Bristol and sixth form provision looks bleak.

12.   Headteachers and officers have lost confidence in the ability of elected members to ensure that sensible and timely decisions are made for the benefit of education across the city, and to focus resources on priorities. Although senior officers have the confidence of schools, the plethora of national and local initiatives and the challenges currently facing the LEA require not only very clearly focused and robust political and professional leadership, but crucially, the effective support of elected members.

13.   Following initial assistance, progress overall has been satisfactory. The issue is whether it is sustainable. We do not believe it is. Elected members have not ensured that they are fully aware of the educational implications of their decisions. Officers have not been successful in challenging and advising members in some key areas and current arrangements so to do are insufficiently transparent. As a consequence, the city has not had the quality of leadership it requires to set out a clear and achievable medium-term strategy. Decisions critical to the future of the service in Bristol have to be made in the coming months; on the basis of recent experience, we share stakeholders' doubts in the capacity of the council to make them. A further inspection will be needed.

SECTION 1

THE CONTEXT OF THE LEA

Context

14.　There has been little change in the socio-economic context of the LEA since the first inspection in the autumn of 1999.　The City Council serves a diverse community with a number of attractive and affluent areas as well as those with significant social deprivation.　Overall, the local authority is ranked as the 69[th][1] most deprived district in England.　Unemployment has continued to fall and is below the national average.

15.　Pupils' entitlement to free school meals has reduced in the last two years in both the primary and secondary sectors, and is broadly in line with the national average.　The proportion of ethnic minority pupils continues to rise, but at 12.4 per cent, is in line with the national mean.

16.　The proportion of primary pupils with statements of special educational need has remained fairly constant at 3.5 per cent, but is well above the national average. However, the proportion of secondary-aged pupils with statements of special educational need has risen and is extremely high at 7.4 per cent; this compares with a static national average of four per cent.

17.　In January 2001, there were 52,111 pupils in Bristol's schools including 1,658 children in maintained nursery schools.　The number of pupils in maintained primary schools has fallen by 1.9 per cent in the last three years.　The number of pupils in the city's maintained secondary schools has risen by 7.7 per cent to 17,906.　Bristol LEA now maintains 165 schools, having closed 13 primary schools and two secondary schools since the last inspection.　There are 15 nursery schools, 23 infant schools, 22 junior schools, 74 primary schools of which 50 have nursery classes, 20 secondary schools of which 14 are 11-18 and ten special schools.　Three secondary schools have less than 60 pupils in the sixth form.　The LEA has a Pupil Referral Unit which caters for schoolgirl mothers.

18.　The proportion of actual[2] surplus places in the LEA's secondary schools has reduced to 9.4 per cent, which is below the national average.　However, in the primary sector the actual surplus place proportion is almost 17 per cent, which is above the national average.　The proportion of pupils lost to neighbouring authorities and the independent sector at secondary transfer has decreased from 20 per cent at the time of the last inspection, to 18.5 per cent.

Performance

19.　A detailed analysis of performance of schools was supplied to the LEA in an OFSTED profile.　The key features of the performance of schools and progress since the last inspection are highlighted below:

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[1] Out of 354 districts in England
[2] Actual surplus is defined as the difference between capacity and number on roll for all schools where capacity exceeds number on roll

- At Key Stage 1, the proportion of pupils achieving level 2 or above in all the tests remain below that found nationally, although the rate of improvement in writing and reading is well above the national rate. The good pace of improvement made in mathematics has not been maintained but is in line with that found nationally.

- In all three core subjects at Key Stage 2, the proportion of pupils achieving level 4 or above is well below that achieved nationally. Moreover, although the improvement made in the proportion of pupils achieving level 4 or above has continued, in the last year, this was less than achieved nationally in English. Nevertheless, 66.6 per cent of pupils achieved level 4 or above in English, exceeding the LEA's 2000 target of 64.5 per cent; similarly, the LEA's numeracy target of 61.5 per cent achieving level 4 or above in mathematics was bettered by 2.6 per cent.

- At Key Stage 3, the gap between the overall proportion of pupils achieving level 5 or above in all three core subjects in the last year has worsened in comparison with the national picture. Moreover, in English, 3.5 per cent fewer pupils achieved level 5 or above in 2000 than in 1999.

- Although there was a very slight improvement in all measures of performance at Key Stage 4, overall schools continue to perform well below the national average. The LEA has failed to achieved all of its Key Stage 4 targets for 2000, albeit by very little in two instances. Significantly, the proportion of pupils achieving 5 or more A*-C grades at GCSE in 2000 was only 32.5 per cent, compared with the target of 34.4 per cent. Bristol remains in the bottom five per cent of all LEAs in England.

- On all tests, a significant proportion of Bristol's maintained schools fall into the bottom quartile of performance when compared with like schools. For example, benchmarked data places half of the LEA's secondary schools into the bottom 25 per cent of similar schools on the basis of attainment in English at Key Stage 3.

20.   The LEA was successful in meeting its target for permanent exclusions in 1999-2000. The proportion of pupils permanently excluded from school has continued to reduce in both the primary and secondary sectors. In the last year, the proportion of pupils permanently excluded from secondary schools reduced by over one-third, but is still above the national rate.

21.   The attendance rate of primary pupils continues to be below that found nationally. Similarly, attendance at secondary schools also continues to be well below the national mean.

22.   In the eighteen months since the last LEA inspection, there has been little change in the proportion of both primary and secondary schools found to require much improvement overall. Twenty-nine per cent of primary schools and 26 per cent of secondary schools need to make much improvement in relation to standards, a proportion significantly greater than the national rate.

23.   Since the last inspection, four primary schools and one special school have come out of special measures and a secondary school in special measures has closed. The three schools currently in special measures (two primary schools and one secondary school) have all been so identified since the last inspection. A further six schools (three primary, two secondary and one special) have recently been found by OFSTED to have serious weaknesses, giving a total of 11 schools currently so categorised. Since the last inspection, three primary schools and one secondary school no longer have serious weaknesses. One junior school has been identified as under achieving.

24.   Since the last inspection, three schools, one nursery, one primary and a secondary have been awarded Beacon status.

Funding

25.   Education is very well funded. Although Bristol's education SSA is in line with its statistical neighbours[3] and unitary authorities, and is below the national average, the planned budget for education in 2000/2001 was 13.4 per cent above SSA. The spending per pupil (£2,878) within the local schools budget (LSB) is consequently high compared with statistical neighbours (£2,660) and is well above the national average (£2,755). Spending across all council activities is ten per cent above SSA.

26.   Within education, spending exceeds SSA in all areas, but is at its greatest outside the compulsory school age ranges. This, in part, reflects the high unit cost of sixth form provision.

2000/2001 Budget as a per cent of SSA	Under 5s	Primary	11-15	Post 16	Other
113.4%	177.1%	100.6%	111.2%	132.2%	142.6%

27.   Individual school budgets per pupil for all phases are all in excess of statistical neighbours. The differences are, however, less pronounced for primary schools (4.9 per cent) than for secondary schools (10.6 per cent).

28.   As well as spending at a relatively high level on schools, planned retained funding (£466 per pupil) within the Local School Budget (LSB) also exceeds the averages for statistical neighbours (£415), unitary authorities (£427) and England (£446). Particular variations include existing and planned premature retirement costs, which are £34 per pupil above the average for the LEA's statistical neighbours[4]. Additionally, expenditure on statutory and regulatory duties is high at £61 per pupil, compared to the unitary and England averages of £50 per pupil. Further delegation of some advisory service costs in 2001/2002 will reduce this figure, but it will still be above other LEA averages. In aggregate, spending on special education in Bristol remains high (21 per cent of LSB compared to 16 per

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[3] Bristol's statistical neighbours are Bolton, Derby, Kirklees, Enfield, Leeds, Stockton-on-Tees, Southampton, Bury, Walsall and Wirral.

[4] And £44 above the unitary authority average and £39 above the England average. Each pound per pupil expenditure in Bristol represents £50K.

cent for neighbours, unitary authorities and England) reflecting both high central retention and high delegated allocations to schools.

29.   The 2000/1 section 52 statements have been carelessly prepared and could inhibit the benchmarking of expenditure. There are two major errors: the Individual School Budget (ISB) has been significantly over-stated and the budgeted expenditure on statutory and regulatory duties is under-stated as £41 per pupil. This is subsequently repeated in council budgetary papers, suggesting a comparatively low spend.

30.   Overall, the planned level of delegation as a percentage of LSB (85.2 per cent) is in line with the average for England and statistical neighbours.   For the 2000/2001 financial year, the City Council 'passported' the increase in education SSA.   However, as a result of its financial decisions for 2001/2002 being dictated by the outcomes of its council tax referendum, which has resulted in a late cut to the education budget, it will not do so in 2001/2002. Although the council intends to take up the full allocation of key Standards Fund grants to protect its participation in Excellence in Cities, the overall net effect will be a reduction in real terms of 1.6 per cent on school budgets.   A further 1.2 per cent reduction is expected in 2002/2003.

31.   Budget forecasting and controls have been weak. These, together with costs arising from two secondary school closures, have contributed to substantial overspending within education overall in the last two years. The effectiveness of recently introduced measures to tighten control have yet to be tested. In 1999/2000, the education budget was overspent by £2.1m. The council continues to struggle to control home to school transport costs, which will again exceed the budget for this year.   Originally the council had expected the education budget to absorb the overspend, but it has subsequently covered it from reserves, and additional transport costs are being built into the base budget.

32.   Capital expenditure on education in Bristol in 2000/2001 has risen to £14.4m from £6.2m in 1999/2000. In response to a recognition of the need to tackle the poor building stock condition, the executive member is appropriately exploring the potential for the council to contribute substantial additional capital funds, £11m, from its own resources, over the next four years. This has yet to be secured.   In addition, the council is actively pursing £55m of Private Funding Initiative credits to replace and refurbish eight secondary schools.

Council structure

33.   Bristol City Council consists of 36 Labour, 24 Liberal Democrat and ten Conservative elected members. Since the last inspection, the council has opted for a 'cabinet with leader' model from April 2000 in response to the Government's modernising agenda.

34.   The cabinet operates as an executive board and consists of the leader, two deputy leaders and five executive members, including one for education and lifelong learning.   One of the six scrutiny commissions covers learning and culture and is chaired by the deputy leader of the smallest party.

35.   At the same time as the council was restructured, the number of directorates was reduced from eight to six, resulting in a smaller chief officers' group.   The directorate of education and lifelong learning was not directly affected by these changes.   Simultaneously, the responsibilities of the post of chief executive were divided between a cabinet secretary and a head of paid service.

The Education Development Plan (subject of two recommendations in the first report)

36.   The first inspection judged the EDP to have some strengths, but also some notable weaknesses.   Since then, the weaknesses in the EDP have been eradicated and, overall, it now provides a satisfactory framework within which the LEA and schools can focus their improvement efforts on the key priorities.

37.   The second version of the plan is currently in use and a third version is in draft form for consideration by the council in April.   The second version has clearly expressed priorities which are appropriate for the city, most of which are linked to other relevant plans.   There is useful cross-referencing to recent initiatives such as the Key Stage 3 pilot project. A major element of overlap has been removed from the teaching priority with staff training appropriately subsumed into other priorities.

38.   Inadequate detail relating to the timing of activities in the previous version made it difficult for schools to know how to plan appropriately for these activities. The LEA has attempted to overcome this by allocating each activity to a broad span of time.   Headteachers interviewed regarded this as an improvement.   However, it is still too imprecise to be a fully effective guide to timing for LEA and school staff.

39.   In the second edition, targets have been sharpened, especially in literacy, numeracy, science, teaching and the promotion of social inclusion.   They are now satisfactory, and provide an adequate basis for both action and evaluation. Evaluation of the implementation of the EDP continues to be based on a sound review of evidence, including that of pupils' performance in literacy and numeracy. It has provided an adequate basis for the second and third versions of the plan, largely through fine tuning of aspects of priorities, reflecting evidence as it emerges, for example, through school inspections, and as new government initiatives, such as the Key Stage 3 project, take root.   The third version, currently in draft form, is more succinct and useful to users in schools.   It is a clear improvement in this respect and is well regarded by the headteachers interviewed, as is the continuing effort of the LEA to base its work on a good level of consultation with stakeholders.   During the period in which the three versions of the EDP have been written, headteachers rightly believe that the plans have become clearer, simpler and more focused on schools' needs.   A widely representative monitoring group, including elected members, officers and other stakeholders, evaluates progress on the EDP termly.

40.   Progress overall has ultimately been satisfactory in response to the recommendation in the previous report for a clearer definition of the costs of the EDP.   The detail in the 2000/2001 document was far too specific and it is difficult to see how this would have been helpful to schools or the local authority.   However, the format of the 2001/2002 version offers a clearer account of the deployment of resources and description of the funding sources.   The process has assisted in

correcting some of the previous errors of the allocation of costs in the section 52 statement, which in turn will assist the local authority to undertake more effective and informed benchmarking.

41. At the last inspection, concerns were also expressed that schools' performance targets were not based on adequate information. The LEA has revised the way in which it supported school target-setting in preparation for Autumn term 2000, and there is evidence that this has led to more focused and rigorous discussions with schools. Significantly more data is available upon which sound judgements can be based, and there is an increasing ability to identify groups of underachieving pupils. However, while satisfactory progress has been made on improving data for schools, the target setting process will not be secure until comprehensive pupil-level information is available; progress on this has been too slow. The authority is aware of this need and is well on its way to having individual pupil information ready for schools for September 2001.

New initiatives

Education Action Zones (EAZs)

42. The central Bristol EAZ was formally launched in September 2000. Twenty-three schools (eight nursery, 12 primary, two secondary and one special) in wards with high levels of social deprivation are involved. The budget for 2000/01 is £730,000.

43. The overall programme of the Zone was determined by the EAZ steering group, after consultation with schools and an initial analysis of the EAZ's needs as identified through data and OFSTED school inspections. Attainment in the EAZ schools at Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 is significantly below the city's average and national levels; and at Key Stage 4 is below the average for Bristol. Appropriately, the programme focuses on improving the quality of teaching and learning, particularly literacy and numeracy; increasing pupils' self-esteem; improving information and communication technology (ICT) competencies; and raising ethnic minority attainment. Zone targets are rightly predicated on increased progress as a consequence of EAZ projects. At the beginning, there was a substantial mismatch between individual school targets and the Zone's value-added targets, which led to some tension in relationships between the EAZ team and officers. These issues have now been resolved.

44. The EAZ action plan is very ambitious. There are too many projects—69 in total—some of which involve a few schools, others engage all. However, the projects complement both EDP priorities and broader regeneration initiatives. Each project's description usefully includes starting points and expected outcomes, which facilitates the focus on achieving targets. The EAZ director meets senior LEA officers and other stakeholders to co-ordinate initiatives.

45. It is too early to measure the impact of the EAZ. However, the reading recovery programme has reportedly helped improve attainment; an arts project was well supported; and initial ICT training has also been greeted with enthusiasm. The number of projects is likely to be trimmed, and some have not begun because of

staffing difficulties. Views of headteachers on the EAZ are now being canvassed, and the outcome of that review will be reported to the DfEE in March 2001.

46. Two small EAZs, as part of the Excellence in Cities (EiC) initiative, are expected to be fully operational from September 2001.

Excellence in Cities (EiC)

47. Although in its early days, good progress is being made on the implementation of the EiC initiative. Headteachers speak positively about the impact of the partnership arrangements on their relationships with each other and with the LEA. All partners now have a greater understanding and increased awareness of their contribution and role in this initiative. Within schools, management structures are being updated to focus on pupil attainment and progress. Learning mentors have been appointed and examples given already of their impact on reducing exclusions. Four learning support units are being developed which will complement existing provision and provide outreach behaviour support to cluster schools. There is a new and welcomed emphasis on the dissemination of good practice, and a recent seminar for headteachers in relation to the teaching literacy was considered to be informative and useful.

48. The extended EiC partnership embraces other LEA services (for example the education welfare service and special needs service) and external partners (such as the education business partnership and youth service). These services are beginning to build upon the EiC structures with, for example, officers asking to speak to a pupil's mentor, as necessary. Appropriate and productive links are being made with one of the EiC Phase 1 cities and with one of the London boroughs in relation to the work of learning mentors. Workshop seminars are being arranged to encourage and develop business partnerships and discussions are ongoing to integrate both the work of the Connexions service and regeneration initiatives.

49. Schools' performance targets have not yet been updated to reflect the impact of this initiative, although schools are beginning to consider the implications of, for example, the gifted and talented work, on individual pupils' performance.

The Key Stage 3 Project

50. This project is being well managed by the LEA and the secondary headteachers involved are, according to interviews held, highly satisfied with its impact so far on their schools. They see it, like the EiC initiative, as a potentially powerful means to raise standards.

51. The project work so far has been based on a clear analysis of the standards of attainment and the effectiveness of teaching and classroom management in the city's secondary schools. Targets provisionally set in the plan have since been updated. They are suitably ambitious and well grounded in sound analyses of data on pupils' performance. The project has an effective management structure and so far, according to headteachers, has succeeded in balancing efforts to focus on school improvement with the necessary efforts to manage the internal mechanisms of the project itself.

52.   The LEA has evaluated the impact of the project on literacy and numeracy in its pilot secondary schools.   There is considerable evidence of sharply focused lesson planning, lively lessons with brisk pace and effective use of time, and of increased motivation among staff and pupils.   It is too early to judge the impact on standards.   Headteachers interviewed, however, are very impressed with the projects' impact on the teaching of English and mathematics.

Allocation of resources to priorities

53.   Despite the council's commitment to high spending on education in Bristol, the allocation of expenditure lacks focus.   In recent years, medium-term financial planning for the education service has not been sufficiently robust nor helpful to the strategic management of the service.   There is little indication of any significant continuous review of priorities or opportunities for the recycling of resources over a longer period.   The choice and timing of education expenditure as the focus for a referendum on council spending whose outcome would only be known six weeks before the end of the financial year is not conducive to effective forward planning. Schools have, unnecessarily, been forced to take short-term expedient measures to balance budgets.   The decision to adopt a strategy designed to introduce avoidable uncertainty into critical service areas was taken by elected members without appropriate opportunities given to headteachers, officers, governors or other informed stakeholders to offer opinion or advice.   The late arrival of a one-off £2m sum to ameliorate the worst effects of a £4.5m cut to the education budget, while welcome, is indicative of unacceptable short-termism.

54.   The council does not involve school stakeholders sufficiently early or at an appropriate strategic level in discussions about the budget or its longer term financial strategy.   Members claim that the budget uncertainty for schools created by this year's budget determining strategy has not been significantly different or inconvenient compared with previous years is, at best, unsatisfactory.   In contrast, work done in the past with schools in developing an activity-led resourced school budget model has been a good example of planning.   It has, however, placed a higher than normal emphasis within the formula on school and site factors. Consequently, there is a high premium on the requirement to tackle surplus places, where they exist, in order to ensure that high spending has an impact on supporting the raising of standards of achievement rather than on maintaining under-subscribed small schools.

Performance management and Best Value (subject of a recommendation)

55.   At the time of the last inspection, the LEA was in the early stages of preparing for Best Value reviews (BVRs).   Some initial progress has been made since on the authority's arrangements to check performance.   Although the council has previously supported employee development arrangements, systems have not been consistent, either in type or application.   An ambitious performance management and development scheme for the three senior tiers is in the early stages of being piloted in the education service.   This incorporates a competency framework (The Bristol Manager), developed with the assistance of the consultants, and includes 360 degree feedback and annual objective setting.   The scheme is designed to link

individual activity to team and organisational plans and targets. The intention is to roll out the scheme for all managerial and supervisory grades by September 2002. It is too early to assess the effectiveness of this scheme.

56. Satisfactory progress has been made on the recommendation in the previous report that schools be given information about service costs so that they can develop a better sense of value for money. Previous slow development reflected the late delegation of services in Bristol. However, schools now have access to service booklets, with prices, both in hard copy and through the local authority intranet. All traded services have a service design group, chaired by school representatives, appropriately concerned with reviewing matters related to the individual service specification and performance. Phase booklets are being revised to coincide with end of contract dates. Plans exist to extend the booklets to cover non-traded services.

57. The experience of schools to date has been of the LEA as a provider-focused organisation, but both the procurement service now offered, and the ambition of officers to develop a web-based information point for alternative providers, are appropriate and encouraging. Progress on requiring schools to demonstrate the application of Best Value principles has, to date, been too slow and formulaic. The Fair Funding Group of headteachers has, however, recently agreed a helpful self-review tool for schools to act as a check on the application of Best Value principles.

58. Progress on conducting programmed BVRs has, overall, been satisfactory. A review on early years is near completion, but the BVR of the advisory service has not yet started. In the context of the delegation consultation and the imminence of the inspection revisit, this is, however, understandable. The council has reviewed its future programme for BVRs to accommodate more cross-cutting reviews. In light of the high levels of expenditure on special education needs, it is appropriate that the review of the service features early in the programme.

Recommendations

In order both to secure more effective and meaningful planning and budget management and control, to focus resources on agreed priorities, and inform schools better:

- ensure accurate and timely information is prepared by officers in the completion of the section 52 statement, and that this is underpinned by up-to-date comparative financial information;

- review the pattern of home to school transport, including the assessment of need for children with special educational needs, with the objective of targeting resources to greatest need and controlling costs;

- develop a more consistent and coherent approach to medium and long-term financial planning and review linked to the council's education priorities; and

- routinely involve school stakeholders at an early stage and at an appropriate strategic level, in discussions about the overall budget and strategic direction.

In order to promote school improvement:

- review secondary schools' performance targets in Autumn term 2001 to incorporate the impact of both the EiC and EAZ initiatives.

SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Monitoring, challenge, support and intervention (subject of two recommendations)

59.   The first inspection judged, as a significant omission, the absence of a detailed service plan to define precisely how priorities would be implemented, sequenced and monitored in the achievement division. Officers have worked to resolve this issue by:

- costing service contributions to the implementation of the EDP;
- planning and sequencing them;
- using purchased software to monitor progress;
- increasing delegation of advisory service time to 40 per cent from April 2001;
- specifying how resource levels will be allocated to national priorities and to consultancy in each service;
- defining the core advisory support to be devoted to schools, dependent on their levels of needs;
- formulating criteria for the more effective evaluation of the LEA's school improvement services; and
- consulting schools on all of these developments.

60.   The first recommendation relating to service planning has two major strands: the production of a detailed service plan, and the reorganisation of the advisory service in line with additional delegation of funding to schools. Proposals for the latter strand have now been adequately outlined, and are currently being consulted upon. The proposals are in tune with the policy of intervention in inverse proportion to success. An outline service plan now shows who is responsible for each EDP priority and the timescale for the completion of activities. More detailed planning for these activities is appropriately contained in specific post-inspection action plans: implementation of these is proceeding satisfactorily.

61.   In order to make the monitoring of schools more efficient, officers have developed, in consultation with schools, procedures to analyse standards and trends in both the performance of schools and the context in which they operate. The former has recently been trialled, and the trialling of the latter is imminent. The procedures are well supported by paper and computer-based data collection and analysis. These procedures have the potential to give LEA staff a good insight into aspects of school performance and to help them, and school staff, to determine the need for support in each school. The system has yet to prove itself in full operation. However, headteachers are satisfied that it will be an effective tool in their annual cycle of self-review. This represents a satisfactory response so far to the recommendation.

62.   The LEA has implemented the recommendation to cease holding its own reviews of schools that duplicate OFSTED inspections. From April 2001, the new procedures for providing differential support, together with better arrangements for the analysis of performance data, and the delegation to schools of 40 per cent of the costs of the advisory service, will combine to remove the need for duplicate inspections or reviews of schools. Thereafter, any such review requested by schools

will have to be financed from their own budgets, unless associated with a particular LEA concern about low or slipping standards.

The collection and analysis of data (subject of a recommendation)

63.	The previous inspection reported that both the LEA's provision of data on pupil performance and the guidance provided to schools on its use were unsatisfactory. At that time, the targets set by individual schools were not based upon a comprehensive and detailed analysis of data.

64.	Initially, progress in tackling this recommendation was slow. Two new posts have been established, one at a senior level within the policy and resources division, and the second within the achievement division. While there was a revised process of target setting in the Autumn term, more detailed information was not available to schools until October 2000 when each school was provided with an individual school data profile. The profile was supported by a rewritten target-setting workbook and, in November, a CD-Rom was distributed that contained backdated attainment information on all Bristol schools. Training to enable headteachers to access and analyse the data individually has been ongoing since November and been attended by the vast majority of schools.

65.	Since October, when the first new appointment became operational, the rate of progress on this recommendation increased considerably. The LEA is well on track to provide accurate individual pupil-level information to all schools by September 2001, and to improve dramatically the time taken for the analysis of data and its transfer from schools to the LEA and between schools. The funding for the second post is being used to both employ a consultant and, since November, provide administrative support to develop the LEA's database. Already the improved database has facilitated the identification of the LEA's 29 priority schools to support this year in the light of their limited progress on raising levels of attainment. Further work is underway to include a wide range of locally specified 'alerts' that will increase both the LEA's and individual schools' capacity to identify key groups for targeting and more finely-tuned benchmarking. A common software package has been adopted across all primary schools for recording and analysing pupil attainment data. The training for primary headteachers, one member of their teaching staff and two support staff will be completed by Easter 2001. Ongoing consultation with headteachers is seeking to resolve issues resulting from a variety of systems being used in secondary schools.

66.	While the authority recognises that it still has much work to do in this area, it has made significant strides over the last six months. Most of the progress made is as a result of an increased emphasis on the collection of comprehensive and accessible data clearly focused on raising standards. As well as increasing the capacity to collect and analyse it, the data is also being well used across the education department. Schools report that there has been a tremendous improvement in the provision of quality data and available training. There have also been opportunities to share good practice and the target-setting process has become more rigorous. All the indications are that progress in this area is now good and will be sustained.

Support for literacy (Education Development Plan priority 1)

67.   Raising the level of pupil attainment in literacy continues to be a key priority in the authority with results at Key Stages 1 and 2 remaining stubbornly below, and at Key Stage 3, well below, those of like authorities and nationally. However, at Key Stages 1 and 2 results in the national tests in 2000 continued to show an upward trend, with those at Key Stage 1 improving faster than results nationally. The LEA's analysis of OFSTED's school inspection reports supports this picture with the quality of teaching of English in primary schools showing a significant improvement over the last two years. At Key Stage 2, the LEA appears to be on track to meet its 2002 target, although the targets set for a large number of individual schools are not being achieved. At Key Stage 3, there was an unexplained dip in results in 2000 of over three per cent.

68.   The LEA is not complacent about the progress it still has to make. Good use is being made of the increasingly more detailed data now available to the LEA to identify individual schools as well as key groups that require careful targeting for support. Priority is being given to:

- working with schools that have made little or no progress over the last three years;
- improving the results in writing; and
- raising the attainment of underachieving groups including boys, children in public care and those ethnic minority groups that should be making more progress.

69.   There is a greater awareness of the importance of assessing the impact of the work undertaken by the literacy team and this is being tackled. The Key Stage 3 literacy pilot, while focusing on 14 secondary schools, is facilitating support in literacy across the whole secondary sector. Although in its early days, LEA analysis, supported by HMI visits to some of the pilot schools in October 2000, demonstrates that the work is already having a positive impact on teaching and learning. Schools continue to report that the support provided by the LEA at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 is at least satisfactory and, in most instances, good. Headteachers value their access to high quality training and consultancy and single out the support to curriculum leaders as being particularly helpful.

70.   While the support for literacy is at least satisfactory in most areas, there are some weaknesses in overall planning. Many of the activities, initiatives and plans that impact on the LEA's support for literacy have not been brought together in a way that is easy for users to understand. This is impacting not only on the LEA's ability to ensure consistency and coherence in approach, but also on schools' ability to respond in an integrated and time-efficient way to the support provided.

Support for numeracy (Education Development Plan priority 2)

71.   At the time of the previous inspection, the LEA had begun successfully to implement the National Numeracy Strategy. Standards at Key Stage 2, although below the national average, were improving at a faster rate. Until 1999, standards at Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 3 had improved only marginally.

72.   However, from 1999 to 2000, the proportion of pupils achieving level 4 or above at Key Stage 2 increased by four percentage points, to 64 per cent, slightly above the national rate, but overall, still well below the national average. The recent round of target-setting with schools suggests that the 2002 target of 70 per cent reaching the required level will be exceeded.

73.   As a result of participation in the Key Stage 3 pilot, a challenging target of 65 per cent has been set for the proportion of pupils who will achieve at least level 5 in the 2002 tests. In the last three years, there has been a very gradual improvement in the proportion of pupils achieving level 5+, but at 50.4 per cent in 2000, this is well below the national mean of 65.5 per cent.

74.   Of the 30 primary schools receiving intensive support last year, six failed to improve the proportion of pupils achieving at least level 4 at Key Stage 2. This is disappointing. However, four of these continue to receive intensive support and all but one of the six have challenging targets for this year. The selection of schools to receive intensive support is rigorous and appropriately involves self-selection by headteachers, which is welcomed by them.

75.   'Raising attainment in numeracy' features as a priority within the Education Development Plan. Satisfactory progress is being made in the implementation of the various activities identified within this priority. This includes:

- 'Project Max' which was initiated as a result of councillors' recognition of the need to improve standards of attainment at Key Stage 3. They decided to fund a project to raise standards in mathematics at Key Stage 3, prior to the implementation of the national pilot. Money from the sale of Bristol airport was used to cover the cost of providing two days of professional development for all Key Stage 3 mathematics teachers and learning support assistants; this training opportunity was taken up by 90 per cent of those eligible to attend. This initiative, together with a successful introduction to the Key Stage 3 pilot, was reported by a number of the secondary headteachers interviewed to have made a considerable impact on the quality of mathematics teaching in their schools.

- Support for three numeracy summer schools, which, while judged qualitatively as effective, has not yet been evaluated in terms of improvement in pupil attainment. The intended plan to measure the impact of the summer schools one year later is unlikely to give a clear indicator of effectiveness.

- Subject reviews carried out in 20 primary schools and 11 secondary schools. Currently, and inappropriately, primary schools have an entitlement to an annual subject review which lasts one day.   The focus of the subject review is determined in consultation with the headteacher and involves, importantly, building the capacity of the numeracy co-ordinator and headteacher to monitor and evaluate the quality of mathematics teaching in the school. Wisely, schools will be able to buy back subject reviews from April; only schools on stage three of the protocol for schools causing concern will automatically have access to such reviews.

76. Headteachers value the support provided by the skilled and enthusiastic numeracy team. Arrangements for teachers to observe leading mathematics teachers in primary schools are co-ordinated and evaluated.

77. Overall, while progress in raising attainment has slowed at Key Stage 2, improvements in all key stages are expected in the next two years as the impact of current initiatives is felt.

Support for Information and Communication Technology (subject of two recommendations and Education Development Plan priority 3)

78. At the time of the last inspection, standards of attainment in ICT were improving, but insufficiently quickly. In addition, support to schools which needed it most was not always available.

79. The priority relating to raising attainment in ICT, detailed in the Education Development Plan, has been revised to take into account the recommendation in the inspection report. However, despite 'raising attainment' being the title of the ICT priority, no attainment targets have been identified. The targets in the current working edition of the plan are vague and not quantifiable. A recent monitoring and evaluation report on progress produced by the lead officer for the EDP priority is too general.

80. A significant weakness inhibiting progress on this priority has been the failure to engage schools quickly after the last inspection in recording the levels of achievement demonstrated by pupils in relation to ICT capability. Consequently, as the LEA still does not have data on pupils' attainment in ICT at the end of each key stage, it is unable to provide comprehensive quantitative data to illustrate improvements in pupils' standards of attainment. In the summer term, primary schools were asked to provide the LEA with details of the attainment levels achieved by pupils in ICT at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2. This was to assist in the identification of schools for intensive support. Unsurprisingly, schools' response to this request was poor, as nationally, as well as locally, many teachers are still developing their expertise in this area. Little support has been made available to teachers to assist them in "levelling" pupils' ICT work.

81. Despite being identified as an evaluation mechanism in the LEA's post-OFSTED inspection action plan, Key Stage 3 assessment data for 1999 has not been collected from schools. As part of the bid for the Key Stage 3 ICT pilot, teacher assessment data was collected from each school in 2000. However, no detailed analysis of this data has been undertaken and, as yet, it has been used to inform neither schools' nor the LEA's targets.

82. Nevertheless, as a result of a careful paper audit of schools' ICT strengths and weaknesses based on their OFSTED reports, primary schools have been identified for intensive support, according to clear and appropriate criteria determined by officers. From last September, five primary schools per term receive five days of intensive support from the ICT curriculum support teacher. The support includes audits of resources and pupils' and teachers' ICT skills, as well as a review of progress on the school's ICT development plan. On the basis of this work, carried

out on the first day of the review, the focus for the remaining days is negotiated with the headteacher. Initial evaluations of the intensive support provided to date have been very positive. Appropriately, two terms after the provision of support, the curriculum support teacher will return to the school in order to evaluate the impact of the support and progress made.

83. Secondary schools and a very small number of primary schools have opted to have short subject reviews focusing on ICT as an element of their entitlement from the achievement division. This will be offered on a buy-back basis from April. These one-day reviews are designed to support schools in their own monitoring and evaluation procedures; several reports read following reviews provide useful advice to schools.

84. Support for ICT within the curriculum is much too thin, and is a key reason why inadequate progress has been made on the relevant recommendation. Curriculum support is provided by the ICT consultant, who spends 40 per cent of her time on New Opportunities Fund training, and a single curriculum support teacher. Single day reviews of ICT are carried out by one of the advisers with a development brief for ICT; one senior adviser has overall responsibility for the LEA's ICT strategy. Staffing overall is inadequate, particularly in the light of ICT developments within the EAZ and the setting up of two City Learning Centres as part of the EiC initiative. While the quality of New Opportunities Fund training delivered by the consortium of which the LEA is a member may be of high quality and well regarded by schools, this has placed an unnecessary burden on the ICT consultant, whose expertise is much in demand. As a result of this, inadequate progress has been made on the recommendation in the last report.

85. At the time of the last inspection, intranet and e-mail facilities had only recently been introduced and were insufficiently used. Good progress has been made in this area. Headteachers have recently, for example, been given the facility to access email from home and LEA officers regularly communicate electronically. Appropriate training has been given to both headteachers and other staff. The intranet site includes some helpful curriculum materials and many links to other useful sites which are increasingly being used by schools. In addition, the well-organised site provides access to all the LEA's statutory plans as well as guidance materials. This work is well-managed and a high number of 'hits' to the intranet site have been recorded.

86. Overall, good progress has been made on the implementation of EDP activities relating to training and the application of ICT within subject areas, the development of ICT in administrative work and in the deployment of resources.

Support for schools causing concern (subject of a recommendation)

87. At the time of the last inspection, the support provided to primary schools causing concern was judged to be satisfactory, while support to secondary and special schools was seen as more variable and insufficiently effective. Although a clear strategy had been put in place to identify such schools and to facilitate differentiated action, concern was expressed about the lack of an analysis of the cost of support and the carrying through of charging where appropriate.

88.   The LEA has taken action to address these concerns, although rather slowly with a number of changes not implemented until Autumn term 2000; some others will not be in place fully until April 2001. The LEA has continued to be successful in supporting schools to be removed from special measures, although three schools, two primary and one secondary, have been placed in special measures since the last inspection. Currently, therefore, there are three schools in special measures, eight schools with serious weaknesses and 26 schools identified as causing concern. The placing of the secondary school in special measures in February 2001 suggests that the EDP target of having no schools in special measures by March 2002 may not be achieved.

89.   A key recommendation in the report was that support to secondary schools causing concern should be reviewed and improved. This recommendation has partially been addressed through now agreed proposals that:

- group schools into one of four categories and allocate resources accordingly;
- restructure the advisory service into three geographical teams led by a senior adviser;
- target school improvement through separate primary and secondary phase teams; and
- require divisions to designate staff time to supporting schools causing concern.

90.   Although it is still early days, there is evidence to suggest that these changes have clarified respective responsibilities within the department and with schools; built upon, and tightened up, the procedures for identifying and supporting schools causing concern; speeded up the department's response to concerns; and raised the level of priority given to supporting such schools across the divisions.

91.   In addition to these whole authority policy changes, 11 secondary schools were identified in Autumn term as not having made adequate progress in terms of attainment over the last three years, and were appropriately targeted for immediate support. Headteachers and governors report that this identification was welcomed; joint action plans have been agreed and are already being implemented. Recent improvements and the quick and appropriate response to the secondary school recently placed in special measures indicate that, while it is still early days, the new procedures are operating satisfactorily.

92.   All schools are currently being consulted upon a sound plan for the provision of differentiated support to schools causing concern. Appropriately, four categories of school effectiveness have been identified and criteria to distinguish between each category have been developed.   The level of LEA staff support, mainly, but not exclusively, from the advisory service, to which schools in each category are entitled to receive, has also been specified. The criteria are satisfactory, although there is more scope for different interpretations between the two highest performing categories[5] than there is between the other, more definitively specified, categories. The differential allocation of support is appropriate. Officers recognise that schools facing very serious problems may require tailor-made support that goes beyond the

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[5] categories 1 and 2

formula. A detailed protocol has been developed to guide LEA staff, headteachers and governors in the operation of this system for providing differential support to schools. Headteachers interviewed fully accept the need for this system which is scheduled for introduction from April 2001. They are complimentary about the high quality of school self-evaluation training, for senior and middle managers, which has been provided by the LEA and taken up by all schools. They cite this as a major source of their own improving confidence in judging effectiveness in their schools.

Support for school management (Education Development Plan priority 6)

93. The last inspection reported that the LEA had made a sound start in implementing the actions in the EDP relating to improving and enhancing the quality of school leadership and management. Progress in this area has continued to be satisfactory, and a wide variety of appropriate support is available to senior and middle managers as well as to governors. Headteachers report support across the board as at least satisfactory and express confidence in the range of activities that has been provided to prepare schools effectively for school self-evaluation. Similarly positive comments are made by governors. School staff and governors, however, share common concerns about the difficulties they experience in being able to attend training. The authority is tackling this concern by offering alternative approaches to provision. Such approaches include running courses at weekends and after school as well as during schools hours; offering payment for course attendance outside school hours; providing in-house seminars; and integrating training into activities already scheduled, for example through link adviser visits.

94. National reporting of OFSTED school inspection reports suggests that leadership and management in both primary and secondary schools in Bristol are not as good as that nationally and in like authorities. The LEA's own analysis of reports since July 1998 shows an increasing identification of good management in inspections, particularly at subject leadership level in English and mathematics. Currently, there is no overall plan that brings together all aspects of the support available. The LEA has recognised this and identified in the draft EDP for 2001-2002 that a cohesive and inclusive training plan needs to be written. There is also evidence that, as part of its work to raise levels of attainment, the LEA is appropriately targeting individual school managers and governors for leadership and management training.

Support for science (Education Development Plan priority 4)

95. This EDP priority is being soundly managed. Progress in its implementation has been satisfactory in primary schools reflecting early efforts therein. However, progress has been limited at secondary level.

96. In science, standards of attainment vary widely between the primary and secondary phases. At Key Stage 1, standards are generally sound and, in some schools, they are good. Standards have improved in Key Stage 2: in 1998, 59 per cent of pupils reached level 4 or above; in 2000, the proportion had increased to 78 per cent, which is at the national average. At Key Stage 3, however, standards of attainment are well below national averages in the percentage of pupils reaching level 5 (44 per cent in 2000 in Bristol compared with 60 per cent nationally). At Key

Stage 4, only 35 per cent of the LEA's pupils reach grades A*-C in science, which is well below the national mean. The LEA has thus been right to have science as an EDP priority and to have invested considerable efforts to raise standards therein in the last three years.

97.   The LEA's procedures to improve teaching and standards in science have included the running of a wide range of training courses; curriculum development and dissemination activities; specific projects involving links with industry; the provision of intensive support in specifically underachieving schools; and in the establishment of the Key Stage 3 project which has a substantial strand of science.

98.   Evaluation by the LEA shows a rapid improvement in the attainment of pupils at Key Stage 2 in the under-performing schools selected for intensive support, based on more rigorous auditing and planning, better focus in teaching on the concepts, knowledge and vocabulary of science, and higher expectations. Results at Key Stage 2 in the first wave of identified schools show an increase in the percentage of pupils reaching level 4 from 41 to 57 per cent from 1999 to 2000. Headteachers interviewed expressed considerable satisfaction with the support received for science at primary level and confirmed the increasing focus and rigour of science teaching in their schools.

99.   Much is being planned for science developments within the Key Stage 3 project and the LEA rightly expects that these will have an uplifting effect on results at Key Stage 4. Much needs to be done to improve teaching and standards in both key stages. Headteachers acknowledge this, and indicate that LEA support for secondary science has been rather thin in recent years. However, six secondary schools were given extra LEA support for Key Stage 3 in 1999-2000 and the percentage of pupils achieving level 5 was raised by an average of 5.6 percentage points in five of the six schools. In the other school there was no improvement. In the most improved of these schools, the LEA argues that standards went up by 19 percentage points partly as a result of the shift from a scheme of work based only on pupil activities to one based on well founded science learning objectives. Overall, at Key Stages 3 and 4, much remains to be developed. However, the LEA and schools are rapidly gearing up for this as the Key Stage 3 Project begins to incorporate science as one of its major areas of development.

Support for teaching (Education Development Plan priority 5)

100.   The priority to improve and enhance the quality of teaching was rightly and quite significantly rationalised during the writing of the second and third editions of the EDP. Staff training has been subsumed into other more specific sections and this has sharpened its focus. Activities for underachieving pupils have been brought together to increase their importance to schools. Overall, on the basis of consultation with schools, the number of activities in the priority have been reduced. This was appropriate, as was the recasting of objectives to make them more precise and better able to inform action and evaluation.

101.   As part of the EDP, the LEA continues to run a good range of training and development opportunities to improve the effectiveness of teaching. These are rightly regarded by schools as authoritative and useful. For example, headteachers

reported excellent courses on monitoring classroom practice. Results have so far included an increase in the confidence indicated by some of the headteachers interviewed in their capacity to judge teaching quality and to take action where it falls short. Secondary heads of department have reportedly been similarly empowered to evaluate teaching and to deal with weak teaching with more authority than before. The LEA has worked successfully to extend the training programme by linking its EDP priorities to those relating to other initiatives. For example, it is poised to run a very substantial programme of training for subject specialists at Key Stage 3, based on the highly regarded work done so far in literacy and numeracy in the pilot schools of the Key Stage 3 project.

102. The LEA evaluates its various programmes to improve teaching. At primary level, training courses and tailor-made consultancy have, for example, been offered to schools shown by inspections to have weaknesses in the assessment of pupils' work and the use of the resulting data to improve planning. LEA evaluation has shown that teachers so involved have focused more sharply on the use of assessment in the planning of teaching and learning and that their pupils appear more motivated.

103. Overall, the LEA has considerable expertise in teaching and learning, supported by useful partnerships with consultants and with external providers, such as the two local universities. It draws well upon this expertise to provide an authoritative and broad service to local schools, which is well guided by clear targets. Progress in this EDP priority has been highly satisfactory.

Recommendations

In order to promote school improvement:

- draw up and share with schools a clear map of all activities and initiatives that impact on literacy;

- provide support to primary schools to enable standards of attainment in ICT to be recorded in line with national curriculum levels and subsequent progress recorded;

- set LEA targets for raising attainment in ICT at the end of Key Stages 2 and 3; and

- ensure adequate support is available to schools to enhance the development of ICT within the curriculum, in the light of imminent EiC developments related to City Learning Centres.

SECTION THREE

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Corporate planning (subject of a recommendation)

104.   The last inspection report criticised late decision making and, more generally, a lack of strategic leadership, resulting in an unfocused vision for the future of education in Bristol. The council had not clearly communicated its intentions for long-term planning for school improvement, the removal of surplus places in the secondary sector, and the provision for 16-19 education. A lack of openness left the council prey to perceptions that decisions were taken behind closed doors and that consultation was token.

105.   The restructuring of the council to a 'cabinet and leader' model has contributed to more transparent and quicker decision-making, although the approach to budget decisions in the current year has proved a major and significant exception. The new structure is intended to make decision-making more systematic with key decisions being passed to cabinet. There is now more open discussion at cabinet with the result that decisions have the potential to be more informed, particularly, for example, on cross-cutting issues that impact on more than one directorate. Nevertheless, little appears to have changed from the point of view of headteachers.

106.   An education forum has just been established to provide an opportunity for member representatives from each political party as well as the leader, to meet with a variety of stakeholders to discuss important issues at a formative stage of policy-making. It has only met once and it is too early to evaluate its effectiveness.

107.   There are adequate opportunities for elected members to be briefed by officers, although the quality of information provided is variable. The education representatives of all three parties acknowledged that they were well informed; for example, they attended and participated in the consultation meetings on the 'transformation of secondary education' and post-16 provision.   In addition, 'members' seminars' provide opportunities for all members to be briefed on topical issues such as the EiC initiative and city academies. However, the closure of a secondary school last year, although eventually secured, encountered procedural problems. Moreover, a recommendation from the executive member for education to close two primary schools was well supported by evidence.   However, insufficient information on the future of a unit at one of the schools and what was felt to be a curtailment of the consultation period were adduced as reasons not to accept the recommendation which was subsequently overturned by the council.

108.   Members do not ensure that they are fully aware of the educational implications of their decisions. Arrangements to facilitate the provision of objective advice from officers to members are insufficiently robust and lack transparency. The current climate does not encourage officers to offer professional challenge with confidence. This is compounded by some absence of clarity and understanding about the respective roles of officers and members. Officers were not consulted by elected members about the likely impact on education of the decision to hold a referendum. Although the council had illustrative examples of the effects of budget

cuts on education, suitable detailed contingency plans to deal with different possible outcomes, and the likely impact on standards and achievement, were not apparent.

109. Senior officers have become more strategic in their thinking since the last inspection. For example, the revised strategy for the LEA, *Achievement in Bristol*, is clear and the documentation supporting the review of secondary education is comprehensive. Nevertheless, the failure to prioritise and act swiftly, for example, by increasing provision for Key Stage 3 pupils excluded from school and to articulate effectively key priorities, indicates the need for still firmer and stronger political management and professional leadership.

110. Education's place within the corporate decision-making processes has improved since the last inspection partly as a result of the restructuring of the directorates. One of the assistant directors has responsibility for regeneration and the department is involved in recent single regeneration budget developments.

111. There has also been an improvement in planning, with the council's new corporate and Best Value Performance Plan appropriately reflecting the education priorities detailed in the EDP.

112. Throughout interviews conducted during the inspection, concerns were consistently expressed about the ability of elected members to make appropriate decisions. Headteachers expressed little confidence that the current rounds of consultation on the future of secondary education and post-16 provision would result in wise decisions being made for the good of pupils throughout Bristol.

Asset management (subject of a recommendation)

113. There is evidence of effective and good quality capital work in the city's schools tackling condition, preventative and education policy needs. However, much needs to be done to improve the slow progress on implementing the recommendation in the previous report about the need to secure a better information flow to all schools on property issues.

114. The authority has made satisfactory progress in developing its asset management plan (AMP), and for some secondary schools it has sensibly already adopted a coherent whole-site strategy to embrace condition, suitability and sufficiency issues. It has appropriately involved schools in developing its local policy statements, undertaken condition surveys of all schools and recently received reports commissioned from external consultants on both the quality and consistency of its condition assessments. This is good practice and the authority is reviewing its procedures as a result.

115. However, schools have not felt the benefits of the work undertaken on property issues since the last inspection. The Audit Commission school survey indicates that on building issues, the local authority is judged as between poor and less than satisfactory. Primary schools particularly have rated a number of areas as significantly worse since the previous inspection. Although the authority has convened a group of headteachers and school representatives to oversee AMP issues and to moderate and comment on the programming of work to tackle to the

condition backlog of £60m, the detail of its intentions have not been clearly communicated to schools. In addition, the information on condition in schools' AMPs, although extensive, is not in a form that readily assists schools in understanding their responsibilities.

116.   Given the poor building stock, the authority places appropriate priority in seeking to avoid closure by offering a reactive indemnity maintenance arrangement to its schools. At this very limited level, it has been successful. Most primary and special schools and a minority of secondary schools returned all of their delegated repairs and maintenance funding to Property Services to create a pool of £2.4m in 2000/2001. The overall scrutiny and management of the fund is undertaken by a board of representatives from schools, although there is currently no mechanism to report back to participating schools how the fund has been deployed. Schools register jobs with Property Services who then place orders for work to be undertaken by approved contractors. For some smaller jobs, however, systems in place do not routinely require schools either to authorise payments or confirm job completion and satisfaction. Although registered complaints are limited, this is a weakness in the arrangements and a missed opportunity to monitor the quality and timeliness of work undertaken. The service has, however, appropriately conducted a more general customer satisfaction survey but this has recorded more positive outcomes than the Audit Commission survey and the service is sensibly revisiting the issue.

117.   Schools' experience of the exercise of the authority's landlord and property monitoring responsibilities, including those schools not in the indemnity scheme, are uneven. Given the acknowledged poor condition of the building stock, the task is a difficult one and the demands upon limited resources extensive. The authority sees itself exercising this role through the process of updating the AMP. However, neither this function, nor the engagement with all schools in the deployment of their formula capital funding, are performed sufficiently systematically or articulated clearly enough.

Recommendations

In order to ensure greater clarity over the management of the education building stock, identify resource needs, secure value for money and track progress by the local authority and engage of schools as partners in the process:

- construct, communicate to schools, and regularly update a financial plan of how the local authority intends to meet capital requirements of the AMP over the next five years;

- ensure that schools receive full and regular information about resource deployment within the indemnity scheme, and clarify for schools the arrangements about how the local authority exercises its landlord function and arrangements for updating the AMP; and

- review the procedures for ordering, monitoring and paying for work within the indemnity scheme.

In order to improve the strategic management of the education service:

- ensure stakeholders have an opportunity to inform elected members' decision-making at all appropriate stages;

- ensure elected members are fully informed in detail of the likely impact of decisions upon the education service before they are made;

- produce a medium-term strategy for the education service that has all party support; and

- clarify the role of elected members and officers in the management and leadership of the education service and in the decision-making process.

SECTION FOUR

SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL PROVISION

Strategy (subject of a recommendation)

118.   The last inspection recorded that the LEA's strategy for special educational needs has been identified as commanding the support of most schools and reflects the Government's agenda to promote inclusion into mainstream and to improve standards for all pupils with special educational needs. This continues to be the case. Support for these pupils, whether they are attending mainstream or special schools, is a high priority for the LEA and its strategic approach to inclusion is sound. The special schools are increasingly central to current developments for including more special needs pupils into mainstream school and are themselves undergoing major changes to enhance their effectiveness. The LEA is driving this forward with suitably targeted funding, increasing opportunities for professional staff development and improved information for schools to help them to become better at analysing data on pupils' performance, especially for low achievers and those with special educational needs.

119.   As part of this development, the LEA has been able to link the work of the various special needs teams to the priorities identified in the EDP. In addition, 50 per cent of the work of some of these special needs teaching teams will be delegated to schools from April 2001. Together, the various teams provide a range of expertise that is valued by the schools and all of the current initiatives operate within a coherent framework. Any judgement on the effectiveness of these changes will need to await their implementation during the coming year.

120.   The LEA has made appropriate progress in addressing the recommendation to ensure that team action plans are precisely related to overall priorities identified in the EDP.

Statutory obligations (subject of a recommendation)

121.   At the time of the last inspection, only 43 per cent of statutory assessments were completed and statements issued within the required 18 weeks; annual reviews were sometimes late. The LEA has subsequently focused its attention on remedying this situation by reducing the timescales while maintaining or improving the quality of the statement and ensuring that the process of annually reviewing them is efficient. In addition, they have improved the arrangements for the transfer of information from primary to secondary schools.

122.   There are now half-termly meetings with the parents of children who are undergoing statutory assessments. A new IT system has been introduced and it is now possible for the casework team to monitor progress and identify problems or delays in the statementing process. Administrative staff have responsibility for their own caseload from start to finish, and all aspects of statutory assessment has been given a higher priority for all special needs teams. This combination of careful data management and increased personal attention has resulted in a much-improved position where cumulatively from April 2000 to the end of January 2001, 85.5 per

cent of statutory assessments were completed within the agreed time limits. The LEA's target for 2000/2001 is 60 per cent. Officers are optimistic that this marked improvement can be sustained. However, the speeding up of assessments has led to a rise in the number of statements in the secondary sector, which was already high as a result of the inheritance from the previous authority. There are appropriate strategies in place to reduce the number of statements in the medium term.

123. The largest difficulty remains outside of the LEA's remit, namely the delays by one of the two healthcare trusts in the completion of their contributions to the statutory assessments. The LEA provides both healthcare trusts with specific information to assist them in identifying the bottlenecks and encourages parents to keep or rearrange appointments.

124. Schools have commented favourably on these improvements, particularly, the improved quality of statements and the speedy way in which the LEA communicates to parents and schools the outcome of annual reviews.

School improvement and value for money (subject of a recommendation)

125. The LEA acknowledges that it allocates a high level of funding to all aspects of special educational needs. Since the last inspection, it has continued to make significant advances in not just costing the services but in developing some innovative mechanisms for analysing data on both the performance of individual pupils with special educational needs and on their impact on a school's overall performance. In addition, headteachers and special educational needs co-ordinators have been provided with extensive guidance on how they themselves can evaluate the outcomes of their own provision. This will become increasingly more important as more special educational needs funding is delegated to schools and as schools become increasingly less dependent on direct services from the LEA.

126. The LEA has been in the forefront nationally in the development of support and training materials for pupils with special educational needs and, in particular, for those attending special schools. Pupils in Bristol have benefited from this work which includes the development of approaches so that pupils can better access both the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies.

127. Schools consider the school based special education needs assessment (SSENA) to be valuable, not just as a means of reducing the number of statements, but as a way of sharpening up how schools record pupil progress, enabling schools themselves to plan provision over a longer period of time. It has already been possible to recycle £88,000 to earlier intervention. Some schools have had their initial worries allayed, and they see the SSENA arrangements as a positive means of reducing the numbers of statements needing to be produced and safeguarding funds to help pupils with special educational needs.

128. As part of a thorough analysis of how standards can be improved, it is appropriate that the LEA has been looking at the quality of individual education plan targets and measuring the extent of parental involvement. The inter-relationship between improved educational achievements in basic skills and the consequent

reduction in pupil misbehaviour or disaffection is a guiding principle for all of the services.

129.   The number of teachers from both mainstream and special schools, including special educational needs co-ordinators and learning support staff, who are on accredited training has risen.   Headteachers and special educational needs co-ordinators respect and value the commitment and expertise of the senior staff in the LEA.   Good use has been made of both Standards Funding and other DfEE initiatives to enhance inclusion.

130.   The LEA has made significant and innovative improvements in the way it evaluates pupils' outcomes and the way its services operate; this will contribute to the preparations for its forthcoming Best Value review.   At the same time, the carefully thought out reorganisation of the special schools has resulted in their becoming a smaller sector.   This has enabled them to play a prominent role working alongside, and in partnership with, mainstream schools to promote not only greater inclusion but improved performances for all pupils with special educational needs wherever they are located.   In the long term, this could lead to a further reduction in the number of pupils who are placed in educational and residential settings outside the city and those needing to attend Bristol special schools.

SECTION FIVE

ACCESS

The supply of school places (subject of a recommendation)

131.   At the time of the last inspection, there was a lack of clarity about the future actions that the council intended to take to reduce both the proportion of surplus places in the secondary sector and the proportion of secondary-age pupils who opt to attend independent schools or maintained schools in other LEAs. At that time, only 80 per cent of primary school pupils transferred to secondary schools within the LEA. The secondary sector was supporting 17 per cent surplus places, and in seven secondary schools more than 25 per cent of places were unfilled. In the primary sector, 15 per cent of places were unfilled.

132.   The school survey identifies planning for school places as one of only two areas in which primary and secondary schools regard the position as having deteriorated since the last inspection. The long-term prospects for managing school places has been exacerbated by the recent failure to finalise the closure of two primary schools whose rolls are projected to continue to fall, coupled with the practice not to revisit previous reviews within a five-year period. Additionally, the criterion within the school organisation plan concerning the impact of poor standards on determining action is unclear. The proportion of surplus places in the primary sector is still too high at 16.6 per cent, with 18 schools having over 25 per cent surplus places. The school organisation plan identifies 28 primary schools expected to have surplus places in excess of 25 per cent by 2005. This is a waste of valuable resources, particularly in the light of imminent budget cuts. When over-subscription at other primary schools is taken into account, the net percentage of surplus places is now 10.2 per cent.

133.   The LEA has made good progress on reducing the number of actual surplus places in secondary schools. Following the closure of two secondary schools, the overall level of surplus places is now seven per cent. However, there is a significant mismatch between supply and demand: six schools are recruiting at less than 75 per cent capacity and five schools are heavily over-subscribed. Moreover, two schools have less than 500 pupils which is below the minimum size for a secondary school detailed in the school organisation plan.

134.   Rightly, the LEA is reviewing the provision of secondary school places within the broad context of the future of secondary education in Bristol. In October 2000, the LEA began a wide-ranging consultation on the direction for secondary education in Bristol, with the aim of "transforming the nature of secondary education in Bristol once and for all". Sensibly, the planning sought to bring together several major strands of work including the:

- Excellence in Cities programme;
- Key Stage 3 pilot;
- post-16 review;
- investment strategy to radically improve the quality of secondary school buildings; and

- pattern of secondary school provision to meet the needs of the city.

135.   The end product of the review is to establish secondary provision which:

- has the confidence of parents and continue to reduce the proportion of pupils who are educated outside the city's maintained sector;
- matches demand for school places to supply;
- ensures that schools are of a viable size to ensure pupils receive a broad and balanced curriculum;
- targets the repair and maintenance programme appropriately;
- provides high quality, effective and efficient post-16 provision; and
- raises standards.

136.   The LEA has embarked on a fundamental review of secondary provision and extensive consultation. The general consultation process concludes in March 2001. It is planned for the council to agree specific proposals on secondary provision in May 2001 as the basis for further consultation. While the consultation process appears slow and drawn-out, it rightly has to reflect the outcomes of consultation on sixth form provision. The published timescales envisage the first changes being implemented in September 2002.

Sixth Form Provision

137.   Sixth form provision in Bristol is costly, and examination results are poor. Two-year sixth forms range from 19 to 267 students in size. Thirteen schools currently offer some type of sixth form provision, although only four have more than 100 students across the two years, and three offer only one-year provision. Transfer rates from Year 11 to Year 12 are low.

138.   In spring last year, the achievement division produced a report on the quality of post-16 provision of the city's schools. Sensibly, the purpose of the paper was to inform decision-making about future provision. However, it was not until the autumn term that the first phase of consultation on sixth form provision began; a report on its conclusions went to cabinet in January 2001. In the first consultation phase, the LEA proposed five possible models of provision, this has been reduced to two in the second phase. While one of these two models (four sixth form centres) is likely to secure viable student numbers, the second option (six centres) is expected to be more attractive to stakeholders, creating a tension between practicality and popularity. The council intends to implement the reorganisation from September 2002. Although the overall process has been slow, the need to engage the commitment of stakeholders and elected members is crucial to the process.

139.   In the light of the council's decision not to close two primary schools, headteachers and others engaged in education are understandably sceptical about the ability and willingness of elected members to make appropriate, timely and prudent decisions that will lead to effective secondary and sixth form provision that meets the learning needs of the city's pupils.

Attendance (subject of a recommendation)

140. At the last inspection, attendance in the LEA's secondary schools was well below the national average, and not improving sufficiently. The recommendation in the report urged implementation of the actions identified in the Education Development Plan.

141. There continues to be insufficient improvement in the attendance of pupils to secondary schools despite, appropriately, 60 per cent of education welfare service time being targeted at the secondary phase. In 1999/2000, the overall level of attendance was 88.1 per cent, a rise of 0.9 per cent on the previous year; the overall level is still well below both statistical neighbours and the national average of 91.4 per cent. Moreover, the incidence of unauthorised absence has also steadily increased in the last three years and is now the highest it has been and, at 2.2 per cent, is well above the national level. Authorised absence is also still too high, but has declined in the last year.

142. A recent District Auditor's report, which expressed concerns at the level of attendance in secondary schools, also highlighted the comparatively high level of both unauthorised and authorised absence in primary schools which have an overall attendance level below that of similar LEAs and the national rate. Four schools have attendance levels below 90 per cent but these are, rightly, receiving additional support.

143. However, adequate progress is being made on the activities identified in the EDP. All 15 activities were either underway or completed. All schools now have negotiated targets for attendance and 80 per cent of schools have attendance policies.

144. In addition, a successful pilot scheme involving the devolution of education welfare officer time to all secondary schools is likely to be extended to a number of primary schools in the north of Bristol. The devolution pilot has resulted in a much sharper focus on targeting the attendance priorities of individual schools. A service level agreement has been drawn up and referral times negotiated with headteachers. Quantitative data is being collected and attendance targets set. As data collection systems become more firmly embedded in the next few months, more rigorous target setting is anticipated. An evaluation carried out after one term indicated that the project was generally successful with 12 of the 15 headteachers' responses asserting that the devolved arrangements had produced a more effective way of working than previously. EiC learning mentors are reportedly having a positive effect on attendance, although the loss of three education welfare officers to this work had a short-term negative impact on provision.

145. Although there is still some way to go to improve attendance to an acceptable level, a range of initiatives are in place which suggest continued improvements are likely. Overall, progress on this recommendation has been adequate.

Behaviour support (subject of a recommendation)

146.   Support for behavioural problems in schools was recognised as a key priority for the authority and the work of the emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD) service seen as having a positive impact in schools. However, at the time of the last inspection, there was concern that some schools were not clear about the ways in which the service could support them and how to access it.

147.   Progress on this recommendation has been slow, primarily because schools' understanding of the workings of the service has been further confused by changes in the way the service supports schools this year and consultations surrounding the increased delegation of resources for the service from April 2001. EBD staff offered to clarify how they can work with schools through attendance at Headteachers' cluster meetings, however, headteachers did not follow up this opportunity. Efforts were made to check out understanding in individual schools through team leader visits, when other related services such as educational psychology had a presence in the school and during training sessions, for example, with governors. These activities, together with the written clarification and new referral forms finally sent to schools in November 2000, have satisfactorily met the requirements of the recommendation. The LEA report that there is evidence that there has been an increase in the referral rate for EBD service support, particularly in secondary schools.

Provision of education otherwise than at school

148.   The LEA was criticised in the last report for the limited education provision, only five hours per week, available to Key Stage 3 permanently excluded pupils. Moreover, the concern was expressed about the LEA's readiness to meet its statutory responsibilities of an offer of full-time provision to all pupils excluded from school.

149.   The support provided to Key Stage 3 pupils excluded from school remains totally unacceptable. Of the 58 pupils permanently excluded from school between November 1999 and January 2001, 47 were out of school for over twelve weeks and 29 of these for 20 weeks or more. Of these 58 pupils, only 18 received more than five hours of tuition a week. Although there has been a limited increase of hours for some Key Stage 3 pupils, in the main for particular groups of pupils such as those from minority ethnic backgrounds, the overall provision is bleak and the LEA is abdicating its responsibility for these pupils.

150.   The LEA has concentrated its efforts over the last year into trying to reduce the level of permanent exclusions in the authority and into developing proposals that will meet the requirement for LEAs to offer full-time equivalent education to pupils not in school by September 2002. The first it has tackled in a number of ways, including making key EBD specialists more widely accessible. The second is being addressed through the proposed opening of two Key Stage 3 Pupil Referral Units. In addition, there are plans to free up space for increased provision for Key Stage 3 pupils in September 2001 by moving Key Stage 4 pupils to a new work-related base. The authority has had some success in working with schools to reduce the number of exclusions and the new secondary headteacher forums are focused on speeding up

the process of placing pupils in alternative provision or in reintegrating them back into mainstream schools. However, there is still some way to go before the percentage of exclusions in Bristol is in line with the average nationally and in similar authorities.

151.   Progress on this recommendation is unsatisfactory.

Support for measures to combat racism

152.   The LEA has made an appropriate response to the relevant two recommendations arising out of the report of the inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence[6].

153.   On the first recommendation relating to the need to set up a racist incident reporting procedure, the LEA issued 'guidelines for dealing with racist abuse and harassment' in 1998. The guidelines are appropriate, and set out support processes for victims. Action against perpetrators would be taken in accordance with an individual school's behaviour policy. Sixty per cent of schools provided returns on a survey on racist incidents; of those, 60 per cent had not reported racist incidents. Follow-up work by the LEA unearthed concerns that a school might be stigmatised if it reported incidents. The LEA is addressing that concern partly through training.

154.   On the second recommendation relating to the need to engage in wider anti-racist strategies in education, the council has produced an action plan entitled 'delivering on Macpherson'. This sets out a number of targets and timescales for tackling such matters as supporting networks for black and ethnic minority staff, and improving customer service by providing training on valuing diversity. There is also an LEA-level Macpherson work programme. The LEA also works with a range of stakeholders on anti-racist strategies, such as the 'black communities education support group' on handling exclusions, and 'support against racist incidents' on training for staff to handle racial abuse and harassment in schools.

Recommendations

In order to promote inclusion:

- urgently increase the amount of educational support provided to Key Stage 3 pupils who are permanently excluded from school; and

- secure and implement proposals for the widening of provision for pupils out of school from September 2002.

In order to improve overall levels of attendance at school:

- further target resources to improve the attendance of pupils at those schools with an overall attendance level of less than 90 per cent.

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[6] Macpherson report, February 1999

In order to secure the economical and effective provision of school places and sixth form provision:

- commence the implementation of the outcomes of the consultation on sixth form provision and secondary education by the autumn term 2002;

- ensure that the forthcoming proposals on secondary education effectively tackle the mismatch of supply and demand for school places; and

- take urgent steps to tackle the large proportion of surplus places in primary schools and better match supply to demand.

APPENDIX

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order both to secure more effective and meaningful planning and budget management and control, to focus resources on agreed priorities, and inform schools better:

- ensure accurate and timely information is prepared by officers in the completion of the section 52 statement, and that this is underpinned by up-to-date comparative financial information;

- review the pattern of home to school transport, including the assessment of need for children with special educational needs, with the objective of targeting resources to greatest need and controlling costs;

- develop a more consistent and coherent approach to medium and long-term financial planning and review linked to the council's education priorities; and

- routinely involve school stakeholders at an early stage and at an appropriate strategic level, in discussions about the overall budget and strategic direction.

In order to promote school improvement:

- review secondary schools' performance targets in Autumn term 2001 to incorporate the impact of both the EiC and EAZ initiatives;

- draw up and share with schools a clear map of all activities and initiatives that impact on literacy;

- provide support to primary schools to enable standards of attainment in ICT to be recorded in line with national curriculum levels and subsequent progress recorded;

- set LEA targets for raising attainment in ICT at the end of Key Stages 2 and 3; and

- ensure adequate support is available to schools to enhance the development of ICT within the curriculum, in the light of imminent EiC developments related to City Learning Centres.

In order to ensure greater clarity over the management of the education building stock, identify resource needs, secure value for money and track progress by the local authority and engage of schools as partners in the process:

- construct, communicate to schools, and regularly update a financial plan of how the local authority intends to meet capital requirements of the AMP over the next five years;

- ensure that schools receive full and regular information about resource deployment within the indemnity scheme, and clarify for schools the arrangements about how the local authority exercises its landlord function and arrangements for updating the AMP; and

- review the procedures for ordering, monitoring and paying for work within the indemnity scheme.

In order to improve the strategic management of the education service:

- ensure stakeholders have an opportunity to inform elected members' decision-making at all appropriate stages;

- ensure elected members are fully informed in detail of the likely impact of decisions upon the education service before they are made;

- produce a medium-term strategy for the education service that has all party support; and

- clarify the role of elected members and officers in the management and leadership of the education service and in the decision-making process.

In order to promote inclusion:

- urgently increase the amount of educational support provided to Key Stage 3 pupils who are permanently excluded from school; and

- secure and implement proposals for the widening of provision for pupils out of school from September 2002.

In order to improve overall levels of attendance at school:

- further target resources to improve the attendance of pupils at those schools with an overall attendance level of less than 90 per cent.

In order to secure the economical and effective provision of school places and sixth form provision:

- commence the implementation of the outcomes of the consultation on sixth form provision and secondary education by the autumn term 2002;

- ensure that the forthcoming proposals on secondary education effectively tackle the mismatch of supply and demand for school places; and

- take urgent steps to tackle the large proportion of surplus places in primary schools and better match supply to demand.