

**Inspection report**  
**BRENT**  
**Local Education Authority**

Date of inspection: January 2003

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Reference:

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**Basic information**

Name of LEA: Brent Local Education Authority

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9 Park Lane  
Wembley  
MIDDLESEX HA9 7RW

Lead inspector: Malcolm Wall

Date of inspection: January 2003



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## Introduction

1. This inspection of Brent local education authority (LEA) was carried out by Ofsted in conjunction with the Audit Commission under section 38 of the Education Act 1997. The inspection used the Framework for the Inspection of Local Education Authorities (December 2001). The inspection focused on the effectiveness of the LEA's work to support school improvement. The inspection also took account of the Local Government Act 1999, insofar as it relates to work undertaken by the LEA on Best Value.

2. The inspection was based on a range of material, which included self-evaluation undertaken by the LEA, and data, some of which was provided by the LEA. That material also included school inspection information; HMI monitoring reports; audit reports; documentation from, and discussions with, LEA officers and members; focus groups of headteachers and governors; staff in other departments of the local authority; and diocesan representatives. Other agencies and LEA partners submitted written evidence of participation and joint working and participated in focus groups. In addition, the inspection team considered the earlier Ofsted/Audit Commission report on this LEA (published in January 1999). A questionnaire, seeking views on aspects of the work of the LEA, was circulated to all schools, and its results were considered by the inspection team. The response rate to the questionnaire was 57 per cent.

3. For each inspected function of the LEA, an inspection team makes a judgement which is converted into a numerical grade. An inspection team may make up to 52 key inspection judgements. An inspection judgement is made against criteria for each inspected function of the LEA. These criteria, (and the guidance notes on functions of an LEA that may be inspected by Ofsted), can be found on the Ofsted website. The numerical grades awarded for the judgements made in this inspection are appended to this report, along with short explanations of what each numeric grade represents. Judgements on inspected functions of an LEA are made during the inspection of the LEA and indicate the effectiveness of the LEA's performance of individual functions at the time of the inspection. The numeric grades awarded by the inspection team complement the areas of the report which comment on the individual functions scrutinised on this inspection, and, as such, must be considered in the light of those comments.

4. Some of the grades are used in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) profile for the education service. It is intended that the CPA for education will be updated annually so that the grades from this inspection will contribute to the next annual assessment.

5. The CPA for the education service takes account of the performance of several aspects of the local service, including pre-school and adult education. The CPA for education is composed of a number of inspection judgements, as well as other performance indicators, such as improvement trends at Key Stage 3. The assessment, published in December 2002, gives star ratings for each local authority for a range of local services, for example social services, benefits, environment etc, whereas this report focuses on the local authority's work to support school improvement."

6. The inspection also involved studies of particular aspects of the LEA's work through

visits to three primary schools and three secondary schools. Those visits tested the views of governors, headteachers and other staff on key aspects of the LEA's strategy. The visits also considered whether the support that is provided by the LEA contributes, where appropriate, to the discharge of the LEA's statutory duties, and is effective in contributing to improvements in the school and provides value for money



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## Commentary

7. Brent is an outer London borough but faces many of the same challenges as those in inner London, with high levels of deprivation in five wards in the south. In contrast, the north and some parts of the south of the borough are distinctly suburban with higher standards of living. The population of the borough is the second most ethnically diverse in the country, 53 per cent are from minority ethnic communities. Seventy three per cent of pupils attending schools in Brent are from minority ethnic backgrounds. Approximately 130 languages are spoken in the schools and over half of all pupils have English as an additional language. Levels of pupil mobility are high and a growing proportion of pupils, 8.3 per cent, are from refugee or asylum seeking families.

8. Since the previous inspection, the attainment of pupils in the primary sector has steadily improved and attainment at Key Stage 2 is in line with the national average and that of similar authorities. At Key Stage 3 the attainment of pupils dips significantly although it remains in line with that of similar authorities; by the end of Key Stage 4 it is broadly in line with the national average. The progress of vulnerable groups of pupils is improving. However, boys of African and Caribbean heritage and looked after children underachieve.

9. In the previous inspection, held in the autumn of 1998, Brent was found to provide effective support to primary and special schools. It identified that the LEA faced a significant challenge in developing the capacity to support secondary schools effectively.

10. Since the previous inspection, expectations about the performance of the LEA and the range of services provided have increased. In this context, Brent has made highly satisfactory progress in improving the quality of service it provides to schools and in carrying out the recommendations of the previous inspection. The partnership with secondary schools, the majority of which now have foundation status, is highly satisfactory. Examples of effective partnership work are the Excellence in Cities initiative and the 14 – 19 Forum. Relationships with primary and secondary schools are good. Most functions are now performed to a satisfactory or good standard. The areas of weakness stem from the council's underfunding of education, and particularly the effect this has had on some central services that have the potential to be more effective, but they cannot be unless they are better funded. Examples include the support for attendance, asset management, and support for governors.

### *Strengths*

There are particular strengths in:

- the definition of monitoring, challenge and intervention;
- the identification of and intervention in under-performing schools;
- financial services;
- assuring the supply and quality of teachers;
- the deployment of staff, the performance management and value for money of services to support school improvement;
- provision for looked after children;

- 
- the quality of leadership of senior officers; and
  - the quality of advice given to elected members.

The previous inspection identified services with particular strengths. No fieldwork was carried out on these services in the current inspection but the evidence from the LEA's self-evaluation and other indicators confirm they remain as strengths:

- support for raising standards in literacy and numeracy;
- the provision of school places; and
- admissions.

### *Weaknesses*

The following weaknesses remain:

- targeting of resources to priorities by the council;
- support for early years education;
- support for human resources (personnel); and
- provision for pupils who have no school place.

11. The leader of the council has a clear vision for education and leading members have stated that education is the council's highest priority. However, the council continues to spend well below the education Standard Spending Assessment. The present council inherited a significant financial cost from the decision to grant premature retirement to staff in the late 1980's and early 1990's. This remains a burden on the education budget. In addition, recent decisions by the council not to pass on funding, in line with the government's assessment for education spending, has placed strain on the budgets of schools, in particular primary schools, and some central services.

12. The leadership of members is satisfactory although the scrutiny of education is weak. The leadership provided by senior officers is good. The newly appointed director of education, together with other senior officers, has sharpened the focus on school improvement. In addition, there is a strong commitment to raising the achievement of all pupils and an emphasis on support for social inclusion and community cohesion. Performance management is well developed and is supporting the improvement process.

13. The LEA's performance in fulfilling its statutory duties and working to improve schools is highly satisfactory. It has improved those services that were unsatisfactory in the previous inspection. The all round highly satisfactory performance of the education service is reflected in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment for education, published in December 2002. This assessment gave the education service two stars for current performance and three stars (the highest category) for its capacity to make further improvement. The inspection team is confident that, providing the commitment by the council to improve substantially the funding for education is sustained, the LEA has highly satisfactory capacity to act on the recommendations made in this report and to continue to improve its effectiveness.

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## Section 1: The LEA's strategy for school improvement

### Context

14. Brent LEA serves a very diverse socio-economic and cultural community; it has the second highest proportion of minority ethnic residents of all councils in the country. The contrast between the distinctly suburban north of the borough and the high levels of disadvantage in five wards in the south is stark.

15. In 2000, the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions' index of multiple deprivation ranked Brent as the 68<sup>th</sup> most deprived district ( the 354<sup>th</sup> being the least deprived ) in the country. Across the borough, unemployment is 6.5 per cent, which is well above the national average of 3.1 per cent. Moreover, in five wards in the south of the borough unemployment is double the borough average. Youth unemployment is high, at over nine per cent of under 20 year-olds, rising to over 30 per cent in the most disadvantaged wards.

16. Since 1998, the number of pupils has risen from about 37,000 to 38,000, and includes a growing number, about 8.3 per cent, of refugees and asylum seekers. In some secondary schools, the proportion of pupils from families with refugee status is as high as 40 per cent. There is also a very high level of mobility of pupils in many schools, averaging 24 per cent in primary schools and 10.5 per cent in the secondary phase. Over a half of all primary schools, and nearly a third of secondary schools, have pupil mobility rates of above 20 per cent. Pupils from a wide range of minority ethnic groups represent 73 per cent of the school population and about 55 per cent of all pupils have English as an additional language.

17. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is above the national average at 26.8 and 24.5 per cent, respectively, for primary and secondary schools. The proportion of pupils with statements of special educational needs is in line with the national average for primary-aged pupils and below for pupils of secondary age. The percentage of pupils with statements in mainstream schools is in line with national figures for primary and below for secondary age pupils. The participation rate for 16 year-olds continuing in full-time education and training has risen significantly between 1997 and 2002 to 84.8 per cent, which is well above the national average.

18. The borough currently maintains 60 primary schools; 13 secondary schools; five special schools; four nursery schools and two pupil referral units. The Jews Free School relocated to new premises in the borough in September 2002 and will become a Brent LEA maintained school from April 2003. The need for additional secondary school places is being met by the enlargement of one school and the establishment of a City Academy in September 2003, following the closure of Willesden High School. At the time of the inspection there were nine Beacon schools, and six secondary schools had specialist status.

### Performance

19. Since the previous inspection, pupils' attainment has steadily improved. In general the performance of schools continues to be broadly in line with national averages, except

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at Key Stage 3 where attainment remains below national figures but in line with statistical neighbours<sup>1</sup>. The progress of pupils between Key Stages 1 and 2 is broadly in line with the average rate. Between Key Stages 2 and 3 however, the rate of progress dips and is well below the rate found nationally. This trend is reversed between Key Stages 3 and 4 where pupils make above average progress.

20. Data<sup>2</sup> for 2002 indicate that attainment in all core subjects is in line with national figures for Key Stages 1 and 2 but below average at Key Stage 3. Performance at GCSE is in line with national averages on most measures but the average points score is below average. Based upon 2001 data, the performance of students in advanced GCE (General Certificate of Education) is below the national performance. Performance at VCE (Vocational Certificate of Education) and intermediate level GNVQ (General National Vocational Qualification) is in line with the national figures.

21. Data from inspections of schools by Ofsted indicate that the percentage of pupils entering primary schools with poor levels of attainment is well above national figures. At Key Stages 1 and 2 the rates of improvement in pupils' attainment between 1998 and 2001 have been broadly in line with the national trend. The rate of improvement at Key Stage 3 in mathematics is above the national trend. However, the rate of improvement in English and science is below the national figures. At Key Stage 4 the rate of improvement for pupils achieving one or more A\* to G grades at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) is above the national trend. However, it is below for pupils achieving five or more A\* to C grades and the average points score.

22. The performance of looked after children in 2001 was below the national average. Only 41 per cent of young people leaving care achieved one or more A\* to G grades at GCSE and only 5.9 per cent achieved five or more A\* to C grades. This compares with the national figures of 52.2 and 7.14 per cent respectively.

23. The findings for schools that have had two Ofsted inspections indicate the number of primary and secondary schools requiring some improvement has reduced at a greater rate than similar authorities and the national figure. The proportion of good primary schools and very good secondary schools has improved at a greater rate than that of similar authorities and national figures. Currently, two schools require special measures, one has serious weaknesses and two schools are in challenging circumstances.

24. Attendance in secondary schools is above the national figure; it is slightly below in primary schools. Unauthorised absence in 2001, for primary and secondary schools is in line with the national figure. In 2001, the permanent exclusion rate from primary schools was in line with the national figure but it was above the national average in secondary schools.

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<sup>1</sup> Brent's statistical neighbours are Ealing, Hounslow, Waltham Forest, Haringey, Lewisham, Wandsworth, Redbridge, Hammersmith and Fulham, Croydon and Enfield.

<sup>2</sup> 2002 National Curriculum results are as yet unvalidated

## Funding

25. At the time of the previous inspection, the council's education spending was 3.3 per cent below its Standard Spending Assessment and capital expenditure was lower than average. Although the level of delegation to schools was higher than the national average, the amount of funding received by schools was lower than that for schools in similar authorities.

26. Brent's education Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) for 2002/03, the amount the government considers should be spent on the service, remains high, over 20 per cent more than the average for England. However, the council's actual expenditure on the education service has fallen steadily since 1998 and it is now 7.1 per cent below the education SSA. See below:-

<b>Financial Year</b>	<b>SSA for Education £m</b>	<b>Net expenditure on education £m</b>	<b>Expenditure as % of SSA</b>
1999/2000	123.1	119.9	97.4
2000/01	129.5	123.7	95.5
2001/02	135.2	126.8	93.8
2002/03	133.4	123.9	92.9

*Data source: LEA Form 2*

27. Brent's education service and its primary schools are underfunded compared with its statistical neighbours, with whom it shares similar levels of educational need. In 2002/03, the council's budget for all expenditure is 3.2 per cent above the SSA. Planned spending for other services against SSA is 99.7 per cent for personal social services, although the actual spend will be much higher; 129.1 per cent for highways; 136.0 per cent for capital financing; and 101 per cent on other expenditure.

28. Brent's level of delegation to schools is no longer above the national average. In 2002/03 it delegated 85.6 per cent of the local schools budget (LSB) to schools, compared with an average 85.7 per cent for statistical neighbours, and an average of 85.8 per cent for outer London and for England.

29. The individual school budget (ISB) for secondary education is higher in comparison to other outer London and English authorities, largely because eleven secondary schools trigger funding protection as a result of their former grant maintained status. See below:-

	<b>LEA £ per pupil</b>	<b>Statistical Neighbours £ per pupil</b>	<b>Outer London authorities £ per pupil</b>	<b>England £ per pupil</b>
<b>Primary individual schools budget (ISB)</b>	2450	2577	2395	2223
<b>Secondary ISB</b>	3371	3275	3183	2940

*Data source: CIPFA Section 52 data2002/3.*

30. Although Brent's gross expenditure on capital building projects per pupil in 2002/03 is comparatively very low, this contrasts with 2001/02 when it was high. The figures per pupil, compared with 2001/02 are: Brent £165 (£339<sup>3</sup>); statistical neighbours £369 (£213); outer London authorities £270 (£224), and for England £311 (£249)

31. Spending on school improvement has benefited from Neighbourhood Renewal Funding of £460,000 between 2001 and 2003.

32. Centrally retained expenditure is below the average for similar authorities and outer London boroughs, with the exception of the much higher and continuing costs for premature retirement. The figure for expenditure on strategic management is inflated by the high cost of premature retirement arising from decisions made some years ago. This is currently £75 per pupil, or 14.6 per cent of the total of centrally retained expenditure, as opposed to an average of £14 per pupil for statistical neighbours (2.7 per cent of their total), £21 Outer London (4.3 per cent) and £25 England (5.5 per cent). In all other respects, expenditure on central services is generally low, as exemplified by services such as asset management, admissions and education welfare. See below:-

	<b>Brent LEA £ per pupil</b>	<b>Statistical neighbours £ per pupil</b>	<b>Outer London authorities £ per pupil</b>	<b>England £ per pupil</b>
<b>Strategic management</b>	142	103	99	101
<b>School improvement</b>	29	43	37	31
<b>Access</b>	130	149	125	131
<b>SEN</b>	182	202	196	160
<b>Total</b>	483	497	457	423

*Data source: CIPFA Section 52 data2002/3.*

<sup>3</sup> The figures in brackets refer to expenditure per pupil in 2001/02

33. Brent's total spending on special education, including the centrally retained LEA budget and the designated special needs funding delegated to schools, is 17.1 per cent in 2002/03. This is less than the average for statistical neighbours and outer London at 18.0 and 17.4 per cent respectively, but higher than the 15.7 per cent figure for England.

### **Council structure**

34. In May 2002, following local elections, the council remained Labour-controlled and a new constitution was adopted, with a structure comprising a leader and executive, and scrutiny and overview committees. The council has 35 Labour, 19 Conservative and nine Liberal Democrat members.

35. Education, arts and libraries is one of ten portfolios held by the Labour members of the executive. The council has appointed one overview committee and one scrutiny committee to support its work and that of the executive. The overview committee supports the executive in the development and review of policy, particularly for strategic and cross cutting issues. The scrutiny committee examines the decisions of the executive and reviews the performance of decision-makers and service providers.

36. The council has established a number of consultative forums for residents and businesses to discuss and raise issues in their locality and respond to consultation initiatives. Issues arising from their deliberations inform the council's decision making process.

37. The education, arts and libraries directorate is one of five service areas in the council. The director has three assistants, each responsible for a functional area: planning, information and resources; lifelong learning and cultural services; and achievement and inclusion. This revised management structure was put in place in November 2002.

### **The LEA's strategy for school improvement**

38. The strategy for school improvement is satisfactory, and progress on implementing it is satisfactory with some good features. The previous inspection found the first Education Development Plan to be clear with an appropriate audit of need, priorities and targets for action. At that time it was too early to assess the implementation of the plan. However, regular reports to members over the lifetime of the Education Development Plan, and the LEA's self-evaluation, indicate that progress in implementing it was highly satisfactory. Literacy and numeracy results at Key Stages 1 and 2 are in line with performance nationally, although test results for English and mathematics at Key Stage 3 are below the national average. There has been improved support for pupils at risk of exclusion, looked after children and disaffected pupils in secondary schools. The proportion of schools identified as requiring special measures or having serious weaknesses has been significantly reduced and is now below the national average.

39. The strategy for school improvement, articulated in the second Education Development Plan, builds effectively on the priorities and achievements of the first Education Development Plan. The strategy is fully reflected in the directorate's strategic and

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operational service plans, and in the priorities of the Excellence in Cities plan, the central Brent partnership Education Action Zone plan and the Strategic Corporate plan 2002-2006. The coherence of planning provides a sound basis for future development with the clear focus on improving the attainment of pupils in the borough.

40. The structure of the second Education Development Plan is sound. Priorities are appropriately derived from the evaluation of the implementation of the original Education Development Plan, the audit of need and a useful analysis of strengths and weaknesses. The plan covers all the national priorities and two further priorities that reflect local need: the improved collection and analysis of data concerning individual pupils; and measures to enhance the recruitment and retention of staff. Activities related to schools causing concern, challenging schools and monitoring their performance are clearly set out, as are individual responsibilities for each priority. Education Development Plan priorities are well represented in service plans and resources are specifically identified for each activity. However, the plan pays insufficient attention to issues concerning transition from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3, which are particularly important as there is a significant dip in the attainment of pupils at Key Stage 3, although this is explained in part by the significant change in the pupil cohort at the point of transfer to secondary schools in Brent. Some actions in the plan remain too broad with imprecise success criteria and time-scales for implementation, and too few precise local targets to evaluate progress.

41. The targets in the plan for 2004 are challenging and require a rapid rate of improvement. The process for agreeing the schools' aggregated targets for 2003 has been good. The LEA has sensibly developed a good analysis of the effect of including the Jews Free School pupils in the calculation of the targets for 2003 and 2004. This indicates that the targets for mathematics at Key Stage 2, mathematics and science at Key Stage 3, and 5 or more A\*-C grades at Key Stage 4 are likely to be achieved. In the case of attainment in English at Key Stages 2 and 3, where the gap is significantly below at four per cent for each key stage, the target for 2003 is unlikely to be achieved, given the current rates of improvement. The very challenging targets set for the LEA and schools for 2004 at Key Stages 2 and 3 are unlikely to be realised.

42. Progress in implementing the strategy for school improvement is highly satisfactory. The LEA's evaluation demonstrates that the implementation of the original Education Development Plan was highly satisfactory. The areas where too little progress was made were identified as improving the achievement of specific minority ethnic groups and the performance of boys, particularly, reducing the very wide gap between the attainment of girls and boys at GCSE. However, the second Education Development Plan includes a determined response by the LEA to make further progress, by making a key priority the improvement of the achievement of specific groups of pupils.

43. The school survey rated the quality of the LEA's planning for school improvement, and the relevance of the LEA's priorities, as highly satisfactory. Since the previous inspection, the LEA has made satisfactory progress in the development of its strategy, and very sound progress in its implementation. Its capacity for further improvement is highly satisfactory.



### **The allocation of resources to priorities**

44. The allocation of resources to priorities is unsatisfactory, although there are good aspects within the education directorate. The council has not met the DfES targets for passing on education funding to schools or its own target that primary school funding should be above the London average. Despite education being stated as a key priority for the council, the comparative financial resources made available have declined significantly since the last inspection.

45. At the time of the previous inspection, despite the background of financial constraints, the education directorate's procedures for allocating resources to priorities were good. There were some schools with high balances and others with significant deficits, leading to a recommendation to improve the quality of support for financial management in schools. This is now satisfactory.

46. The council's medium term financial strategy is supported by an efficient planning procedure. The corporate process for setting the council budget allows for a thorough appraisal of spending issues. The council has had to face particular spending pressures in social services and its ability to meet and finance strategic priorities is limited by its having minimal funding balances. The council's corporate strategy places the highest priority on provision and support for children and young people. However, in each of the last three years the DfES target for passing on education funding to schools has not been met. At the time of the inspection, the council had agreed, as a minimum, to pass on to education the 13.5 per cent increase in schools funding for 2003/04. A key commitment in the previous corporate strategy was that primary school funding should be above the London average. This target was achieved until 2000/01, but spending in Brent fell below by one per cent in 2001/02 and it is 6.7 per cent below in 2002/03. The overall allocation of funding has not been matched sufficiently well to the council's stated priority for education, as a result the education service, and in particular primary education, is underfunded.

#### ***Recommendation***

##### **In order to improve the allocation of resources to priorities:**

- re-assess the adequacy of education funding, particularly that delegated to schools, in the context of the council's priority for children and young people.

47. The total cost of centrally retained education services, with the exception of the expenditure for premature retirement, is low and corporate charges offer value for money. Budget control of central education spending is very effective, following the thorough procedures set by the corporate framework. Consultation and co-operation with schools on budget issues are timely and transparent. The introduction of a new, much simplified, scheme for formula funding of mainstream schools provides a clearer educational rationale for school finances and has produced some additional and well targeted funding for special educational needs. However, a re-evaluation of special school and special unit funding has been delayed for too long.

48. At the end of 2001/2 secondary schools had a deficit of 0.9 per cent whereas primary schools showed surplus balances of 6.3 per cent, and special schools 4.2 per cent. Where

there are surpluses, for the most part, schools have the money earmarked for specific purposes, whether revenue or capital. However, there remain some very high deficits or surpluses at individual schools. The LEA has improved its measures for budgetary control, and provides useful financial benchmarking information. However, the time scales in the recovery plans for some schools with high deficits are too long and the monitoring procedures for schools with balances over 5 per cent are not always effective. Satisfactory plans are now in place to deal with these issues.

49. In 2002/3 external grants to support educational services totalled over £38m for revenue and over £10m for capital expenditure. Many of these grants are based on a formula and allocated to local authorities. The education service is playing an increasing part in the borough's regeneration strategy and the share of external funding flowing to education projects is expected to increase.

### **Structures to ensure continuous improvement, including Best Value**

50. Arrangements to promote continuous improvement within the education directorate were not inspected in 1998. They are satisfactory. The current Best Value Performance Plan was produced in accordance with all statutory requirements. The conduct of Best Value reviews has shown consistent improvement in recent years. A clearer brief is now provided for the review team for the organisation of a Best Value review, and an increased emphasis on the production of rigorous and costed improvement plans.

51. The review programme for education is broadly satisfactory, although the early years partnership review, scheduled for 2004/05, comes too late in the programme, in view of the weaknesses in the work of the partnership identified by this inspection. The pilot Best Value review of aspects of special needs proved of little value and a further review of special needs provision, currently being organised, has been subject to too much delay. By contrast the other completed education Best Value reviews, for transport; planning, information and resources; excluded pupils; and the education welfare service, have all had a positive effect and have led to a series of planned improvements to the services, while not necessitating any radical overhaul.

#### *Recommendation*

#### **In order to ensure continuous improvement:**

- bring forward the planned date of the early years partnership Best Value review.

52. The council has been operating a corporate and performance appraisal system for two years. The organisation of this within the education directorate is a particular strength, linking effectively with arrangements for service planning. Education service plans are thorough, sufficiently challenging and well linked to each other and to education and corporate objectives. There is sufficient emphasis on financial data within the service plans, particularly that for the education directorate as a whole.

53. Education, arts and libraries was the first directorate within the council to achieve full Investors in People accreditation. Though there remains room for development, there is

now a strong culture for continuous improvement, which includes Best Value reviews.

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## Section 2: Support for school improvement

### Summary

54. The LEA's support for school improvement is highly satisfactory. Most functions are carried out well and the core services for school improvement offer good value for money. The directorate places an appropriate emphasis on improving schools, raising pupils' achievement and increasing the level of inclusion of all pupils. Schools understand and value the LEA's responsibility to monitor, challenge and intervene. The relationship is well developed, based on trust and a partnership of equals.

55. In addition to the school improvement service itself, the majority of other services in the directorate also focus well on school improvement. The teacher recruitment and finance services provide effective and valued support to schools. There is, however, a significant weakness in the support schools receive for the management of human resources.

### Monitoring, challenge and intervention

56. The LEA has defined monitoring, challenge and intervention well. It has consulted schools fully and involved them in the development of its procedures, which are clearly articulated. The LEA's responsibility to monitor and challenge all schools, and to intervene where necessary, is understood clearly by schools. Each school is aware of the category of performance into which it has been placed by the LEA, and of the consequent level of attention it will receive in order to help it to improve.

57. There is a strong drive to raise standards and challenge is evident in most schools, particularly those in the primary phase and in categories of concern. It is provided chiefly through the work of the link school improvement advisers. Intervention, and the criteria for it, are defined clearly in the LEA's policy on schools causing concern, which has been developed in consultation with schools. In principle, the frequent monitoring visits by the school improvement service to all Brent schools, including successful ones, could hinder their progress towards autonomy and self-improvement. However, in practice, this is not the case as school self-evaluation is a strong feature of the LEA's monitoring process and many schools are well versed in self-improvement strategies, for example through involvement in Excellence in Cities and the specialist schools movement.

### The extent to which the LEA's support to schools is focused on areas of greatest need

58. This is a highly satisfactory aspect of the LEA's school improvement work. The LEA knows the schools very well. It uses this knowledge and a range of performance data effectively to identify schools that need support, and to target its resources accordingly.

59. The LEA's policy on support for school improvement fulfils a recommendation of the previous report in distinguishing between support that is available to schools as an entitlement and that which they may purchase if they choose to do so. The schools understand the rationale. The previous inspection report commented that the high level of delegation of available funds enabled the schools to make their own decisions about

providers from which to buy support. Schools continue to use their own resources to purchase support as they wish.

60. Support is now differentiated and deployed according to clear criteria, related closely to individual schools' needs. Those in most need are supported well in both amount and quality. However, the core allocation of link school improvement adviser visits is too high for those schools whose performance gives no cause for concern. The school improvement service has reduced the annual number of such visits from six, at the time of the previous inspection, to four, and its policy is to maintain this level of provision, subject to annual review. Reasons given include: the high proportion of schools in challenging circumstances; the volatility in pupil rolls and staffing complements that many schools face; the importance of sharing good practice; and the need to strengthen relationships with schools that formerly had grant maintained status. There is merit in this case and most headteachers support the pattern of visits. Although the LEA acknowledges that successful schools are responsible for their own improvement and do not need such close attention from link advisers, sufficient progress to further differentiate the need for these core visits has not been made.

#### *Recommendation*

#### **In order to improve the targeting of support:**

- further differentiate the allocation of core visits by the link school improvement adviser so that successful schools do not receive more than they need.

#### **The effectiveness of the LEA's work in monitoring and challenging schools**

61. The effectiveness of the LEA's work in monitoring and challenging schools is highly satisfactory.

62. Monitoring is carefully planned and provides the LEA with secure knowledge of schools' strengths and weaknesses. With the exception of the standard allocation of core visits to all schools, it is suitably differentiated. Data and other relevant information are used effectively to target support on the schools that most need it. The LEA has provided strong support to schools for the development of reliable systems of self-evaluation, which are used in the monitoring process and linked to school improvement planning.

63. The LEA's strategy stresses the link between monitoring, challenge and support. Monitoring and challenge are increasingly effective, particularly through the work of the link school improvement advisers and the annual review of standards in all schools. The need for the LEA to intervene in schools is reducing and the proportions of schools in special measures and with serious weaknesses have fallen significantly. Schools are given good advice about sources of support for the needs identified by monitoring and challenge. However, these are largely confined to quality-assured sources within the local area and the LEA does not undertake a wider brokering role. Following each monitoring visit, the adviser and headteacher agree a brief written record of topics discussed and actions agreed but such records lack an evaluation of strengths and weaknesses that could strengthen the LEA's knowledge and the school's development.

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**Recommendation****In order to improve the effectiveness of monitoring and challenge:**

- make written records of monitoring visits more evaluative.

64. The LEA issues performance data that supplement those provided nationally. These are found useful by schools. Sensibly, the LEA has strengthened its staffing, which will allow further improvements including the establishment of a central pupil database, the incorporation of better value-added information, and the tracking of the performance of different groups of pupils across the LEA.

65. Headteachers and other school staff receive helpful training in the interpretation and use of data, as required. However, the provision for governors does not fully meet their needs. Link school improvement advisers are well prepared to use performance data in their autumn visits and are successful in helping schools to set robust, challenging and realistic targets. There is little discrepancy between the schools' aggregate targets and those of the LEA. Although, the LEA does not have complete access to data on the performance of individual pupils, satisfactory plans are in place to further strengthen its target setting by obtaining this data, as it becomes available.

66. The electronic transfer of data between the LEA and schools is not yet well developed. This service is, however, provided for individual schools that request it. Schools report that the transmission of data between the primary and secondary phases has improved recently and it is now satisfactory.

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

67. The effectiveness of the LEA's work with under-performing schools has improved from its satisfactory level at the time of the previous inspection and is now good. Fewer schools are now being identified by Ofsted inspections as requiring special measures or having serious weaknesses than is the case nationally.

68. In response to one of the recommendations in the previous report, a thorough policy on schools causing concern was written in consultation with headteachers and is well understood. Effective monitoring gives sufficient priority to early identification of schools needing intervention. All schools are placed in one of four distinct categories and these are well understood by schools.

69. Schools in categories 3 and 4 receive well-planned, co-ordinated and differentiated support according to their particular needs. Cases of difficulties not being tackled promptly and decisively are now rare. Headteachers and governors of schools in special measures or with serious weaknesses report strong and effective intervention to tackle identified weaknesses. Regular meetings of a strategy group, in which the headteacher and governing body chair are joined by officers and representatives of relevant services, are found to be particularly helpful. The progress of such schools is monitored frequently and helpful reports are made regularly to the headteacher and governing body. The LEA has not yet found it necessary to remove a school's delegated budget but it has not hesitated to use other powers to intervene, where necessary. For example, additional governors are appointed to

strengthen governing bodies and headteachers are replaced where the capacity to sustain improvements is in doubt. Effective use is made, for example through secondments, of successful senior managers of Brent schools to support and improve the management of schools in difficulties.

70. The progress of schools causing concern is reviewed regularly by senior managers of the LEA and by the portfolio holder for education. An annual report is made to members. When schools come out of category 4, the LEA agrees with them suitable exit strategies that aid their transition. The LEA now ensures that the support given to schools requiring special measures or with serious weaknesses is such that their weaknesses are remedied in a timely way.

### **Support for literacy**

71. The support for literacy was good at the time of the previous inspection. No fieldwork was carried out in the current inspection but the evidence from the LEA's self-evaluation and from the primary schools confirms that the quality of provision has been maintained.

### **Support for numeracy**

72. At the time of the previous inspection, the LEA's support for raising standards in numeracy was good. The LEA's self-evaluation confirms that the quality of support has been maintained. No fieldwork was carried out and the current inspection did not reveal any evidence to invalidate this judgement.

### **Support for information and communication technology (ICT)**

73. As at the time of the previous inspection, the support for ICT in the curriculum is satisfactory with strengths outweighing weaknesses. A new structure of support is in operation, and this has suffered from pressures on staffing and management but these problems have been resolved recently and the quality of support is improving.

74. The LEA's strategy for 2000/03 is being updated to take account of current initiatives, such as the two city learning centres. The strategy promotes the use of ICT across the curriculum and focuses on raising attainment, chiefly through New Opportunities Fund (NOF) training. However, in practice, there is insufficient emphasis on raising attainment and, other than the analysis of Section 10 inspection reports, there are no central systems to collate or analyse the standards and progress achieved by pupils. Monitoring and evaluation are under-developed.

### ***Recommendation***

#### **In order to improve the support for information and communication technology:**

- devise and implement effective systems of monitoring and evaluation in order to have accurate knowledge of schools' progress and the levels of pupils' attainment in ICT.

75. The ICT curriculum adviser is supported by a number of primary and secondary teachers who give advice to schools. This is particularly appreciated in the primary phase. The work in secondary schools has been strengthened by the appointment of a Key Stage 3 strategy consultant for ICT. The curriculum adviser is now managed by a school improvement adviser with recent experience of headship and the responsibility to support schools' strategic development of ICT.

76. Implementation of the LEA's strategy by schools is variable, particularly in the use of ICT across the curriculum. Schools that need additional support in this respect have been identified and it is a focus of the Key Stage 3 Strategy. Currently, the LEA sets targets to raise standards only at Key Stage 3, but an interim target has been established for Key Stage 2 and work has begun to convince all schools of the value of implementing this. A small number of primary schools already set key stage targets for attainment in ICT. The authority has provided school co-ordinators with good support for judging the levels of pupils' attainment. It has also issued helpful examples of schemes of work and of assessment and recording schemes for ICT. Schools have responded positively to an exemplar development plan and all but a very small number have now submitted plans to the LEA.

77. The schools cooperated in agreeing a fair distribution of National Grid for Learning funds. Those schools that have met national targets for pupil-computer ratios have, additionally, spent some of their own funds.

78. The LEA has been effective in supporting schools to sign up for NOF training and all had done so by July 2002. Over half the schools have completed the training and their feedback has been very positive. The LEA's monitoring has concluded that the training has led to greater use of ICT across the curriculum and to more consistent planning, teaching and evaluation, especially in the primary phase. However, the LEA's support for schools where the NOF training has had little effect has been inconsistent.

### **Support for raising standards at Key Stage 3**

79. This aspect of the LEA's support was not included in the previous inspection. Currently, it is satisfactory. The LEA has adopted the national Key Stage 3 strategy and is committed to it as a way of improving relationships with, and attainment in, secondary schools, as recommended in the previous report.

80. The strategy is an integral part of the LEA's school improvement work. The strategic plan adopts a thematic approach and is well linked to other relevant planning, including that for Excellence in Cities. However, continuity with the strategy for raising standards at Key Stage 2 is not strong and the effect of work aimed at bridging the gap between primary and secondary schools has been mixed. Schools in need of particular support are identified effectively through the use of appropriate procedures and criteria. The LEA knows its schools well and tailors the support accordingly. Through the annual review of standards, schools have been helped to monitor the progress of specific groups of pupils. Good guidance has been given on improving the performance of pupils whose first language is not English and a working party is considering how to raise the attainment of boys who have the potential for high grades in English and mathematics.



81. Although there were some initial delays, a full team of consultants is now in place and the strategy is being implemented effectively. The consultants are well managed and operate as a coherent team. Each has relevant experience and very good subject knowledge. Effective links have been established with other services that contribute to school improvement.

82. Although the attendance at training has been variable, its quality is good. LEA monitoring has found that it has improved teachers' attitudes to the strategy. School co-ordinators have undertaken planned dissemination of the training and, importantly, additional courses have been provided by consultants for teachers who gained their initial qualifications overseas. The work of consultants is well received in schools and they are beginning to make a difference. Although slow to start in some schools, the strategy is beginning to help schools and teachers to develop cross-phase and cross-curricular perspectives on teaching and learning. Leading teachers of mathematics and English have been identified but there are difficulties in releasing teachers to observe their lessons. Nevertheless, they are used effectively in network meetings.

83. Although it is too early to see the direct effects of the strategy on key stage test results, monitoring by the LEA has found signs of improvement in individual schools and, in particular, the positive effects of booster classes in Year 9. Similarly, it is too early to link the effects of the strategy closely with attendance and exclusion rates but improvements in pupils' attitudes have been recorded by consultants.

#### **Support for minority ethnic groups including Travellers**

84. Support for minority ethnic groups including Travellers was highly satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection. The LEA's self-evaluation and the school survey rates the support provided as satisfactory or better. No fieldwork was carried out in the inspection. The indications are that the quality of support is being maintained. Support remains highly satisfactory.

#### **Support for gifted and talented pupils**

85. This is the first inspection of the support for gifted and talented pupils. The support is satisfactory. It is good in secondary schools, making an effective contribution to raising standards and to social inclusion. In primary schools, the support is at an early stage of development but the LEA is now taking steps to extend it.

86. Excellence in Cities, in which the LEA is an effective partner, is the main channel through which secondary schools are supported in meeting the needs of gifted and talented pupils. The support is well co-ordinated and there is a clear strategy for further improvement. Guidance on the identification of pupils has been effective. Advice and training are soundly based on very good evaluation of the activities provided for gifted and talented pupils, accurate identification of areas for development, and the provision of relevant targets. There is a good range of activities including summer schools, and project work with universities, which introduces gifted pupils to subjects beyond the National Curriculum, such as geology and zoology.

87. Secondary schools regard the support for gifted and talented as a very strong strand within Excellence in Cities. In several schools, the provision is now built into whole-school curricular plans and is a central part of the policy for teaching and learning.

88. The LEA has not made sufficient progress in extending the gifted and talented strategy to primary schools. There are pockets of good work, for instance in literacy in a cluster of schools formed around a Beacon school, but they tend to arise from informal links between schools. However, Year 6 pupils are included effectively in the summer schools and in the developing work with the recently established city learning centres. The LEA is now encouraging primary schools actively to evaluate their provision for gifted and talented pupils by including it on the agenda for visits by school improvement advisers and in the discussions they have about targets for pupils' attainment at level 5 and above. Several relevant short courses for primary teachers have been provided and an advanced skills teacher has been appointed recently to develop the work in primary schools

### **Support for school leadership and management**

89. The support for school leadership and management is highly satisfactory. As recommended by the previous report, the LEA has developed productive relationships with secondary schools and has increased its capacity to support management in both primary and secondary phases by appointing two school improvement advisers from primary headships and one with recent experience as headteacher of a secondary school. Experienced consultants and effective senior managers of Brent schools are also used successfully in other schools where leadership and management have been identified as in need of improvement. The previous report recommended that best practice should be shared more effectively and this is now a strong feature of the LEA's work, highly regarded by both primary and secondary schools. Strengths of particular schools are used increasingly to support others with weaknesses and the LEA publishes a list of partnership ventures between schools in order to disseminate good practice.

90. The LEA has a thorough knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of school leadership and management, and provides focused support and intervention where needed. The evidence from monitoring and from analysis of data indicates that the quality of leadership and management is improving gradually. Link school improvement advisers work consistently and effectively with headteachers in primary schools, and increasingly so in the secondary phase. However, the written records of their routine visits are insufficiently evaluative for headteachers and are not provided at all for governing body chairs.

91. New senior managers are well supported through an effective induction programme. Continuing professional development opportunities include a central programme of management training and support for national leadership and management programmes. There is a strong network to support deputy heads. Rightly, the LEA attaches great importance to school self-evaluation. The senior managers of all primary schools and of targeted secondary schools have all been trained by the LEA, using the Ofsted school self-evaluation course. Some secondary middle managers have also been trained. In a further positive development, the school improvement adviser with responsibility for leadership and management is working with a pilot group of primary schools to develop a programme for

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the external accreditation of effective school self-evaluation schemes.

92. Both primary and secondary schools rate highly the quality of the LEA's provision for the professional development of teachers. The authority also makes schools aware of alternative providers, whose quality it feels able to assure with confidence, but the range is limited. The current support for middle managers is satisfactory, with some strengths in the provision for primary schools, but the school improvement service has rightly identified it as a priority for improvement in the coming year.

93. The schools are provided with relevant, benchmarked performance data that includes analysis of financial information. Some schools are skilled in the use of data but, if required, guidance is provided for school managers by link advisers and through training. Training and support in financial management is also available, when necessary, and has been particularly helpful to the heads and governors of some schools in difficulties

94. Limited progress has been made in helping schools ensure they implement Best Value principles in securing services, though there has been some head teacher induction training and schools have been asked to maintain a Best Value portfolio of evidence.

### **Support to governors**

95. The support for governors has improved considerably since the previous inspection and is now satisfactory. The LEA has made progress in tackling all the weaknesses that caused this aspect of its work then to be unsatisfactory. The most significant improvements have been the appointment of a governor support officer and the reduction in the number of vacancies for LEA-nominated governors.

96. The governor support service is held in very high regard by governors and has been instrumental in improving the LEA's support. Sensibly, plans are in hand to provide additional staffing for this work.

97. There have been highly satisfactory improvements in the information available to governors, for instance in the very good newsletter, in the termly briefings for chairs and clerks of governing bodies, and in the quality of training, which is closely matched to governors' expressed needs. The director maintains good contact with governors through a termly report. There is an annual governors' conference and a website of good quality. Consultation with governors is adequate but not as well developed as the provision of information.

98. The recruitment of governors is now managed well and, as a result, the rate of vacancies for LEA nominated governors has reduced considerably. The LEA provides 'taster sessions' for potential governors and maintains for schools a list of people who are willing to serve as co-opted governors. A recently-introduced brokerage service supports the governing body to recruit and appoint clerks in the case of vacancies.

99. The monitoring of the effectiveness of governing bodies, a weakness at the previous inspection, is now adequate. Governors receive information about pupils' attainment but lack sufficient guidance to enable them to monitor and evaluate effectively other aspects of the performance of their schools. However, some governing bodies are now piloting with

the LEA an approach to self-evaluation that has the potential to help governors make a greater contribution to school improvement.

### *Recommendation*

#### **In order to improve the support for governors:**

- provide more guidance to governors so that they are able to play an effective part in the monitoring and evaluation of their school's performance.

### **The effectiveness of services to support school management**

100. The previous inspection report stated that there were sound arrangements in place to provide management services to schools. It also made recommendations to improve the accountability of service providers, via the increased use of performance measures and the production of clearer guidance on what specific services were being offered. The recommendations have been implemented and now general arrangements relating to the provision of services are satisfactory. However, the quality of individual services is variable, ranging from financial services support, which is good, to human resources support which is unsatisfactory.

101. Brent delegated many of its management services to schools in 1990. The acquisition of grant maintained status by all but two secondary schools, and by some primary schools, further emphasised the autonomy of Brent schools. The services now offered directly by Brent are more restricted than in most LEAs. There is no enthusiasm among schools for an increased direct delivery by the LEA, except for human resources support, but, even so, the LEA does not do enough to secure a suitable management support infrastructure for schools. A recent consultancy report was critical of Brent's corporate arrangements for procurement of services. The council's proposal to establish a central procurement unit to give advice and support to purchasers, including schools, addresses this issue satisfactorily.

102. Schools receive a timely and well ordered booklet setting out key central and delegated services provided by the education, arts and libraries directorate. Annual improvements have been made since its first publication in 2000, for instance, providing service options for schools in response to the consultation with schools. The booklet does not, however, offer brokerage; provide enough detail about the costs of central services; or use a common format to provide information about each service.

103. **Financial services** at the time of the previous inspection were largely reactive and narrowly focused on accountancy and budget control. Recommendations were made for improving the quality of support for financial management in schools. The service is now good; it was also rated as such, in the school survey, and in school visits and focus groups. Although no delegated bursary service is available, the central service offers appropriate assistance to schools, has introduced effective procedures for consistent financial reporting and has established a useful internal monitoring group for schools causing financial concern. Financial systems work very reliably, and accounting practices of the former grant maintained schools have been effectively reconciled with those of the LEA. There are good working relationships with internal audit. A much needed expansion in the central team is

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planned to improve the monitoring of all school budgets and increase the emphasis being given to encouraging medium term financial planning by schools.

104. The previous inspection considered support for **human resources** to be effective, as a low cost, well-managed, responsive and reactive service. It is now unsatisfactory. Schools' views about the quality of this service are variable. Some report receiving very good advice but there is common agreement that the quantity of advice is insufficient. As a result, casework support is limited, too little attention can be given to strategic issues such as the production of a composite personnel handbook for schools, and in-service training for school managers is minimal. There are, however, productive links with payroll services, which were rated as good in the school survey. Furthermore, industrial relations are generally positive. At the time of the inspection, schools were being consulted about a proposal to expand the delegated service to secure the improvement necessary for the future. The expansion of the service would place an additional cost on schools but the proposal addresses directly their concern about the availability of personnel advice.

105. The LEA has little involvement in providing schools with **property services**, but the limited support it does provide is satisfactory. At the time of the previous inspection, the LEA had no property management service, having delegated all the resources for property management to schools in 1990. Schools, as a consequence, continue to have minimal technical support from the LEA and rely instead on contractors, without the benefit of an approved council list. The council's decision to develop a central procurement unit is a direct response to the need to improve the quality of advice available to schools. A good property manual, published recently, offers effective guidance to schools. In addition, the LEA responded effectively to the requirement to develop an asset management plan. The data and property information provided has considerably increased the ability of the LEA and schools to determine priorities for building and maintenance work. The quality and value for money of building works is satisfactory.

106. The previous inspection described **ICT administrative support** as generally well regarded. It is now satisfactory, though schools have had some difficulties with the quality of technical assistance. In April 2001, the support provided directly by the LEA was transferred to an external provider and therefore the judgement on ICT services is related both to the service provided by the contractor and how the LEA links with that service. The ICT strategy for education is sound and sits well with the corporate strategy. Schools have integrated whole-school networks, and electronic communication is generally effective, complemented well by the development of an intranet and, recently, an extranet. The LEA has a satisfactory plan to introduce a central pupil database to improve management information and reduce the time spent by school managers on administration. The external provider offers a good range of service options to schools. The performance of the service is monitored satisfactorily by a user group of representatives from the LEA and schools.

107. The education service plays no part in providing or monitoring the quality of services to schools for **cleaning and caretaking**, and has not done so since 1990. The same applies to **grounds maintenance**, though some schools use the council's direct service. The former grant maintained schools operate their own arrangements for **catering services** and the full delegation of catering was completed in 2000. The LEA provided useful support, though not on specialist catering issues, to the large majority of primary schools that have

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entered into a joint contract. Its continuing involvement in a contract user group to monitor the quality of the service provided, is welcomed by the schools involved.

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

108. This was not inspected previously. The support for assuring the quality of teachers is good. The LEA has a highly effective and well-led recruitment service. Despite an above average level of unfilled vacancies, 2.9 per cent compared with the national average of one per cent, currently no classes are without a teacher although some schools are very dependent on supply staff.

109. Improving the recruitment and retention of staff is a local priority in the second Education Development Plan. The strategy includes an impressive range of measures that address local issues and reflect national guidance. Attendance by the LEA at recruitment fairs is well established, and a highly successful primary appointment pool operates in partnership with schools. A similar appointment pool, piloted with a small number of secondary schools, successfully recruited teachers to 20 per cent of the vacancies in schools last year. The recruitment package offered to newly qualified teachers, includes access to key worker accommodation, and relocation expenses. The induction offered to newly qualified teachers is comprehensive, and 90 per cent remain in the borough for their second year of teaching. The authority, in partnership with schools, has plans to improve this further by introducing a fourth term bonus payment for those newly qualified teachers who remain in Brent schools beyond the end of their induction year.

110. The recruitment service has responded well to the challenge of attracting new teachers to the borough. Successful recruiting campaigns with good quality assurance arrangements have been conducted overseas. Overseas trained teachers accounted for 11 per cent of appointments last year. Good training and support is provided to enable these staff to achieve qualified teacher status and to continue to work in schools in Brent.

111. The service encourages parents, governors and support workers in local schools to apply to the graduate and registered teacher programme. Thirty-six recruits have achieved qualified teacher status and a further forty-two are working towards the standards. Two thirds of the successful recruits are from minority ethnic groups.

112. The recruitment service also supports schools by operating a teaching assistants' pool for primary and secondary placements. Recruitment data indicates this arrangement has encouraged applications from the minority ethnic communities in the borough. The LEA manages an efficient and cost-effective supply teacher pool for primary schools and the Brent supply service, operated as an educational trust, provides an effective service for secondary schools.

113. The LEA has developed a good teacher recruitment web site service. This advertises vacancies in schools, supports on line application and provides good information about the borough as a place to live and work.

### **The effectiveness of services to support school improvement**

114. The effectiveness of services to support school improvement continues to be

highly satisfactory. They provide good value for money.

115. The major responsibility for supporting schools in their efforts to improve rests with the school improvement service. The service is well led. School improvement staff are respected by the schools, with whom they communicate effectively and share a clear vision for improvement. The service plans contain sound strategies and are clearly linked to strategic plans. Service provision and its effects are reviewed and evaluated regularly, although some success criteria are not articulated clearly as the basis for making objective judgements.

116. The deployment of school improvement staff matches priorities and, to a large extent, schools' needs. The level of expertise is high and effective use is made of the specialist knowledge and experience of individuals. Workloads are monitored to ensure that members of staff are not overburdened. Increasingly valuable use is made of secondments and consultants to supplement the work of the service and to fill gaps in specialist knowledge and expertise.

117. The performance management arrangements are good. New members of staff are well inducted and a system of formal and informal reviews monitors performance and establishes sound links between performance targets, service priorities and corporate objectives. Continuing professional development provides satisfactory support for the achievement of personal and professional targets.

118. The effectiveness of other services, with the exception of human resources, to support school improvement is satisfactory or better. However, support is good from the recruitment, education welfare and finance services. They provide good value for money. There are also good arrangements in place for performance management in the central services.

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## Section 3: Special educational needs

### Summary

119. The LEA's performance is now satisfactory in all aspects of special educational needs. At the time of the previous inspection, the LEA's strategy for SEN was unsatisfactory. A sound policy and strategic plan for development are now in place and satisfactory progress is being made. The recommendations of the previous report have been acted upon. The LEA continues to take reasonable steps to meet its statutory obligations in respect of special educational needs but the time taken to produce statutory assessments involving advice from other agencies is unduly long. The LEA has satisfactory procedures in place for monitoring the use of funding. However, the Best Value review of special schools is yet to take place, which means the role of special schools within the strategy for special educational needs is not clear, and the value for money offered by the schools has not been examined sufficiently.

### Strategy

120. The LEA now has a satisfactory policy for special educational needs and inclusive education in place. Following wide consultation, it has the support of schools, elected members and other stakeholders. The policy and associated plans are coherent with other statutory and strategic plans. Operational service plans support the strategy, and the senior management team regularly reviews implementation. The special educational needs and inclusive education strategic review group, comprising representatives from primary, secondary and special schools, social services and health, meets regularly to monitor the effect of the special educational needs policy and strategy and clear progress reports are made to elected members. The "invest to save" initiative is beginning to reduce the reliance on special school places outside the borough by investing in provision inside Brent. Provision for special educational needs has been enhanced by the addition of specialist units attached to schools and effective outreach work for pupils with autism and speech and language difficulties.

121. Some weaknesses remain in the special educational needs strategy. The authority has set a high priority on supporting children with special educational needs during their early years, but it has not made significant progress on this. Earlier intervention in mainstream schools has been supported by elected members who have agreed the allocation of increased resources for pupils with special educational needs but who do not require a statutory statement. However, the difference between the resources allocated to pupils with a statutory statement and those without, remains large. This does not encourage schools to meet the special educational needs of pupils without a formal assessment and statement.

122. A review of the role of special schools is planned, but they are currently unclear about their role. This reduces the potential for more effective and efficient partnership working between specialist provision and mainstream schools.



*Recommendation***In order to improve the strategy for special educational needs:**

- proceed with the Best Value review of special schools and other specialist provision as a matter of urgency.

**Statutory obligations**

123. The LEA continues to take adequate steps to meet its statutory obligations. There are systematic procedures in place for monitoring the statementing and annual review processes and the placement of pupils. During 2002 the rate of completion of statements within the recommended 18 weeks improved to 92 per cent, excluding those involving other agencies. In cases where medical and other advice is sought, the completion rate is low at 58 per cent, which is below that for similar authorities. Although the LEA analyses the reasons for the delays, action to remedy the situation has been insufficient.

124. Relationships with the primary care trusts are improving. The LEA's effective contribution to the children with disabilities strategy group is a good example of positive joint working. The LEA has agreed to part fund a joint commissioning manager for children, with health and social services, to improve their capacity for meeting the needs of children with special educational needs.

*Recommendation***In order to improve the provision for pupils with special educational needs:**

- put in place effective procedures to reduce significantly the delays caused by other agencies to the process for producing statutory statements.

125. The procedure for the identification of special educational needs and for requesting a formal assessment is explained well in publications for schools and parents. Letters to parents are clear. The decision-making process is transparent; schools and other agencies are effectively included. The LEA's educational psychology service undertakes effectively the assessment of pupils in independent schools.

126. Relatedly, a parent partnership scheme has been established with a full-time officer in post. Independent parental supporters are being recruited. A useful web site is accessible to parents and helpful leaflets are now being produced. The parent partnership has intervened successfully to resolve a number of potential appeals to the special needs tribunal.

**Special educational needs functions to support school improvement**

127. The LEA's support for school improvement is satisfactory, as in the previous inspection. Clear guidance is published about the criteria and the Brent thresholds for statutory assessment and about the provision schools are expected to make to meet pupils' special educational needs.

128. The LEA has a useful handbook for special educational needs that provides schools and co-ordinators with clear information, and helps to ensure consistency of practice across schools. However, the updating of the handbook has only begun recently. Decision-making about pupils requiring a statutory statement and the identification of the provision to meet their needs is transparent. Representatives of mainstream and special schools are consulted appropriately in the process.

129. The allocation of funding for those pupils with statements of special educational needs is moderated satisfactorily by the annual review process. For pupils without a statement, funding is delegated to schools. The LEA undertakes an annual audit of the resources used to support pupils with special educational needs. The outcomes of the audit, and examples of good practice, are disseminated effectively to schools.

130. A recent reorganisation has strengthened the links between the school improvement and inclusion services by placing these under one assistant director. Currently, the advice given to schools on target setting for pupils with special educational needs is not consistent and value-added data to improve target setting in the assessment of these pupils are not yet available to schools. Satisfactory support is available to schools through projects, outreach work and the educational psychology and learning support service. However, vacancies in the educational psychology service mean that too much of their work is focused on statutory assessment.

131. The training and guidance on the new Code of Practice for special educational needs has been satisfactory. A good programme of training courses and meetings supports schools in improving the quality of provision, many of these courses are accredited by external bodies.

### **Value for money**

132. The LEA's systems for ensuring value for money are satisfactory. A range of performance indicators are used in order to compare costs and performance with similar local authorities and the national averages. The central budget is well managed and controlled with the exception of the cost of special educational needs transport which has increased significantly in recent years. The basis of funding allocations to schools and individual pupils is clear and understood by schools. The annual audit procedure monitors, and is starting to evaluate, how schools and central services spend the resources allocated but the LEA has not yet taken the next step to compare the progress made by individual pupils with the resources allocated.

133. The LEA publishes concise information about the roles and responsibilities of central services, making clear which services are free, which schools have to pay for, and how to access them. Individual services are required to consider Best Value objectives in the planning and implementation of their development plans. A number have undergone Best Value reviews with satisfactory outcomes. However, the Best Value review of special schools has been delayed and until this takes place, it is difficult for the LEA to be sure that the optimum use is being made of the resources provided to special schools and other specialist provision. There are good procedures in place for performance management in the central special needs services.

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## **Section 4: Promoting social inclusion**

### **The strategy to promote social inclusion**

134. The strategy to promote social inclusion was not covered in the previous inspection. It is highly satisfactory. There is a strong commitment to promote social inclusion and a number of different initiatives are in place. However current action is not sufficiently well co-ordinated.

135. The council's corporate strategy 2002/06 places a strong emphasis on social inclusion. The performance of under-achieving groups is also one of the priorities in the Education Development Plan. The achievement of pupils from different minority ethnic groups and groups at risk of exclusion is monitored. Databases and tracking systems for such pupils have been improved, although these are still not fully integrated. Progress of vulnerable groups of pupils is improving although some groups continue to underachieve. The LEA is targeting particular groups, such as boys of African and Caribbean heritage, children who are looked after by the council, and those who are permanently excluded. Support for vulnerable groups is mostly at least satisfactory although at the time of the inspection a few children who were permanently excluded from school were not receiving full-time provision. However, the LEA is taking appropriate steps to rectify this situation.

136. The council has been successful in securing additional funding for social inclusion initiatives, which are targeted at areas of deprivation. The LEA makes an effective contribution to the health and social care partnership, the Local Strategic Partnership and other partnerships such as the Crime Prevention Strategy Group. Partnership working with the social services directorate is strong, particularly in connection with supporting looked after children. Links with health and the police are, in most respects, good. The recently appointed joint commissioning officer for children, whose task it is to implement the decisions of the children and young people's planning group, is improving the coherence of work with health.

137. An inclusive education projects network was set up in September 2001, involving workers from a wide range of projects, such as healthy schools, drugs education, and the government funded programme On Track. It has completed useful work, for example in tracking the services received by young asylum seekers. However, progress in developing coherence across projects has been limited, partly because there is currently a vacancy within education, arts and libraries for the post of social inclusion manager. The recent crosscutting Best Value review on social inclusion, which has yet to report to the council, also identifies weaknesses in the structures and processes in the council for ensuring coherence in promoting social inclusion.

### **The supply of school places**

138. The LEA's performance in managing the supply of school places was good at the time of the previous inspection. The LEA's self-evaluation and other evidence indicate that it remains good. Accordingly, no fieldwork was carried out during this inspection.

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## Admissions

139. The previous inspection concluded that, in spite of the complexity of admissions arrangements because of the diversity of schools in the borough, the service provided was good. The LEA's self-evaluation and other evidence indicate that it remains so. Accordingly, no fieldwork was carried out during this inspection.

## Asset management

140. At the time of the previous inspection, asset management planning was in its infancy. The report referred to a substantial backlog of repairs and the opportunities presented by a promising Private Finance Initiative (PFI) scheme. Asset management planning (AMP) is now satisfactory. The LEA's documentation is good but its performance in delivering a local service, much assisted by increased funding made available by the government, is only satisfactory. Schools' perceptions, in the school survey and in interviews, confirm this.

141. The AMP local policy statement and statement of priorities, produced in 2002, are clear, thorough and well structured. AMP planning within the education services is well integrated with the council's corporate AMP. The quality of education asset management planning demonstrates a considerable improvement on earlier plans and associated property data.

142. Consultation with schools on the AMP is conducted through an appropriate forum but diocesan representatives are not involved early enough. At individual school level, more can be done to clarify where the school stands in the prioritisation procedure which would make the process more transparent. The LEA has a reasonable knowledge of schools' priorities for their delegated funding and has a good system for determining the level of schools' contributions towards any projects which are jointly funded. Though staffing has recently been enhanced, the LEA's asset management planning comparative costs are relatively low. This restricts the ability of the central team to improve further on the satisfactory arrangements now in place.

143. The condition data for schools, prepared in 2000, suggested that the backlog of repair work was similar to the national average. The subsequent injection of capital funding, over £10m in 2002/3, has enabled the LEA to make a significant reduction in the backlog. Increasingly effective use has been made of external funding. However, the abandonment at a late stage of the Private Finance Initiative scheme to improve 17 schools for an estimated cost of £29m, has caused understandable frustration to schools. The lessons learned from this have been effectively incorporated into a more recent proposal to replace four deficient schools buildings at an estimated cost of £31million.

144. At the time of the inspection, the council was engaged in a re-tendering process for two consultancies to design and manage school building work funded by the LEA, and to give greater flexibility and improve co-operation with the AMP team to ensure the completion of building projects on time.

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**Provision of education for pupils who have no school place**

145. At the time of the previous inspection, the LEA was meeting its statutory responsibilities to provide for pupils without a school place. However, expectations in this area have risen and despite very significant improvements, provision is now unsatisfactory. This is because statutory requirements are not being met as a small number of excluded pupils do not receive full-time provision.

146. The Education Development Plan includes two actions aimed at making improvements for pupils who are educated otherwise than at school. The actions and activities are suitable, but are not comprehensive, as they do not ensure all categories of children are covered. The two services most directly involved have been restructured and strengthened.

147. The LEA has improved significantly the range, quality and quantity of provision available for excluded pupils. The Key Stage 4 pupil referral unit (PRU) now provides full time education in conjunction with other providers, such as the local further education college and the local work experience consortium. The education at the PRU is of good quality, and the LEA monitors the quality of that provided by the college. A Key Stage 3 PRU has been established very recently. This has good facilities, is fully staffed, and also has two members of staff for pre- and post-exclusion work. Pupils excluded from primary schools are currently given home tuition. A small primary PRU (a base attached to the tuition centre) will open in February and will provide full-time education.

148. At the time of the inspection, 55 excluded pupils were receiving full-time provision in the PRUs, at college, or via a combination of tuition and work experience. Seven excluded pupils were receiving only 10 hours of home tuition, which is unsatisfactory. Two of these will be catered for full-time by the primary PRU when it opens in February. During the course of the inspection, plans were made to increase to full-time provision for the other five children, all of whom have complex needs, in February. The LEA is looking eventually to place these children in special schools that have the capacity to meet their needs, but reports a shortage of suitable places in the London area.

149. Referral systems are mainly effective. An excluded pupils' case management group has been established which discusses, plans and tracks the placement of excluded pupils. The time children have to wait to be placed has decreased. Reintegration rates into mainstream schools for pupils at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 have significantly improved. The LEA has brokered an agreement with secondary schools on procedures for re-integrating excluded pupils at Key Stage 3 and the PRU is providing effective support for re-integration. A complex cases decision-making group meets weekly to discuss the placement of excluded pupils who have statements of special educational needs.

150. The home tuition service provides tuition for other pupils without a school place, including school phobics, sick children and school-age parents, and monitors their progress and attainment. The centre has recently set up a group tuition base, registered with the DfES, to give more effective teaching to pupils in years 10 and 11. Sick children are provided for at the hospital schools, which are part of the tuition service, or receive home tuition. Links are maintained with the child's home school. School-age parents are mainly catered for by

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the tuition service, although some choose to return to school. Records show that most complete their education. All such pupils are also referred to the teenage pregnancy adviser.

151. Arrangements for monitoring the education of children whose parents choose to educate them at home are satisfactory. This duty has recently been transferred to the education welfare service, which has made improvements to the system and offers guidance to parents.

152. A Best Value review of excluded pupils reported in 2001. The findings have been helpful in bringing about improvements in provision. An earlier report by district audit on school attendance and exclusions highlighted problems of lack of integration of data systems. Improvements have been made, although systems are still not fully integrated.

153. Schools in the school survey rated provision for the re-admission of excluded pupils as satisfactory. Progress since the previous inspection has been good, as is the capacity for further improvements.

### **Attendance**

154. The LEA's support for attendance was not covered in the previous inspection. It is satisfactory with good features. Attendance in primary schools is just below the national average and in line with that of similar authorities. Attendance in secondary schools is above the national average and that of similar authorities. There has been little change in primary attendance since the time of the previous inspection but a slight improvement in secondary attendance.

155. The Education Development Plan sets out suitable activities for improving attendance. These include the setting and monitoring of attendance targets for all schools, focused work with weaker schools, and the identification and dissemination of strategies for encouraging attendance and of efficient procedures for registration.

156. The education welfare service has a service level agreement which clarifies referral criteria and procedures, and the respective responsibilities of the service and the schools. The service has a very good record of meeting the service standards it has set; all referrals are responded to within five days. A core and a traded service are available. Core time includes guidance and support to schools on attendance issues, as well as casework with individual pupils.

157. Good analysis of attendance data is used to set school targets. Targeted support to particular schools has enabled good improvements in attendance. The service has recently increased from eight members of staff to ten. However, it remains relatively small, and this limits the number of primary schools to which it can offer additional support. The service is low cost and offers good value for money.

158. There are links in place with neighbouring LEAs. In response to a recent Best Value review, the service is improving its links with other services and agencies. It also makes periodic visits to places of temporary accommodation to help to identify any pupils in the borough without a school place.

159. The service analyses the attendance of looked after children and analyses referrals according to ethnicity. It does not target particular groups, but aims to provide a good service for all cases that are referred.

### **Behaviour support**

160. The support provided to schools for managing behaviour was not previously inspected. The LEA's support is satisfactory, although some primary schools do not have access to adequate support.

161. The Behaviour Support Plan is satisfactory; it provides a clear statement of key principles and describes the services and the support necessary for implementation. There are appropriate links with the special educational needs policy and the Excellence in Cities initiative. Schools and other agencies were involved in the development of the plan and it is kept under regular review. Exclusions have reduced and are within the DfES target figure. The number of boys of African Caribbean heritage who are excluded is relatively high but specific strategies are being put in place to address this. A database has been put in place to monitor fixed term exclusions. The quality of the information from schools about fixed-term exclusions is improving, but the LEA's information is not complete although it is taking the appropriate steps to rectify the situation.

162. Significant funding is available to secondary schools through the Excellence in Cities initiative. All secondary schools have learning mentors in place and there are learning support units in six secondary schools. Schools report that these strands have had a positive effect on preventing exclusion and reducing disaffection and the number of fixed term exclusions in the schools with learning support units has decreased significantly. The LEA provides clear information on exclusion procedures and on the use of the Pupil Retention Grant, which also provides secondary schools with significant additional resources.

163. The LEA does not have a behaviour support team. In theory, the educational psychology service provides support to schools but, in practice, staff shortages mean there is little time available for this. The LEA has two pre-exclusion officers, who are based in the Key Stage 3 PRU. They work closely with schools to enable pupils to be maintained in school and to re-integrate after exclusion. The number of appeals following exclusion has reduced and schools speak very highly of this service. However, the service is very stretched and is not allocated sufficiently according to the needs of schools.

### ***Recommendation***

#### **In order to improve the quality of behaviour support:**

- target more effectively the support given to schools by the pre-exclusion officers to identified need.

164. The LEA has a number of inclusion projects operating in primary and secondary schools. Despite being targeted towards schools using a formula based on need, schools are not always clear about the rationale for selection. The projects appropriately enable behavioural, motivational and therapeutic interventions to take place and the effect is closely monitored and evaluated. Although schools view the projects positively and consider that

support for behaviour is improving, they are critical of the lead-in time to implementation of the projects. The support for primary schools is fragmented, and is insufficient in some cases.

#### *Recommendation*

#### **In order to improve the quality of behaviour support:**

- ensure that all primary schools who need it have access to behaviour support.

165. The externally funded behaviour improvement programme is being established in two clusters of primary and secondary schools. The education teams are not fully in place, but work with the police is underway and is having a positive effect in schools.

#### **Health, safety, welfare and child protection**

166. As in the initial inspection, the LEA continues to meet its responsibilities for protecting children in a satisfactory way. The LEA's self-assessment and the school survey rated support for health, safety and child protection as generally satisfactory, although secondary schools were less satisfied with support for health and safety than were primary schools. During this inspection, fieldwork was carried out to follow through procedures for child protection, but not for health and safety.

167. The LEA contributes fully to the work of the area child protection committee, and is represented on this by the relevant assistant director. A recent joint review report by the Social Services Inspectorate and Audit Commission highlighted the work of the area child protection committee as a strength. Regular multi-agency training is provided by the committee and attendance is monitored, although the LEA does not act sufficiently vigorously to ensure that all teachers have had their training recently updated.

#### *Recommendation*

#### **In order to improve support for child protection:**

- ensure that all designated teachers undertake updated training.

168. All schools have designated teachers for child protection. Guidance and procedures are circulated to schools. A small number of experienced teachers are designated as child protection advisers and are available to offer advice to those less experienced. Schools were recently surveyed to check that procedures for child protection are in place and to identify their training needs.

169. An assistant director takes responsibility for child protection within education. Other education staff have specific responsibilities. The LEA intends to make a further appointment in order to make a greater contribution to training. There are strong links between officers in education and social services. Procedures for child protection have been reviewed jointly to see where improvements are needed. The capacity of the social services directorate to respond to referrals from schools used to be poor but has improved, although schools continue to report some variability. All referrals are now made to a duty social



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worker because the social services directorate still lacks the capacity to provide schools with a named link social worker.

170. The LEA has responded to the two actions for education arising from a recent public enquiry.

### **Looked after children**

171. The LEA's support for the education of children looked after by the local authority is good. This function was not covered in the previous inspection of the LEA. In November 2002, there were 337 children being looked after by Brent local authority.

172. The council has improved the way it fulfils its corporate responsibility for looked after children. The monitoring system has been improved, with regular reports to elected members as well as an annual report on the children's achievement. Additionally, a task group for looked after children, chaired by the chief executive and attended by members, meets quarterly. Targets for improvement have been set in the Quality Protects management action plan, and progress towards them is monitored.

173. Links between the directorate of education, arts and libraries and social services are strong at strategic and operational levels. A dedicated team of teachers in social services, recently increased to four, works together with an educational psychologist to support teachers and children. The team has set up several initiatives aimed at supporting the educational achievements of looked after children, including booster classes for children in year 9, and revision classes for those in year 11. The team has also supported the implementation of personal education plans which are in place for all the children. All schools have designated teachers, and training is provided for them.

174. A good feature is that the views of the children are sought and acted upon. One example of this is that the children now have computers in their foster homes. The achievements of the children are celebrated in a special event and they have also been made the first priority for admission to community schools. Few looked after children are permanently excluded and their attendance generally is satisfactory.

175. However, attainment remains low. Provisional results at GCSE in 2002 remained much lower than the borough average, with only nine per cent attaining five or more grades A\* - C, and only 55 per cent attaining one or more grades A\* - G. About a third of the children in the cohort were unaccompanied asylum seekers with English as an additional language. Despite the general picture of under-achievement, the LEA's tracking shows that particular individuals have made substantial progress.

176. The lack of stability of foster placements for the children was highlighted in the Social Services Inspectorate's annual review of performance in 2001-02. Until this is improved, the good efforts of the council to support the children's education will be undermined to some extent.

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**Measures to combat racism**

177. Support for combating racism was not covered in the previous inspection. It is highly satisfactory.

178. The council demonstrates a strong commitment to combating racism. It acted promptly in response to the report on the inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence, and developed a corporate framework for equality action planning. Good progress has been made, with the establishment of two cross-council service improvement teams and a five-year council action plan for enhancing racial equality. An equality action group has been set up in the education, arts and libraries directorate. This group has co-ordinated a thorough audit and action planning process across the directorate. All services now have an equalities action plan that is incorporated into their service operational plan and into the targets of individuals.

179. Equalities targets have been set. The council aims to meet the Council for Racial Equality's level 3 by August 2003 and level 4 by July 2004. A workforce profile has been carried out of the ethnic origins of council employees and an action plan developed from this. The LEA does not have data on the ethnic composition of staff in schools, but plans to collect them during the forthcoming year.

180. The LEA has sent schools useful guidance on equalities, including a framework for a race equality policy and guidance on responding to racist incidents. However, this was only sent to schools in September 2002, and as the LEA does not intend to collect in data until the end of the academic year, it currently has no data available. Monitoring of schools' progress with the audit was conducted by school link development advisers in the summer term. Schools have been offered training, although so far few have attended.

181. Those interviewed in connection with this inspection, from the council and from the community, viewed Brent as a vibrant, cohesive, multi-ethnic community with schools that reflected this. Although some problems exist, a culture that celebrates diversity and where issues of race can be discussed openly, is well-embedded in the schools. Headteachers reported few racist incidents, but confirmed that they were being monitored, and that incidents were dealt with as appropriate.

182. The LEA is supporting particular projects aimed at increasing access to the curriculum, for example consultants are working with boys of African and Caribbean heritage who are underachieving in science. Good practice is spread by recommendation and at conferences. A successful 'black history month' is well established. Several projects, such as mentoring, aim to help reduce the number of boys of African and Caribbean heritage who are excluded from school. Joint work between the police, the council and the community has taken place in an effort to reduce the level of inter-community crime.

183. Consultation with the community takes place through the area forums and the citizens panel. In a borough with such a high proportion of different minority ethnic communities, consultation specifically with these communities presents problems. The council's response has been to try and ensure wide consultation on all its policies.

## **Section 5: Corporate issues**

### **Summary**

184. The quality of the council's corporate leadership for education is satisfactory. The modernised council structure enables decisions to be made effectively and there is a very explicit will from the administration to encourage cross-party working. The democratic structure includes separate overview and scrutiny committees; the latter chaired by a member from the opposition. However, the scrutiny function is insufficiently developed and resourced to perform its role effectively and meet its extensive work programme.

185. Education continues to benefit from the good leadership of senior officers and the determination of key elected members to improve schools and raise standards of achievement. The education portfolio-holder and the leader of the council are well informed and have a clear understanding of the role for education in tackling social deprivation. Despite this high level of commitment to education as the priority for the corporate strategy, education remains underfunded, although the council gets good value from the resources made available to the education, arts and libraries directorate and to schools.

### **Corporate planning**

186. The quality of corporate planning for education and the procedures for implementing and evaluating plans are satisfactory. At the time of the previous inspection, planning in the education service was increasingly taking account of corporate and national priorities. Processes for evaluation were generally effective, and well used to monitor, evaluate and improve the support offered to schools.

187. The "Building a Better Borough" corporate strategy recognises that education, and, more specifically, access to high quality child care services and improvements in the performance of schools and the achievements of pupils, are essential elements in the regeneration process. There are five key cross cutting themes, of which supporting children and young people is the council's first priority. The education directorate's strategic service plan outlines in sufficient detail the contribution to be made to each of the five themes. Service operational plans, the revised action plans for the second Education Development Plan and performance management arrangements are linked effectively to achievement of the council's overarching priorities.

188. The second Education Development Plan and service plans are costed in terms of service days and detailed spending by service area. The financial feasibility of the corporate plan is underpinned by careful and detailed work at service level. However, the funding allocated to education does not reflect the priority given to it in the corporate plan. Corporate and service plans are aligned with the financial planning cycle and, rightly, emphasise the efficient co-ordination of plans to maximise improvement. However, schools report some overlap in the objectives and priorities for individual social inclusion projects and a lack of clarity about the role for schools in the council's wider regeneration strategy. The leader of the council and the chief executive have responded to this and put in place regular meetings with the headteacher convenor group to ensure schools are more fully engaged in the

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corporate strategy.

189. There is a highly satisfactory system for keeping the implementation of corporate plans under review. Lines of accountability are clear and monitoring takes place at directorate and corporate level. Monthly monitoring by the directorate and regular reporting to the executive is the basis for very effective financial control of the education budget. A quarterly risk-based assessment provides the executive and senior officer with monitoring information to track the implementation of agreed plans and intervene where appropriate. At present, a weakness is that this information is not shared effectively enough with members of the overview and scrutiny committees.

190. The education directorate has a well-established process of monitoring. Clear and informative reports go to the executive, and more recently scrutiny committee, on progress with the Education Development Plan and standards in schools. Progress with service plans is regularly reviewed by heads of service and the senior management of the education, arts and libraries directorate. There is a good understanding of strengths and weaknesses; the Education Development Plan, operational service plans and the director of education's self-evaluation of the service, drawn up in advance of this inspection, confirm this to be the case.

### **Decision making**

191. The speed, transparency and effectiveness of decision making are highly satisfactory. The executive takes decisions in a transparent and accountable way. The forward plan contains the details of key decisions and dates when they will be taken. The executive has recently taken a controversial and difficult decision to proceed with a consultation on the removal of surplus primary school places in the light of the draft school organisation plan and consultation with stakeholders. The council has shown itself willing to take radical decisions, proceeding with the closure of a maintained high school to enable a city academy to be developed on the site, to achieve its stated priority to raise the performance of schools.

### **The leadership provided by elected members**

192. The quality of leadership provided by key elected members is satisfactory. The leader of the council and other members interviewed in this inspection regard the education service as crucial to bringing about improvement and, together with schools, as essential for breaking the cycle of deprivation. Schools regard the portfolio-holder for education as well-informed, willing to listen to their views and taking every opportunity to visit schools. She champions educational issues with her colleagues in seeking to influence decisions about the distribution of scarce resources. However, because the funding of education has remained well below the education Standard Spending Assessment, schools regard the leadership of members in this respect to be unsatisfactory.

193. The education portfolio holder works closely with the director of education and the senior management team, and respects the powers appropriately delegated to officers. Elected members receive good advice about policy options from senior officers and the portfolio holder distributes a regular briefing to her colleagues. Her hard work, commitment to education and determination to improve schools and raise standards make significant

contributions to the LEA's good relationships with schools.

194. The wider involvement of members in monitoring education policy, decision-making, and the work of the directorate is less well developed. The current scrutiny committee's role in examining cross cutting themes is very recent and political tensions remain about its remit and function. The committee has an extensive work programme but there is little evidence of it having moved beyond receiving reports to conducting rigorous and systematic examination of policy decisions. Following the publication of the Audit Commission's recent corporate assessment which judged scrutiny as weak, support from professional officers is proposed and plans are in place to review the effectiveness of the scrutiny process. In addition the director of education, with the support of the education portfolio-holder, has initiated a regular briefing session to improve the advice and information available to the opposition spokespersons for education.

### *Recommendation*

#### **In order to improve scrutiny:**

- provide training, advice and support for members to make the scrutiny function effective in monitoring and evaluating the work of the LEA.

### **The leadership provided by senior officers**

195. The leadership provided by senior officers is good. The appointment of a new director of education and the restructuring of the education, arts and libraries directorate, have further sharpened the focus on school improvement and raising the achievement of all pupils. The decision to combine school improvement and inclusion within one division is aimed at reinforcing the links between the two. Senior officers have high expectations of their staff and schools. There is a clear commitment to the autonomy of schools, the balance between this and intervention is well understood and schools value the professional challenge from officers in seeking to raise standards. The council receives very good value from its highly professional and skilled education team but its capacity is stretched, particularly when developing initiatives. Communication and consultation and the provision of information are highly satisfactory. There is a good level of trust and respect between schools and officers. The new director of education has reinforced the shared vision with schools and there is a sense of optimism about the future direction of education policy in the borough.

### **Partnership**

196. Partnership with other agencies is highly satisfactory. At the time of the previous inspection, partnerships with external agencies were effective, contributing well to corporate aims. This continues to be the case and good progress has been made in developing the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and the 14-19 Forum with schools and external partners.

197. The education, arts and libraries directorate is developing a more strategic approach to the partnerships supporting the corporate regeneration and neighbourhood renewal priorities of the council. The Local Strategic Partnership, chaired by the leader of the council, builds upon a history of effective partnership working and has a clear sense of direction, committed to adding value to the borough. Initial difficulties in reaching a

common understanding and shared vision have been overcome successfully. There is widespread ownership of the draft community plan and the priorities for joint action. The education, arts and libraries directorate is playing its full part in this partnership, particularly the themes of securing the future for young people in Brent and developing strategies for the recruitment and retention of staff.

198. More recent developments in the 14-19 curriculum have led to the establishment of the 14-19 Forum. This brings together secondary schools, the local college, Connexions, the Learning and Skills Council and the LEA in a very productive and well managed partnership. There is a clear focus on the outcomes of the most recent post-16 area inspection and the 14-19 development plan. Relationships are strong with the shared objectives to extend collaborative work and broaden the curriculum opportunities for pupils in the borough.

199. The partnership with the standing advisory council for religious education is effective despite some tension about funding for the recent publication of the new agreed syllabus for religious education. Links between education and health are improving, however problems remain with the completion of medical advice on time for pupils requiring a statement of special educational needs. The appointment of a dedicated children and young person's commissioning officer should strengthen the partnership. Relationships at a strategic level are good between education and social services. At an operational level, the directorates work effectively and jointly review procedures where appropriate. The LEA has a long established and effective relationship with the crime prevention strategy group and partnership working between the police and the education welfare service on truancy sweeps has been very successful.

### **Support for early years**

200. The LEA's support for early years was not previously inspected. It is currently unsatisfactory. However, it is improving and there is the capacity to secure further improvements. The fundamental weaknesses are the lack of integrated planning to raise standards, and the legacy of under-funding of the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership (EYDCP) by the LEA. A major strength is the quality of training available to staff in non-maintained settings.

201. The data from Ofsted inspection of schools indicate that progress in the under fives' is insufficient and that the quality of teaching remains a significant issue. The LEA has a sound plan to raise children's attainment in the maintained sector and the EYDCP has planned clearly how it will meet national targets. However, the links between the plans are not sufficient and lack the coherence necessary to improve quality and raise standards throughout the early years. As a consequence, the assessment of children's development and learning lacks continuity.

### ***Recommendation***

#### **In order to improve the LEA's support for early years:**

- take steps to improve the coherence of planning between the LEA and the EYDCP.

202. Partnership working between the EYDCP and the LEA in the recent past has

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been a weakness. The LEA provided insufficient funding for the EYDCP to meet national targets for the provision of qualified teachers and for special educational needs co-ordinator support to non-maintained settings. However, the LEA has responded appropriately to the concerns that were raised by the EYDPC. It is now represented effectively in the partnership and is committed to making additional funding available to the EYDCP in 2003/04. In addition, the LEA has appointed an early years co-ordinator to improve the coherence and co-ordination of provision for children in the early years.

203. The EYDCP is well placed to meet all the national targets by 2004. However, providers of care and education for children in the early years in the non-maintained sector have an insufficient understanding of the EYDCP's targets and priorities. Nevertheless, the quantity of early years places available has increased and, with the exception of out of school care for children with special educational needs, the EYDCP has ensured there are sufficient places to meet demand. It is planning to provide more out-of-school places in disadvantaged areas. The partnership does much to improve the quality of the provision for which it is responsible. For example, it provides a good amount of information; it promotes relevant training, much of which is of a good quality; it supports childminding networks; and it runs a well-supported annual conference.

204. The LEA provides intensive support to ten per cent of private or voluntary nurseries and to a slightly higher proportion of primary schools catering for children in the Foundation Stage. This support includes monitoring which has identified strengths, and areas for development, and has contributed to the planning of further training. The LEA's intensive support has led to improvement, but concerns remain about the quality of some provision in the private and voluntary sector.

## **Appendix 1: Recommendations**

The report makes a number of recommendations.

The following recommendations should be acted upon as a matter of urgency:

### **In order to improve the strategy for special educational needs:**

- proceed with the Best Value review of special schools and other specialist provision as a matter of urgency.
- put in place effective procedures to reduce significantly the delays caused by other agencies to the process for producing statutory statements.

### **In order to improve the quality of behaviour support:**

- ensure that all primary schools who need it have access to behaviour support.

### **In order to improve support for child protection:**

- ensure that all designated teachers undertake updated training.

### **In order to improve scrutiny:**

- provide training, advice and support for members to make the scrutiny function effective in monitoring and evaluating the work of the LEA.

However, the following recommendations are also fundamental in that they affect the LEA's overall capacity for improvement:

### **In order to improve the allocation of resources to priorities:**

- re-assess the adequacy of education funding, particularly that delegated to schools, in the context of the council's priority for children and young people.

### **In order to improve the LEA's support for early years:**

- take steps to improve the coherence of planning between the LEA and the EYDCP.

We also make the following recommendations:

### **In order to ensure continuous improvement:**

- bring forward the planned date of the early years partnership Best Value review.



**In order to improve the targeting of support:**

- further differentiate the allocation of core visits by the link school improvement adviser so that successful schools do not receive more than they need.

**In order to improve the effectiveness of monitoring and challenge:**

- make written records of monitoring visits more evaluative.

**In order to improve the support for information and communication technology:**

- devise and implement effective systems of monitoring and evaluation in order to have accurate knowledge of schools' progress and the levels of pupils' attainment in ICT.

**In order to improve the support for governors:**

- provide more guidance to governors so that they are able to play an effective part in the monitoring and evaluation of their school's performance.

**In order to improve the quality of behaviour support:**

- target more effectively the support given to schools by the pre-exclusion officers to identified need.

## Appendix 2: Record of Judgement Recording Statements for the inspection

No.	Required Inspection Judgement	Grade	NI
<b>SECTION 1 SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT STRATEGY</b>			
1	The socio-economic context of the LEA	6	
2	The performance of schools	4	
3	Funding, including the co-ordination of external funding	2	
4	The LEA's strategy for school improvement including the EDP and EiC	4	
5	The progress on implementing the LEA's strategy for school improvement including the EDP and EiC	3	
6	The extent to which the LEA targets its resources on priorities	5	
7	The extent to which the LEA has in place effective strategies to promote continuous improvement including Best Value	4	
<b>SECTION 2 SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT</b>			
8	The extent to which the LEA has defined monitoring, challenge, and intervention and shared those understandings with schools	2	
9	The extent to which the LEA's support to schools is focused on areas of greatest need	3	
10	the effectiveness of the LEA's work in monitoring schools and challenging them to improve, including the use made of performance data	3	
11	The effectiveness of LEA identification of and intervention in under-performing schools	2	
12	Support to schools for raising standards in Literacy	2	NI
13	Support to schools for raising standards in Numeracy	2	NI
14	Support to schools for raising standards in and the curriculum use of information and communications technology	4	
15	Support to schools for raising standards at Key Stage 3	4	
16	Support to schools in raising standards of ethnic minority and Traveller children including the effective deployment of the ethnic minority and Traveller achievement grants	3	NI

17	Support to schools for gifted and talented pupils	4	
18	Support for school leadership and management including support for schools effort to achieve Best Value	3	
19	Support to school governors	4	
20	The effectiveness of its services to support school management	4	
20a	Financial services	2	
20b	Human resources	5	
20c	Property services	4	
20d	Services for ICT in school administration	4	
20e	Cleaning and caretaking	0	
20f	Grounds maintenance	0	
20g	Catering	4	
21	The extent to which the LEA is successful in assuring the supply and quality of teachers	2	
22	The effectiveness of the leadership of services to support school improvement	3	
23	The effectiveness of the deployment of staff to support school improvement	2	
24	The effectiveness of strategic planning of services to support school improvement	3	
25	The effectiveness of the performance management of services to support school improvement	2	
26	The standard of expertise of staff to support school improvement	3	
27	The effectiveness of services to school improvement	3	
28	Value for money of services to support school improvement	2	
<b>SECTION 3 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS</b>			
29	The effectiveness of the LEA's strategy for SEN	4	

30	The effectiveness of the LEA in taking steps to meet its statutory obligations in respect of SEN	4	
31	The effectiveness of the LEA in exercising its SEN functions to support school improvement	4	
32	The extent to which the LEA has exercised its SEN functions to meet the requirements of value for money	4	
<b>SECTION 4 PROMOTING SOCIAL INCLUSION</b>			
33	The overall effectiveness of the LEA in promoting social inclusion	3	
34	The effectiveness of the LEA in relation to the provision of school places	2	NI
35	The effectiveness of the LEA in discharging asset management planning	4	
36	The effectiveness of the LEA in relation to admissions to schools	2	NI
37	The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to provision for pupils who have no school place	5	
38	The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to school attendance	3	
39	The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to behaviour at school	4	
40	The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to health and safety, welfare and child protection	4	
41	The extent to which the LEA meets its statutory requirements and achieves value for money in relation to children in public care	2	
42	The effectiveness of the LEA in combating racism	3	
<b>SECTION 5 CORPORATE ISSUES</b>			
43	The clarity, consistency, coherence and feasibility of corporate plans	4	
44	The effectiveness of the procedures for implementing and evaluating corporate plans	3	
45	The speed, transparency and effectiveness of decision-making (particularly financial decision-making)	3	
46	The quality of leadership provided by elected members	4	
47	The quality of the leadership provided by senior officers	2	

48	The quality of advice given to elected members	2	
49	The effectiveness of the co-ordination of actions in support of priorities involving collaboration between several agencies	3	
<b>OVERALL JUDGEMENTS</b>			
50	The progress made by the LEA overall	3	
51	The LEA's capacity for further improvement and to address the recommendations of the inspection	3	
52	The overall effectiveness of the LEA	3	

<p><u>JRS numerical judgements are allocated on a 1 to 7 point scale:</u></p> <p>Grade 1 – Very good</p> <p>Grade 2 – Good</p> <p>Grade 3 – Highly satisfactory</p> <p>Grade 4 – Satisfactory</p> <p>Grade 5 – Unsatisfactory</p> <p>Grade 6 – Poor, significant weaknesses</p> <p>Grade 7 – Very poor, fails to provide effective support to schools</p>			
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