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APPENDIX: SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

1. This inspection was carried out by OFSTED in conjunction with the Audit Commission under Section 38 of the Education Act 1997. The inspection used the *Framework for the Inspection of Local Education Authorities* which focuses on the effectiveness of local education authority (LEA) work to support school improvement.

2. The inspection was partly based on data, some of which was provided by the LEA, on school inspection information and audit reports, on documentation and discussions with LEA members, staff in the Education Department and in other Council departments and representatives of the LEA's partners. In addition, a questionnaire seeking views on aspects of the LEA's work was circulated to 82 schools. The response rate was 95 per cent.

3. The inspection also involved studies of the effectiveness of particular aspects of the LEA's work through visits to four secondary, two special and 11 primary schools. The visits tested the views of governors, headteachers and other staff on the key aspects of the LEA's strategy. The visits also considered whether the support which is provided by the LEA contributes, where appropriate, to the discharge of the LEA's statutory duties, is effective in contributing to improvements in the school, and provides value for money.

COMMENTARY

4. Barnet serves an area on the northern edge of outer London. Unemployment in the area is relatively low but, as in most London boroughs, there are areas of social deprivation. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is close to the national average. Almost 30 per cent of pupils are of minority ethnic heritage and there is a wide diversity of languages and cultures in schools. About one third of pupils speak English as an additional language. Approximately one third of secondary pupils reside outside of the borough.

5. Schools generally perform well. Data from OFSTED inspections shows the proportion of schools providing good or very good quality education is higher than that found nationally. This is reflected in test and examination results, which are well above national figures and in line with, or slightly above those of authorities with similar socio-economic characteristics. Rates of improvement, starting from a high base, generally match or exceed national rates.

6. Barnet LEA has more strengths than weaknesses, though the weaknesses are considerable. The LEA is effective in its major areas of responsibility and takes reasonable steps to meet its statutory duties. It has contributed more effectively to improvement in primary and special schools than in secondary schools where working relationships are less well established. There is strong leadership and a cross-party commitment to the priorities for education by members. Heads of service and other officers provide sound leadership and there are effective working relationships between members and officers. Members are provided with good quality advice from officers. Expenditure on education has been consistently above the standard spending assessment and most aspects of the service are well resourced. The LEA is delegating a higher proportion of its budget to schools than similar authorities and the costs of centrally provided services are generally below London averages. The LEA's education development plan is feasible, but there are weaknesses in aspects of strategic planning which reduce the overall effectiveness of some individual services.

7. The following functions are exercised particularly effectively:

- support for literacy;
- support for numeracy;
- support to governors;
- behaviour support in mainstream schools;
- support for multi-cultural education and English as an additional language;
- support for early years education;
- provision of financial and personnel advice.

8. The performance of a number of other functions is satisfactory or better. These include: aspects of support for school improvement; partnerships with other agencies; support for senior managers in schools, newly qualified teachers, attendance; the planning of school places. There are weaknesses in the strategic planning for information and communication technology (ICT) but the quality of classroom support is good. Support for pupils with special educational needs (SEN),

including those with statements, is good once the level of provision has been decided.

9. By contrast, there were inadequacies in the following functions:

- aspects of strategic planning relating to the EDP, SEN and behaviour support;
- the collection, analysis and use of data to set targets;
- support to schools in special measures;
- aspects of support to management in schools;
- the speed of producing statements of SEN and the amendment of statements;
- the development of capital projects and the maintenance of premises.

10. The LEA faces considerable challenges in working with its secondary schools. Half the schools were previously accustomed to the independence of grant maintained status and are sceptical about what the LEA can offer them. There is also an unusually wide variety of types of secondary schools, including selective schools, single sex schools, voluntary aided and specialist schools. The LEA has only had limited success so far in meeting these challenges. What is lacking with all schools, but of particular relevance in the secondary sector, are formally defined partnerships setting out agreed responsibilities and accountabilities on both sides. The lack of such arrangements leads to a degree of mistrust on the part of some schools and uncertainty about the LEA's precise role in monitoring, challenging, supporting and intervening.

11. The Council has acted positively and promptly in response to the government's agenda for modernising local government and has put in place a new political decision-making structure. The potential advantages of this in terms of better co-ordination and clearer delegation of powers to officers are becoming apparent. A new officer structure, reflecting changes to the political structure, has recently been introduced. Details of the structure are still being developed and there is a lack of clarity about some areas of responsibility, both across and within services. This uncertainty is resulting in very heavy work loads for some senior officers.

12. Schools do not have a sufficient understanding of how the LEA allocates centrally held resources for supporting schools or what their precise entitlement is to services purchased as a 'package'. This lack of transparency leads to confusion and makes it difficult for schools to judge whether the LEA's provision represents best value. In that sense, services are not sufficiently accountable.

13. There is thus considerable scope for improvement and no room for complacency. The schools generally perform well, but have the potential to do even better. The LEA should challenge them to do so more consistently. The LEA recognises the considerable task it faces and has the professional expertise and commitment to take effective action on the recommendations made in this report.

SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

i Context

14. Barnet serves an area on the northern edge of outer London. Unemployment in the area is relatively low but, as in most London boroughs, there are areas of social deprivation and the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is close to the national average. Almost 30 per cent of pupils are of minority ethnic heritage and there is a wide diversity of languages and cultures in schools. About one third of pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs is slightly below the national rate. Approximately one third of secondary school pupils reside outside Barnet.

15. There are some 46,486 pupils on roll in mainstream primary and secondary schools. The LEA provides four nursery schools, 87 primary schools, 21 secondary schools, five special schools and two pupil referral units. Four primary and 10 secondary schools were formerly grant maintained (GM). There are seven single sex schools of which three are fully selective. There is an unusually high proportion of denominational and religious schools.

ii Performance

16. Schools generally perform well. OFSTED inspection data show that the proportion of primary and secondary schools where the quality of education is good or very good is above that of statistical neighbours and well above national figures. Two schools have been designated as Beacon schools. Grades for teaching are above national figures for primary and secondary schools. Three primary schools and two special schools are currently subject to special measures.

17. Attainment in tests at Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 in English and mathematics is above national averages and in line with statistical neighbours. The proportion of pupils achieving five or more GCSE passes at grades A*-C is well above national averages and above statistical neighbours. The proportions achieving one A*-G pass and five A*-G passes are similar to national figures. Rates of improvement in key stage tests and GCSE have generally been at or above national rates. Unauthorised absence and exclusions are below national rates.

iii Funding

18. Key features of Barnet's education funding in the present financial year and recent past include:

- the Council plans to spend £141,249,000 on education in 1999/00 which is £5,332,000 or 3.9 per cent above the Standard Spending Assessment (SSA). This continues a pattern of expenditure above SSA;
- capital expenditure on education is project based and has therefore varied significantly in recent years. For 1999/00 it is planned to be £4,057,000. It reached a high point of £7,398,000 in 1996/97 and a low of £2,724,000 in 1997/98;

- final figures for 1998/99 show more than half of the schools carrying forward a surplus exceeding five per cent of their budget. Three schools have budget deficits;
- in the last year for which final figures are available, 1997/98, the Council's expenditure per pupil was below the average for London in all phases but above that of Outer London and at about the 25th percentile overall. In the current year the Council plans to spend an overall average of £2970 per pupil compared to the London average of £3098, an Outer London average of £2940 and a national average of £2625;
- in 1999/2000 the LEA received an allocation from the Standards Fund of £5.9m and an infant class size grant of £273K;
- in 1998/99 the Council's delegation of budgets to schools was close to the London average; in 1999/00 it plans to be significantly above that average (86.1 per cent compared to 81.5 per cent). No other London borough increased its level of delegation by a larger percentage;
- reflecting the comparatively high level of delegation by the Council, the funds it retains centrally are allocated to services that cost, per capita, less than the comparable London averages. This is particularly noticeable in the areas of school improvement where the Council centrally spends £16 per pupil compared to the Outer London average of £34 and access (excluding transport and school meals) where the Barnet figure is £19 per pupil compared to £44. The Council spends more than the Outer London average on home to school transport; £75 per pupil compared to £51.

iv Council structure

19. There are 28 Conservative, 26 Labour and 6 Liberal Democrat members. Labour and Liberal Democrat members form the current administration. The Council has been quick to respond to the government's agenda for modernising local government. In November 1998 it abolished service based committees and replaced them with a decision making structure which establishes a clear division between policy and implementation and the scrutiny of performance. The policy and implementation committee has responsibility for agreeing the education development plan and the activities to be undertaken to support schools in raising achievement. The effectiveness of policies and the quality of service delivery are monitored by the scrutiny commission for education and children.

20. The effects of this radical change in the members' policy making structure are yet to be felt fully but there is already some evidence of it facilitating better co-ordination, for example in early years education. There is also less bureaucracy and officers welcome the clearer delineation of decision making powers. Members are still developing their new role, particularly in relation to scrutiny commissions, and there is still some lack of clarity about how members will monitor progress on implementing key policies. Some concerns were expressed to the inspection team about a perceived loss of representation by stakeholders such as the unions and

governors in the public debate on policy, although it is recognised there are still formal ways for these groups to make their views known to members.

21. A new officer structure, to reflect changes in the political structure, was agreed in January 1999. The implications of this are discussed in section 3(i).

v The Education Development Plan

22. The main vehicle for the LEA's strategy for school improvement is the Education Development Plan (EDP). The plan has DfEE approval for three years, subject to general requirements, and was implemented from April 1999.

23. The priorities defined in the EDP are:

- improving the quality of teaching and learning;
- enhancing and supporting school leadership and management;
- supporting schools causing concern;
- a commitment to inclusive education;
- literacy
- numeracy
- information and communications technology (ICT)

24. The priorities reflect the national agenda and actions in support of them are based on a local audit of pupil and school performance. There is a substantial overlap between support for teaching and the other priorities, but they are otherwise appropriate. A reasonable level of consultation took place on the draft EDP within the tight timescale allowed and the views of schools are reflected in the final version. The school survey and visits to schools reveal that primary and special schools were more satisfied with the consultation procedures than secondary schools. Similarly, primary and special schools feel that the priorities and associated actions match their needs more closely than do secondary schools.

25. The LEA has not had a strong tradition of collecting and analysing performance data. This means a lack of rigour in some aspects of the audit for the EDP, resulting in actions to support priorities not being targeted precisely enough on specific needs. For example, too little is known about the performance of particular groups of pupils. For the same reason, some success criteria lack precision and are not easily measurable. There is variation too in the quality of the action plans underpinning the priorities. Those for numeracy and literacy, for example, have a much clearer and more logical sequence of development than those for teaching and management.

26. Despite these weaknesses, the EDP is feasible and the LEA has allocated adequate resources to implementing it. As other sections in this report demonstrate, the LEA has the professional expertise to support the key areas of school improvement it has identified. Actions within the EDP are cross-referenced to other statutory and non-statutory plans. The new structures for members and officers are helping to facilitate a more integrated approach to school improvement, although it is too early to evaluate fully the effectiveness of these developments.

27. The LEA has recently established a group of stakeholders to monitor progress on the EDP. An officer is identified to take a lead on each of the priorities. A monitoring and evaluation group reports findings to the CEO. This is good practice but it is too early to evaluate the effectiveness of this process. It is intended that the members' scrutiny commission will regularly monitor performance indicators for education. At the time of the inspection it was not clear to members how they would fulfil their responsibility to monitor overall progress on the EDP.

28. The LEA has set aggregated statutory targets for Key Stage 2 and GCSE that are challenging but realistic. Results from 1999 indicate satisfactory overall progress towards these targets, with the exception of the proportion of pupils achieving one or more grades A*-G at GCSE. However, there is an unevenness in the progress being made by individual schools. For example, the proportion of pupils gaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A*-C declined in a quarter of schools between 1998 and 1999. Some individual school Key Stage 2 targets appear to be insufficiently challenging while others are too optimistic in the light of the 1999 results. The target for looked after children is not yet based on firm evidence of past performance and it is therefore difficult to judge progress. The weaknesses in the approach to setting targets in some schools is discussed in Section 2(iii) of this report.

vi The allocation of resources to priorities

29. The LEA allocates resources effectively to the main budget headings associated with its educational priorities. The lack of performance data already described in section 1(v) makes it difficult to target centrally held resources precisely enough within some areas of support.

30. The authority has consulted with schools about the allocation of resources in the context of Fair Funding, the EDP and school development planning. Although the school survey shows that many schools do not feel able to influence that process significantly, there is evidence in the last planning round of schools having an impact on strategic planning and its financial implications.

31. The LEA meets its statutory duties in relation to the local management scheme (LMS) for funding schools. There is adequate consultation on the formula and schools are generally clear about their entitlement to delegated funds. However, they are often not clear about how time, personal and other support to schools from centrally held resources are being allocated. In addition, when schools buy a package of support services they are uncertain about their entitlement to individual services. It is not clear to them whether the use of each service is open ended, limited to a number of days or based on a measure of need. Schools are therefore not always able to judge satisfactorily whether LEA services represent value for money. The LEA recognises some of these difficulties and is responding, for example by inviting alternative providers from outside the LEA to have stands at its annual services 'fair'.

32. The LEA lacks comprehensive information on the comparative cost and performance of some services and therefore has ground to make up in its approach to Best Value. Personnel, for example, uses a wide variety of performance indicators, measures its costs against those of other providers and evaluates its effectiveness in meeting its customers' needs. In contrast, at the time of the inspection, the traded element of the advisory service still had a long way to go to reach the requirements of Best Value scrutiny.

vii Recommendations

In order to improve the quality of the EDP:

- (i) develop better performance data to enable a more rigorous audit of needs to be carried out so that actions to support priorities can be targeted more precisely and that success criteria are sharper and more quantifiable; ensure all plans follow a logical sequence of development.

In order to improve the allocation of resources to priorities:

- (ii) make the allocation of resources and some arrangements under Fair Funding more transparent to schools; clarify service level agreements with schools; ensure more rapid progress towards meeting Best Value criteria; communicate to schools clear information about the allocation of resources.

SECTION 2: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

i Implications of other functions

33. The EDP sets out the strategy for school improvement. The strengths and weaknesses of the EDP have already been analysed in section 1(v). However, there are important aspects of the LEA's support for school improvement which are outside the scope of the EDP. These include, for example, the considerable resources allocated to improving access to education through support for English as an Additional Language (EAL), attendance and behaviour. There are also a range of management services such as personnel, finance and property which support the infrastructure of schools and thereby contribute to school improvement. These aspects, together with a more detailed analysis of the effectiveness of support for the priorities identified in the EDP, are developed elsewhere in the report.

34. There are considerable strengths in the LEA's support for school improvement. Individual services, including the inspection and advisory service (IAS), the governor support unit, the multi-ethnic and language support service, the behaviour support service and aspects of SEN services are effective, particularly in primary and special schools. Finance and personnel services are purchased by a high proportion of schools and provide good support. The Council and heads of service provide sound leadership in supporting school improvement.

There are four important weaknesses which reduce the overall effectiveness of the LEA's provision. These are summarised below and illustrated in other sections of the report.

- A lack of clarity in the organisational structure which results in some overlap of functions and accountabilities and very heavy workloads for some senior officers. It has also led to some confusion for schools in knowing who is responsible for a particular area of work. [sections: 2(vi); 3(i);4(l),(ii)]
- A lack of transparency in the allocation of resources held centrally to support school improvement. Schools are not clear as to what they are entitled to and what they themselves are responsible for. [sections: 1(vi); 2(ii); 3(ii); 4(iii)]
- Shortcomings in the quality of management and performance data available to the LEA. This has already been referred to in relation to the audit for the EDP but is a weakness across a number of services. [sections: 1(v); 2(ii),(iii);5(*ethnic monitoring*)]

Partnerships between the LEA and its schools are ill-defined, particularly in relation to secondary schools. This has led to a degree of mistrust and a lack of openness on both sides [section: 2(ii)]

ii Monitoring, challenge, support, intervention

35. Link advisers have the key role in monitoring, challenging, supporting and intervening in schools. They have operated under various guises for some time but their role has recently been clarified in the light of the Code of Practice on LEA/school relationships. All schools receive a minimum of a half day visit each half term. This is used to monitor progress, set targets and agree further support if it is deemed to be necessary. This time is also used in primary schools to support school self-review and to agree an annual report for governors which evaluates current performance and progress on the action plan. Schools are categorised according to their performance and the progress they are making and this determines the level of any extra support they receive.

36. Nearly all primary and special schools welcome the role of the link adviser and feel they provide effective support. The response of secondary schools is more variable and there is some scepticism about the effectiveness of the role. Visits to schools generally confirmed these overall perceptions. The role of the link adviser is less clearly defined in secondary schools and there is considerable variation in the effectiveness with which they monitor and challenge performance.

37. The LEA has not shared the precise categories which define the level of concern and associated support with schools. This lack of transparency has led, not surprisingly, to confusion for headteachers and governors about what support they are entitled to and what they need to provide themselves. In a few schools, it has also led to a degree of mistrust about what the LEA is attempting to do. The LEA has given insufficient thought to its role in relation to the many schools which are performing well and need a 'light touch' approach. It is questionable whether all these schools, particularly secondary schools, need the current level of visiting.

38. Several of the weaknesses in the LEA's role in monitoring, challenging and supporting schools stem from a lack of formally defined partnerships between the LEA and its schools. Current arrangements do not set out clearly enough the responsibilities and accountabilities for supporting improvement by both the school and the LEA. The need to develop these arrangements with the secondary sector, where the range and variety of types of school pose difficult challenges, is particularly pressing.

39. The LEA has recently introduced annual reports to governing bodies in primary schools. These are prepared by the link adviser in discussion with the headteacher. They provide an analysis of current performance and an evaluation of progress on addressing key issues. They also include a set of questions for the governing body to consider. Headteachers and governors in the schools visited generally welcomed this process and found the reports useful. The inspection found the majority of reports provided a good assessment of the school and the suggested questions to governors were helpful. The reports provide a useful focus to the work of the link adviser with the school. However, there is some variation in quality and a minority tended towards description rather than rigorous evaluation.

40. The work of the link adviser in helping primary schools develop self-review is in its early stages of development but is also helping to provide a useful focus on improvement. This is evaluated in section 2(ix).

41. The LEA has not yet introduced the annual review process described above in secondary schools. As a consequence, some of the work of link advisers lacks direction. There are formal lines of reporting outcomes to headteachers but not yet to governors and other officers. Without a formal annual review process it is difficult to justify the existing allocation of time in some secondary schools.

42. The LEA has yet to establish a system for centrally storing the data and other information kept by services on each school. This means that there is an over-reliance on informal systems of communicating possible problems and makes it difficult for link advisers to obtain an overview of the issues facing the schools they are responsible for. The use of performance data by link advisers in their role of monitoring and challenging schools is evaluated in section (iii) below.

iii Collection and analysis of data

43. The LEA has been slow in developing systems for the collection and analysis of data. Progress has been made during the last 18 months but there is still some way to go both in improving the quality of data and in developing its use in schools in monitoring progress and setting targets. Secondary schools in the school survey were critical of the quality of data and support for data analysis. Weaknesses in some aspects of the collection and analysis of data are already recognised by the LEA and are identified as action points in the EDP. The LEA also accepts that the centralised system for data analysis needs further development.

44. The LEA provides useful data which include baseline assessment information and worthwhile contextualised data which allow comparisons between similar types of schools. The LEA also has data which allows comparison of GCSE performance by subject. The LEA has yet to develop pupil level value added data and there are still weaknesses in its collection of data on the performance of different groups of pupils, such as looked after children and pupils of ethnic heritage. The LEA has a strategy to develop the quality of its data collection and analysis but it has not been successful in communicating this to schools. As a result, schools are unsure of what data to expect in the future and how to develop systems which will be compatible with those of the LEA. The approach so far has been perceived as piecemeal, making it difficult for schools to make effective use of the material provided.

45. Many secondary schools and some primary schools have collected their own data and to date these have sometimes proved more useful than those from the LEA. The LEA has taken the initiative with neighbouring boroughs and agreed a common transfer of baseline data at age 11 but so far, in its first year, this has had little impact on the secondary schools visited. Training in the use of data has been provided for individual schools, at cluster group meetings and for governors. The majority of schools visited found this and the LEA's written guidance on assessment, recording and reporting useful.

46. Target-setting in many of the schools visited has not been underpinned by a rigorous and systematic use of data and some of them confuse target setting with forecasting. There is also variation in how effective link advisers are in using data to challenge schools' targets. It is clear from the LEA's own recent analysis of 1999 results that some schools set short-term targets that were not ambitious enough.

47. Overall, the LEA has yet to establish credibility for its work in this area with all schools. A number of schools feel that their current capacity to collect and make use of data exceeds that of the LEA. Some schools do not yet make full use of the data in their development planning.

iv Support for Literacy

48. The LEA has a clear and effective strategy to support literacy which integrates the national strategy with a range of other initiatives. Responses to the school survey show that support for literacy is well received. Visits to schools as part of this inspection as well as visits to monitor the national strategy confirm this finding and also provide evidence of effective training and other support.

49. Progress towards the LEA's Key Stage 2 literacy target for 2002 of 82 per cent is good, with 76 per cent of pupils achieving Level 4 in 1999. The rate of improvement over the past three years has been faster than the national rate in 30 out of 74 schools. The more intensive support for literacy has been broadly effective. Half of the 20 most improved schools were ones in receipt of intensive literacy support during 1998-99.

50. Schools visited gave particular praise for: support for literacy co-ordinators; up-to-date advice; in-class support and monitoring by literacy consultants; in-service training for classroom assistants; advice on resources; use of the literacy resource centre at the professional development centre; regular newsletters; family literacy; help for pupils with SEN and initiatives to raise boys' achievement. A small minority of schools felt that the NLS training had been insufficiently flexible to meet their specific needs. Conferences organised to introduce the NLS to secondary schools have been well organised and well received. There was evidence of the effectiveness of the LEA's strategy in nearly all the schools visited.

v Support for Numeracy

51. The LEA's strategy for introducing the National Numeracy Strategy (NNS) is also clear and its implementation is being well managed. The LEA's work in numeracy and mathematics is very well received in schools. Visits to schools as part of this inspection and monitoring visits for the NNS found evidence of the training and other support making an effective contribution to improvement.

52. The LEA has not been a pilot for the NNS but schools have been encouraged to introduce it early. Progress towards the Key Stage 2 target of 80 per cent of pupils reaching Level 4 and above by 2002 is good, with 77 per cent of pupils achieving this standard in the 1999 tests. In all 10 schools where the LEA has been providing intensive support, the 1999 results showed improvement, when compared to 1998. In seven of these schools, the improvement exceeded the national rate.

53. On visits to schools, there was praise and evidence of effectiveness for: advice on planning and the monitoring of plans; involvement of SENCOs in NNS training; demonstration lessons; in-class support by curriculum advisers; intensive-school training; support for numeracy co-ordinators and inputs to parents evenings. LEA training and support have also helped schools carry out their numeracy audits. The work of 'leading mathematics teachers' in highlighting and disseminating good practice is starting to have an impact. Summer schools for pupils about to enter secondary school and tailored support for mathematics in several secondary schools have also been well received.

vi Support for Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

54. The evidence from the school survey and school visits shows that LEA support for ICT in the curriculum is a balance of strengths and weaknesses. The LEA has been successful in deploying funds for the National Grid for Learning (NGFL) to enable many schools to upgrade their previously limited ICT facilities. Support to improve the quality of teaching in ICT is often good. The LEA has been less successful in communicating its ICT strategy, including its criteria for allocating resources, to schools. Secondary schools were more critical than primary and special schools of the LEA's support in the school survey. Most of the secondary schools already have well-established ICT systems and see a limited role for the LEA.

55. Planning for developing ICT is a significant weakness and many schools are unclear about the LEA's longer-term intentions. Schools were given some help with preparing ICT development plans but received little feedback on the quality of these plans from the LEA. The secondment of part of the ICT adviser's time to support the administration of the LEA's LMS scheme has resulted in some discontinuity in developing the policy and strategy for ICT.

56. ICT co-ordinators in schools have been encouraged by the LEA to gain further accreditation and have generally found regular network meetings and briefings useful. The LEA's ICT curriculum support teachers are well-regarded for providing practical advice and in-school training sessions have been particularly well-received. Technician support is also valued, although a few schools have complained of delays and are now seeking self-help solutions to their ICT problems.

vii Support for schools causing concern

57. Three primary schools and two special schools have been identified as requiring special measures. All were placed in special measures since April 1998. In addition, two primary schools have been identified as having serious weaknesses. The LEA has closed one of the special schools in special measures and is replacing it with a unit at a mainstream school. Two of the primary schools in special measures are an infant and junior school on the same site and the LEA is in the process of amalgamating them to form a new school under new leadership.

58. There have been weaknesses in the LEA's approach to supporting schools in special measures and progress has been too slow. Emphasis has been given to trying to solve the problems by organisational means but, in the meantime, there has sometimes been a lack of effective support to improve management and teaching.

There have also been weaknesses in the coordination of support across services and the LEA has been slow in implementing parts of its action plan.

59. The LEA recognises past weaknesses in its support for schools causing concern and has made it a priority in its EDP. Recent monitoring visits to two schools in special measures found better coordination of support and the LEA taking a more proactive role in supporting management. However, these improvements have yet to impact on standards of teaching and learning and progress overall remains slow. In addition, the LEA does not have rigorous procedures in place to monitor the effectiveness of its support to these schools.

60. Visits as part of this inspection to schools with serious weaknesses and others where the LEA had identified concerns found evidence of effective support and some early signs of a positive impact on standards. There are also some encouraging signs of Key Stage 2 test results improving at rates faster than the national average in schools where the LEA is giving extra support (see sections (iv) and (v) above).

viii Support for Governors

61. The LEA provides effective support to governors.

62. Support for governors comes from the governor training unit, IAS and a range of other services such as finance and personnel. The school survey shows this support is well regarded and there is evidence of its effectiveness in a high proportion of the schools visited. Governors welcome the attendance of link advisers at governing body meetings as a way of communicating concerns to the LEA, receiving advice and being kept informed of LEA policy. Governors spoke highly of the quality of training, although some governors from secondary schools felt it was occasionally orientated too much to primary schools. Guidance materials, director's reports and other written communications help governors to be more effective in their work. The recent development of providing annual written reports to governors on the performance of the school with a set of suggested questions to consider is a useful tool in helping governors in their monitoring role.

63. Most schools bought back governor clerking services and felt they provided good value for money. Several of the schools visited were able to cite examples of good support to governors of schools facing difficult personnel or financial issues.

ix Support for school management

64. Support for management, including governors, is a priority in the EDP. The role of the link adviser, the use of performance data in supporting management and support for governors have already been evaluated in sections (ii), (iii) and (iv) above. The LEA also provides a range of courses for senior and middle managers, support for new headteachers and support for development planning. The LEA works in partnership with local universities to provide some aspects of management training. The take up of courses is good by both primary and secondary schools and they are generally well received. The second cycle of OFSTED inspections shows an improvement in the quality of management and there was evidence of the LEA making at least a satisfactory contribution to this in nearly all of the schools visited.

65. Support for new headteachers is generally good, but there are a few examples of headteachers being without a mentor in the first few months of their appointment. Support for school development planning is effective and reflected in the generally good quality of planning seen in the schools visited. The proportion of headteachers appraised in the last academic year is low and a considerable number of headteachers have not been subject to appraisal in the past two years. As in many LEAs, support for teacher appraisal has lapsed pending new guidance from central government. Support for newly qualified teachers was rated as at least satisfactory in most schools and the LEA is effective in its implementation of the new arrangements for teacher induction.

66. A key part of the strategy for improving management in primary schools is developing self evaluation and review. The model is a good one. The criteria for assessing a particular aspect of school improvement are introduced by an adviser at a cluster group meeting. This is followed up by the link adviser and headteacher jointly evaluating it during a school visit. The model is still in its early stages of development but most headteachers found it a useful management tool. Its effectiveness in some schools is reduced because of a lack of rigorous evidence used in reaching judgements. The best examples were where advisers worked alongside headteachers in assessing the quality of teaching and learning.

67. The LEA does not have a model to support self evaluation and review in secondary schools in the way that it does in primary schools. There are some isolated examples of the LEA providing useful support in helping secondary schools to monitor their own performance, but the LEA has yet to make an effective overall contribution in this area.

xi Recommendations

In order to improve monitoring, challenge, support and intervention:

- (i) set out partnership agreements which identify the accountabilities and responsibilities for each school and the LEA and which clearly establish the level of support each school is entitled to;
- ii) develop more effective procedures for monitoring the impact of support to schools in special measures;
- (iii) develop the skills of link advisers in their role of monitoring and challenging performance and ensure more rigour and consistency in their work.

In order to enhance the collection and analysis of data:

- (iv) communicate to schools a clear strategy for the development of data analysis.

In order to improve support for ICT:

- (v) clarify the strategy for ICT and communicate it clearly to schools, making the criteria for allocating funds for ICT transparent.

In order to improve school management:

- (vi) provide more focused training for senior managers to develop school supported self-review and target setting;
- (vii) work with secondary schools to define and implement a strategy for developing the monitoring of performance by the link adviser and school self-review.

SECTION 3: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

i Corporate planning

68. Education is the top corporate priority for Barnet and there is a strong cross-party commitment to it by members. There is general agreement on priorities and education has been consistently funded above SSA. Members have provided sound leadership for education. Officers have been allowed to get on with their work without unnecessary interference and the new political structure described in section 1(iv) further strengthens and clarifies their delegated powers. Officers provide members with good quality advice and are accountable to the chief executive for their areas of responsibility.

69. The contribution of education to other corporate priorities and the contribution of other services to education are implicit in corporate planning. For example, the role of education and life-long learning are embedded in the priority to support economic development in the borough. The new Council structure is helping to promote a more coherent approach by members to policy making. The scrutiny commissions are starting to provide a more rigorous evaluation of corporate plans and draw on a wide range of evidence across services.

70. The speed of decision making is generally adequate and the new Council structure is designed to improve this further. Financial decisions are made in appropriate time and schools are provided with sufficiently early and accurate indicative budgets to allow planning to take place. However, the review of SEN has been necessarily lengthy and important decisions are still awaited.

71. The LEA provides adequate opportunities for consultation with schools and other stakeholders. Primary and special schools consider the consultation arrangements to be more effective than secondary schools. Secondary headteachers have recently agreed with the LEA to take over the control of their termly meeting. Schools feel there is a lack of transparency in the criteria for allocating resources and are unclear about what they are entitled to. Evidence from the inspection supports this view.

72. A new officer structure was agreed in January 1999, reflecting the changes to the council's decision making structure. The Director for Education and Children is one of five strategic directors responsible for steering the corporate management of the council. Services have been regrouped into 25 units, each led by a head of service, fully accountable for all aspects of performance. The key services for education are: standards and achievement; services to schools; children and families; early years; youth service. The Head of Standards and achievement is also the Chief Education Officer. It is too early to assess fully the effectiveness of the structure. At the time of the inspection there was a lack of clarity about some areas of responsibility both across and within services, for example in education standards and performance and in children and families. The lack of clarity is also leading to very heavy work loads for some senior officers.

73. Senior officers individually provide sound leadership but the task of providing a strong overall steer for education is a difficult one under the new structure. The Director for Education and Children does not have line management responsibilities for the services supporting education and the Chief Education Officer is only one of five officers concerned with pupils and schools. Schools visited did not have a clear understanding of the new officer structure and were sometimes confused about who had responsibility for particular areas of work, for example in aspects of support for SEN.

74. The LEA has successfully promoted some good links with other partners and agencies. The Education Business Partnership has established strong links with local employers to support work related aspects of the curriculum in both primary and secondary schools. The Youth Service supports work with disaffected pupils through the OASIS project. Various LEA partners have helped in setting up a multimedia centre for teachers and pupils. There is good cooperation with local colleges of further education and universities to support aspects of the curriculum and in-service training for teachers. The authority has worked well with the TEC to provide out of school activities, breakfast and homework clubs. The local Health Authority is working with the LEA and other partners in promoting a health education programme in schools. A multi-agency approach to drug and alcohol is currently being developed.

ii Support for school infrastructure

75. Financial services, personnel and some aspects of ICT provide good support for school infrastructure. The provision of computing facilities for administration and the maintenance of its premises and management of its building stock are not satisfactory.

76. The LEA offers a full range of **financial services** and over 90 per cent of schools purchase some or all services. The school survey and visits to schools reveal justifiably high levels of satisfaction with these services. The quality of the service is further reflected in generally good budget management by schools. Only two schools have serious budget deficits and appropriate action is being taken in both cases. The LEA is monitoring the 63 schools with surpluses in excess of five per cent and requesting action to reduce them where necessary.

77. More than 90 per cent of schools buy back into a **personnel service**. The school survey showed a high level of satisfaction with this service and that impression was confirmed during school visits. Schools receive a good day to day service and good support at key points of recruitment or staff competency proceedings. The service conducts an annual quality assurance survey and uses other survey tools to monitor customer satisfaction.

78. **Support for the use of ICT** in administration is purchased by 84 per cent of schools. The school survey indicates that support is satisfactory or better. However, support for improving hardware and software is reported as less than satisfactory. The LEA has been slow in its development of electronic data and information exchange with schools and this remains poor, particularly in secondary schools. ICT for administration has been under-resourced for a number of years and is an area where the LEA's leadership has not been satisfactory.

79. The LEA has not provided satisfactorily for the **maintenance and asset management** of its building stock. Since April 1999, maintenance budgets have

been fully delegated to schools. However, the budget delegated for maintenance was nine per cent less in 1999/2000 than the equivalent budget retained centrally in 1998/99. In the school survey, the following related areas were described as either unsatisfactory or poor: standard of school premises; building condition and suitability surveys; landlord responsibility for structural maintenance; technical advice for building maintenance; programming major projects; in-house provision for buildings maintenance; cleaning.

80. Visits to schools and inspection reports provide evidence of a substantial number of buildings being in an unsatisfactory condition due to poor maintenance. In a small minority of cases this caused some disruption to teaching but it had very rarely resulted in school closures. Evidence from visits indicates that schools have historically been unable to understand how maintenance and capital projects were allocated or where their school stood in the LEA's priorities. Some schools did not know when their last building condition survey occurred. Many schools expressed legitimate concerns about the inability of the delegation formula for maintenance funds to take proper account of their different starting points and, in particular, the different levels of neglect.

81. The LEA acknowledges the concerns expressed by schools and the existence of a large maintenance backlog. They confirm that a lack of investment in planned maintenance is leading to pressure to spend on reactive maintenance. The LEA welcomes the transparency in decision making which the asset management plan requires. At the time of the inspection, the LEA was behind in the development of its plan but had a schedule in place to meet the required timescale.

iii Recommendations

In order to improve strategic management:

- (i) clarify the organisational arrangements between and within services for aspects of support for pupils and schools;
- (ii) develop as rapidly as possible systems for the electronic collection and exchange of data and information;
- (iii) take steps to improve the quality of school buildings.

SECTION 4: SPECIAL EDUCATION PROVISION

i Strategy

82. Elected Members have a strong commitment to meeting the needs of individual children. The contribution of officers across the range of special educational needs (SEN) support services is well received in schools but weaknesses in the LEA's strategic planning and management have reduced their effectiveness.

83. The LEA has developed a comprehensive range of services and responded promptly to current trends and national initiatives. Most recently, the Council has drafted a sound inclusive education policy in response to the government's green paper, 'Excellence for all children'. This carries the widespread support of schools and other stakeholders. Good progress has already been made in implementing this in some schools. The LEA has also drafted a useful new SEN handbook for schools, along with helpful updated guidance on a variety of procedures, including revised criteria for assessing pupils at stages one to three of the Code of Practice for SEN and a new directory for parents. The latter draws together the contributions from educational, health and community and reflects the LEA's determination to coordinate the work of agencies in supporting SEN.

84. The difficulty for schools and parents is that the overall strategy has not been sufficiently clear or convincing. This is mainly because it has evolved piecemeal, resulting in over-complicated structures and procedures and uncertainty about responsibilities at a senior level. Other contributory factors include staff deployment not always matching the LEA's intentions and documentation not always being kept up-to-date. The LEA acknowledges these weaknesses and is taking steps to address many of them. The interim report of the LEA's current SEN review proposes measures intended to clarify policy as a whole and bring about a more efficient distribution of resources. However, more still needs to be done to simplify and clarify the management structure which serves to implement the policy.

ii Statutory obligations

85. The LEA meets the Code of Practice for SEN but there are serious delays in the completion and amendment of statements.

86. There is a well defined system for identifying needs at an early stage and progressing them through the stages of the Code of Practice. The school-based review group, the SENIT, is effective in initiating appropriate action where it is needed. Thereafter, the system frequently fails to operate effectively. In most cases, the educational psychologists are prompt in making their first assessments of pupils referred to them. However, the way in which the referrals are prioritised is not clear to schools, resulting in frustration. Things become worse when the statementing process begins, with many instances cited of delay and apparent inaction. Despite recent improvements, only about half of the statements are issued within the target period of eighteen weeks. Amendments to statements are also slow to be made. In the worst cases, they are not made before the next annual review makes them out-of-date. Much time is wasted by schools in chasing up progress. Response to enquiries can be slow and officers are said not to be readily accessible.

All this brings schools and officers into potential conflict with parents, resulting in the possibility of unnecessary tribunals. However, the LEA has an effective parent partnership to support parents of children with SEN.

87. The LEA is well aware of the problem and is trying to remedy it by making the administration more rigorous and responsive and by improving support in the earlier stages so that fewer statements are called for. The SEN team monitoring the Code of Practice and the SEN advisory teachers already give useful advice to schools on how they are performing their role.

88. Once pupils' needs, at whatever stage, have been agreed, the picture becomes much more positive. The provision made is generally appropriate, sufficient and of good quality. There was ample evidence in the schools visited of valuable work done by advisory SEN teachers, educational psychologists, the behaviour management teams and others. It embraces testing and assessment, direct support to pupils, and advice and training for school staff. The expertise and advice available within the inspection and advisory service to support SEN also commands widespread respect.

89. Two special schools have required special measures. One of these, a school for pupils with emotional and behavioural problems, has now been closed. The LEA is in the process of making provision for EBD pupils in a unit attached to a mainstream secondary school. In the meantime, the LEA has made appropriate arrangements for educating the pupils in its mainstream schools or in special schools in other boroughs. Visits to two special schools showed they were making good provision in their respective areas. There are some specific shortages in health service provision, such as speech and language and occupational therapies. The Health Authority is currently working with the LEA to consider how to make best use of its specialist resources and a report is to be produced shortly.

iii Improvement and Value for Money

90. OFSTED inspection data shows that the provision for SEN and the progress of pupils with SEN is at least satisfactory in most schools. Evidence from visits to schools indicates that LEA support makes an effective contribution to this generally positive picture.

91. Central expenditure on SEN is lower than the Outer London average, reflecting the recent delegation of expenditure for statements to schools. Expenditure on special schools is comparatively low but there is relatively high spending on out of borough and independent school placements. There is some uncertainty in schools about how funds delegated for pupils with statements of SEN can be spent. The wording of some statements also leads to differences in interpretation between parents and schools.

92. Part of the LEA's formula for calculating notional SEN budgets is determined by the number of pupils on the school's SEN register at stages 2 and 3. There is therefore a financial incentive for schools to move pupils up the stages and a disincentive in moving them down. This could be the cause of the fact that the number of pupils on the SEN register in some schools is disproportionate to average

levels of attainment as measured by national tests. The LEA has a team charged with monitoring the placement of pupils on the SEN register but there is justifiable concern that the criteria are not always being applied equitably

93. The LEA has attempted to improve the efficiency of the centralised parts of the SEN service by restructuring and, particularly of late, a rigorous form of self review within each section. So far, it has not entirely succeeded, as the administrative inefficiencies cited above make apparent. The LEA therefore achieves reasonable value for money with its SEN provision but there is also scope for considerable improvement.

iv Analysis of overall performance

94. Good work is done by both LEA personnel and staff in schools and that is of paramount importance. Nevertheless, there are weaknesses in the LEA system and structures which, at the least, cause frustration and, at the worst, prevent it from meeting its statutory obligations in some instances. The root cause of the administrative problems is that the LEA has in the past been too reactive to internal and external pressures and initiatives, allowing its management structures and interdisciplinary groups to become unwieldy and staff to be deployed inefficiently. Senior management has not had a clear enough view of how the whole system should operate, nor taken sufficient control of developments as they occurred. The management structure is far from clear to schools. The statutory assessment process is currently overburdened.

95. The functions of IAS, advisory SEN teachers, educational psychologists and the behaviour management staff are, in large part, complementary but they also overlap considerably. This was evident in the varying ways in which they were deployed in the schools visited. There is a strong culture of interdisciplinary cooperation but, with loosely-defined roles, it sometimes leads to an excessive dependence on time-consuming liaison. There is room for rationalisation.

v Recommendations

In order to improve provision for SEN:

- (i) reduce delays in procedures for statementing and the amendments of statements;
- (ii) simplify and clarify the organisational arrangements, relating staffing levels to function and workload;
- (iii) communicate the outcomes of the current SEN review to stakeholders and urgently implement its priorities;
- (iv) monitor the cost and effectiveness of independent and out of borough special school places to inform the internal level of provision;
- (v) ensure that the wording of statements is unambiguous and that the resource implications are readily understood by schools and parents;

- vi) ensure that the criteria for the allocation of funds for stages 2-3 of the SEN Code of Practice are clear and consistently applied.

SECTION 5: ACCESS

i The supply of school places

96. Barnet manages the provision of school places satisfactorily in circumstances that are complicated by the large number of bodies with responsibility for schools in the Borough.

97. Barnet's forecasting of pupil numbers has been consistently good and well within Audit Commission good practice indicators. Implementation of the plan to reduce infant class sizes is well ahead of the required timetable and virtually completed. Primary school capacity is sufficient and unfilled places overall are close to acceptable levels. Surplus places in the secondary sector are now below the Audit Commission indicator level after some years in excess. In both phases, surplus places are likely to be reduced further in the near future by a growth in pupil numbers. Planned expansion is anticipated in both phases. Despite this, spare capacity remains a concern in five primary schools and one secondary school where it exceeds 25 per cent.

98. Barnet met statutory requirements by establishing a School Organisation Committee (SOC) in May 1999 and publishing a draft School Organisation Plan in June 1999. A report on the consultation on the draft plan was made to SOC in September 1999 and has now been approved.

ii Admissions

99. Admissions arrangements for primary schools in Barnet are well managed. The number of appeals lodged in this phase as a percentage of admissions was 6.3 in 1998 and is well below the lower quartile of 9.3 per cent for Outer London Boroughs.

100. Admission arrangements for secondary schools in Barnet are managed by 13 different admissions authorities: the LEA for nine Community Schools and the twelve governing bodies of Voluntary Aided or Foundation Schools. To some parents the arrangements for secondary transfer therefore appear complicated and many of them express preferences to a number of admissions authorities. This process generates strong feelings and some hostility towards the LEA. At the time of the inspection, about one month into the school year, the parents of 17 Year 7 children had not accepted available places and were making arrangements to educate them otherwise.

101. The inspection found no evidence of the LEA failing to meet its statutory duties on admissions and most aspects are managed well. The LEA does not make offers of secondary school places to parents but fulfils its statutory responsibilities by publishing information on where there are vacancies. The LEA publishes clear guidance and advice to parents of Year 6 pupils on how to express their preference for secondary school. The publication includes all community, foundation and voluntary schools in the borough on an equal basis. The LEA has negotiated a common admissions timetable between all the secondary schools and is trying to negotiate a common application form. There is strong pressure on places in the

single sex secondary schools, particularly for girls, due in part to religious reasons. There are already more single sex places for girls than boys and the LEA has responded imaginatively by sponsoring single sex teaching groups in one mixed school.

102. Although the number of appeals lodged by parents at the secondary transfer stage in 1998 was comparatively high, half were withdrawn before being heard. This is partly due to parents being able to hold temporarily several offers of places, causing a short term lack of offers being made to other parents. In 1998 there were 11 appeal hearings per 100 admissions which is close to the Outer London median. This figure has risen to 15 per hundred in 1999, representing 162 actual appeals of which 141 (86 per cent) were overturned.

103. There is therefore room for improvement in the transfer arrangements to secondary schools but this depends on the cooperation of schools for which the LEA is not the admissions authority. It is also difficult for the LEA to take action until the outcomes of any ballots on the future of grammar schools are known.

iii Provision of Education Otherwise than at school

104. The LEA makes satisfactory provision for the relatively small number of pupils educated otherwise than at school. Children who are sick and educated at home receive three hours tuition each week and five if they are taking examination courses. There is satisfactory provision for hospitalised children. A group of phobic and anxious pupils receive 18 hours tuition each week on LEA premises and older pupils are also taught at a local college of further education.

iv Attendance

105. Attendance in Barnet is better than that found nationally and comparable to that in similar LEAs. A very small minority of schools have overall rates of attendance below 90 per cent. The LEA takes satisfactory steps to meet its statutory duties and to encourage good attendance. There is comprehensive guidance for schools and parents on improving attendance. Visits confirmed that the Educational Social Work Service is effective in most of these schools in checking registers, drawing attention to persistent absentees and making home visits. The service has recently been redesigned to allow more of its resources to be targeted towards schools where the need is greatest, for example through a more rapid follow up of absences.

v Behaviour support

106. The behaviour support plan is not strongly founded upon an analysis of need, nor does it set out a longer term strategy in any depth, something which the LEA is already taking steps to remedy. Nevertheless, there was evidence from the school visits of the behaviour management teams, educational psychologists and SEN advisory teachers working effectively to support pupils and teachers. The outreach work of the pupil referral units in mainstream schools to support the reintegration of excluded pupils is well regarded. The unsatisfactory view of behaviour support shown in the school survey was not borne out by the school visits and it is likely that

it was strongly influenced by the difficulties which schools encounter in dealing with exclusions, particularly in the secondary sector.

107. LEA support has been an important contributory factor in the fall in permanent exclusions from 101 in 1996/7 to 43 in 1998/9. The LEA continues to address the issues of the high proportion of black pupils being excluded and the number of 'unofficial' exclusions. The LEA makes satisfactory provision for excluded pupils and takes appropriate steps to reintegrate them to mainstream schools. However, the LEA has not developed a strategy to ensure a fair distribution of pupils who have been permanently excluded, or those who are moving because of risk of exclusion, amongst its secondary schools. This results in a considerable number of these pupils ending up at the one or two secondary schools that have spare capacity. These schools are also having to cope with the difficulties of substantial numbers of casual admissions, including refugee children and children of asylum seekers.

vi Health, Safety, Welfare, Child Protection

108. The LEA generally takes reasonable steps to promote the health and safety of its employees, pupils and the public. Comprehensive guidance on matters relating to health and safety is provided to schools. Poor maintenance gives rise to concerns about health and safety in some buildings. This is commented upon in section 3(ii) above. The LEA provides appropriate training and guidance to ensure child protection.

vii Looked After Children

109. There are about 230 children in the care of the LEA of whom about three-quarters are in foster homes. The LEA's commitment to individual needs is strongly reflected in its concern for Looked After children. This concern derives from elected members who take a particular interest in the well-being of looked after children and make regular visits to residential homes. The heads of educational social work and educational psychology are the named officers and there is a case conference review system responsible for all monitoring and decision-making regarding the children. The LEA maintains up-to-date and accurate records on looked after children. However, these records are not matched with data on attainment to allow the LEA to monitor performance and target support. This shortcoming is part of the wider problem of centralised data which the LEA is addressing. In some of the schools visited, however, such information did exist and progress was being closely monitored with a view to improving performance.

viii Ethnic minority children

110. The Council and the LEA attach high importance to supporting ethnic minority groups and raising achievement. The school survey indicates that this support is well received and there was considerable evidence from the school visits of its effectiveness. The LEA has only recently introduced comprehensive monitoring of the performance of ethnic minority pupils and there is therefore a lack of robust data to demonstrate progress in raising achievement.

111. Multicultural education has a high profile in Barnet. Its annual fair for multicultural education resources attracts interest from all over the country. The LEA has produced useful resource packs to develop multicultural education in schools. The professional development centre also houses an extensive range of multicultural resources. There is a sharp focus on equality, with an Equal Opportunities Group chaired by a member of the IAS and overall responsibility resting with the Strategic Director for Education and Children. The Council itself has an Equalities Policy Development Committee and has made a positive response to the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry.

112. The LEA's ethnic minority achievement grant (EMAG) action plan sets realistic targets and reflects the EDP priorities. The Multi-ethnic and Language Support Service (MELSS) is a well organised service existing primarily to meet the needs of pupils with EAL. The school survey shows that the quality of its support and the expertise of its staff are held in high regard. There was evidence from inspection reports and visits to schools of the effectiveness of the support for EAL in raising standards. The increased delegation of funding under the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMAG) has meant a swift transition to a bought-back service and it is a mark of confidence that the majority of schools which received support under previous arrangements were quick to agree a package of support.

ix Other aspects of access supporting school improvement

113. Barnet is strongly committed to early years education and makes very good provision in this area. It aims to offer education from three onwards for all children whose parents wish it and is well on the way to achieving this goal. The Early Years and Play Service effectively brings together social services and educational professionals to support both the care and learning of young children. It is a well organised service making efficient use of resources and keeping well abreast of current initiatives. The Early Years Development and Childcare plan has been based on a thorough analysis of needs and takes account of the opportunities presented by a diverse pattern of voluntary and public provision. The LEA's partnership with parents and the wider community is particularly strong in the early years.

x Other aspects of support for social inclusion

114. The LEA is involved in a number of worthwhile initiatives to support social inclusion. An access agreement has been developed with a local university to encourage pupils from disadvantaged homes to go on to further and higher education. The pre-school inclusion project is aimed at ensuring access to education for young children with physical or learning disabilities. Other projects target support on specific schools and particular groups of pupils with high levels of disadvantage or are aimed at improving access for physically disabled pupils.

xi Recommendations

In order to improve the supply of school places and admissions:

- (i) take steps to reduce spare capacity in schools where it exceeds 25 per cent if there is not a rapid increase in the popularity of these schools;
- (ii) work with admission authorities to improve arrangements for secondary transfer.

In order to improve support for excluded pupils and casual admissions:

- (iii) develop strategies with secondary schools to ensure a fairer distribution between schools of permanently excluded pupils and casual admissions.

APPENDIX: SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to improve the quality of the EDP:

- (i) develop better performance data to enable a more rigorous audit of needs to be carried out so that actions to support priorities can be targeted more precisely and that success criteria are sharper and more quantifiable; ensure all plans follow a logical sequence of development.

In order to improve the allocation of resources to priorities:

- (i) make the allocation of resources and some arrangements under Fair Funding more transparent to schools; clarify service level agreements with schools; ensure more rapid progress towards meeting best value criteria; communicate to schools clear information about the allocation of resources.

In order to improve monitoring, challenge, support and intervention:

- (i) set out partnership agreements which identify the accountabilities and responsibilities for each school and the LEA and which clearly establish the level of support each school is entitled to;
- (ii) develop more effective procedures for monitoring the impact of support to schools in special measures;
- (iii) develop the skills of link advisers in their role of monitoring and challenging performance and ensure more rigour and consistency in their work.

In order to enhance the collection and analysis of data:

- (i) communicate to schools a clear strategy for the development of data analysis.

In order to improve support for ICT:

- (i) clarify the strategy for ICT and communicate it clearly to schools, making the criteria for allocating funds for ICT transparent.

In order to improve school management:

- (i) provide more focused training for senior managers to develop school supported self-review and target setting;
- (ii) work with secondary schools to define and implement a strategy for developing the monitoring of performance by the link adviser and school self-review.

In order to improve strategic management:

- (i) clarify the organisational arrangements between and within services for aspects of support for pupils and schools;
- (ii) develop as rapidly as possible systems for the electronic collection and exchange of data and information;
- (iii) take steps to improve the quality of school buildings.

In order to improve provision for SEN:

- (i) reduce delays in procedures for statementing and the amendments of statements;
- (ii) simplify and clarify the organisational arrangements, relating staffing levels to function and workload;
- (iii) communicate the outcomes of the current SEN review to stakeholders and urgently implement its priorities;
- (iv) monitor the cost and effectiveness of independent and out of borough special school places to inform the internal level of provision;
- (v) ensure that the wording of statements is unambiguous and that the resource implications are readily understood by schools and parents;
- (vi) ensure that the criteria for the allocation of funds for stages 2-3 of the SEN Code of Practice are clear and consistently applied.

In order to improve the supply of school places and admissions:

- (i) take steps to reduce spare capacity in schools where it exceeds 25 per cent if there is not a rapid increase in the popularity of these schools;
- (ii) work with admission authorities to improve arrangements for secondary transfer.

In order to improve support for excluded pupils and casual admissions:

- (i) develop strategies with secondary schools to ensure a fairer distribution between schools of permanently excluded pupils and casual admissions.

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