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IN EDUCATION

**INSPECTION OF
BARKING AND DAGENHAM
LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY**

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in conjunction with the
AUDIT COMMISSION**

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INTRODUCTION

1. This inspection of Barking and Dagenham 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 the work undertaken by the LEA on Best Value. The previous inspection of the LEA took place in January 1997. The LEA's Excellence in Cities initiative was also inspected as part of OFSTED's programme of thematic inspections.

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; monitoring reports and audit reports from Her Majesty's Inspectors; documentation from, and discussion with, LEA officers and members; focus groups of headteachers and governors; staff in other departments at that local authority; and diocesan representatives. Other agencies and LEA partners participated in discussion groups. In addition, the inspection team considered the earlier OFSTED/Audit Commission report on this LEA published in January 1997. 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 81 per cent.

3. The inspection also involved studies of particular aspects of the LEA's work through visits to the pupil referral unit and one secondary school. These visits tested the views of headteachers and others on 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, and is effective in contributing to improvements in schools and provides value for money.

COMMENTARY

4. The London Borough of Barking and Dagenham serves some of the most deprived urban districts in the country. Unlike other London boroughs, its population, despite the recent arrival of large numbers of asylum seekers, is mainly white, but 17 of the borough's 20 wards have high levels of deprivation. Educational disadvantage is also high; indeed, the borough has the lowest proportion of adults with higher educational qualifications in the country.

5. The last inspection report drew attention to the determination of the LEA, working in this difficult context, to raise educational aspirations and attainment. To an impressive degree, it has succeeded in doing so. Much remains to be done, but up to 2001 the rate of improvement achieved by the LEA's schools was among the fastest in the country.

6. This report provides clear evidence that the contribution of the LEA to that improvement has been considerable. Through its perseverance over many years, the LEA has achieved a crucial shift in attitude across the borough. Educational failure is neither expected, nor accepted as an inevitable feature of the local scene. Well-supported by elected members, the director of education and the chief inspector have provided leadership of a high order. Their consistent focus on the need to reinforce teachers' pedagogical skills - in this, mirroring and to some extent anticipating the national strategies - has done much to improve the quality of provision in schools and has materially improved the prospects of thousands of local children.

7. The support provided for school improvement is of very high quality. The LEA's particular strengths are:

- the quality of its Education Development Plan (EDP);
- monitoring, challenge and intervention in schools, including under-performing schools;
- support for literacy, numeracy, information and communication technology and raising standards at Key Stage 3;
- support for ethnic minority and Traveller children and gifted and talented pupils;
- support for school management and governors;
- assuring the supply and quality of teachers;
- the effectiveness of services to support school improvement;
- the provision of school places;
- asset management planning;
- support for health, safety, welfare and child protection;
- the quality of leadership provided by members and senior officers, and quality of the advice given to members; and
- collaborative partnerships.

8. The LEA's achievement has been, and remains, a striking one. It also involves a very high level of investment. The cost of the EDP is one of the highest in the country, and the LEA retains centrally all the funding for the community inspectorate and advisory service (CIAS). In this, it differs radically from the great majority of LEAs. The schools are content with the position, and the LEA argues that the cost of school improvement, though undeniably high, is necessary in view of the continuing vulnerability of schools to

the effects of deprivation. However, the argument depends mainly on assertion, since the LEA has not seriously challenged the financial basis for its way of working. Fairly enough, it regards its approach as justified by success, but it follows that it is not fully discharging its Best Value duty.

9. The LEA has some evidence for the proposition that its schools remain vulnerable. Although it has been successful in narrowing the attainment gap between the highest and the lowest performing schools, OFSTED judgements show that it has a smaller proportion of good or very good schools than is the case nationally. A minority of schools are still of concern to the LEA. However, at some point, the LEA must question whether the average provision of 650 hours support a year for secondary schools is really consistent with supporting school autonomy.

10. The LEA has few weaknesses, but several of them are important, because their impact is felt by the most vulnerable pupils. The weaknesses are:

- structures for achieving Best Value;
- arrangements for the procurement of management services;
- provision for pupils who have no school place;
- steps taken to meet statutory obligations in respect of special educational needs; and
- the extent to which the LEA exercises its special educational needs functions in a way which provides value for money.

11. Overall, the LEA's provision for social inclusion is satisfactory, following considerable recent improvement. Here, however, its main thrust has been towards the raising of educational quality and standards as a means of preventing failure at school.

12. Barking and Dagenham is an innovative, in some respects pioneering, LEA. Its approach is not precisely like that of any other, and it has some limitations. The balance of strengths and weaknesses, though, is overwhelmingly positive. It is one of a very small number of LEAs who have shown that it is possible to counter the effects of disadvantage: that poverty does not inevitably lead, through the grinding mechanism of a grim and hopeless determinism, to failure at school. The LEA has the capacity to address its weaknesses. Its current performance offers an example of what can be achieved, given the resolution.

SECTION 1: THE LEA STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Context

13. The London Borough of Barking and Dagenham is situated on the north bank of the Thames to the east of London, and forms part of the Thames Gateway area. It is primarily a residential borough with distinct communities. There are small pockets of local industry, and one main manufacturing employer. Over the next three years, a major regeneration programme should result in new employment opportunities requiring a skilled local workforce. At the time of the last inspection the borough was the eighteenth most deprived in the country; it is now the twenty-fourth, and the sixth most deprived in London. Seventeen out of its 20 wards have high levels of deprivation, and, at 3.5 per cent, the borough has the lowest number of adults with higher qualifications in the country.

14. Since the last inspection, the single greatest change in population has been the rapidly growing number of refugees and asylum seekers living in the borough. In May 2001, this figure accounted for approximately 2,600 asylum seekers and about 600 permanent admissions to schools in the last two years.

15. The LEA has an estimated school-age population of 27,850 pupils. The proportion of primary pupils eligible for free school meals (27 per cent) is above the national figure (20 per cent), as is the secondary figure (29 per cent, compared to 18 per cent). The percentage of pupils from ethnic minority groups is broadly in line with the national figure. Ten per cent of pupils have English as an additional language.

16. The borough maintains 49 schools in the primary phase (22 primary, 14 infant and 13 junior). There are eight secondary comprehensive schools, including one Catholic school; all have sixth forms, and three have specialist college status. A ninth secondary school is due to open in September 2002. The borough's one special school admits pupils aged from three to 18 with complex learning difficulties. There is one pupil referral unit (PRU). One infant, and the special school, have been awarded Beacon status.

17. The proportion of pupils with statements of special educational need is 2.2 per cent in primary schools and 3.8 per cent in secondary schools. This is below the national figure of 2.7 per cent for primary schools, and in line with the national average of 4.0 per cent for secondary schools.

18. Seventy six per cent of three year-olds have an early education place; 61 per cent of these are LEA maintained. Sufficient nursery provision is secured for all four-year olds, and 97 per cent are on the roll of maintained schools.

Performance

19. Since the last inspection, the performance of schools has improved markedly at all key stages and at age 18. At Key Stage 1, the rate of improvement is overall above the national trend. The rate of improvement is well above the national trend at Key Stage 2, and for the three years to 2000, was the fastest in the country. At Key Stage 3, improvement is broadly in line with the national trend in English, above this in

mathematics, and well above the national trend in science. At GCSE, rates of improvement are well above the national trend. In 2000, GCSE five A* - C results showed the fourth highest rate of improvement of all LEAs. At A-level, the rate of improvement in pupils' average point score is broadly in line with the national trend.

20. Schools' OFSTED inspection reports show attainment on entry to primary and secondary schools to be well below that found nationally. Pupils under five make good progress. The progress of pupils between Key Stage 1 and 2 and between Key Stage 3 and 4 is above average; progress is average between Key Stage 2 and 3. OFSTED inspection judgements show that the quality of education and management in schools has improved significantly between inspection cycles, but the proportion of good or very good schools is considerably below national averages for primary and secondary schools.

21. In 2001, standards at Key Stage 1 at Level 2 and above are in line with national averages in reading and writing, but below average for mathematics. At Level 4 and above at Key Stage 2, standards are below the national figure for English, and in line with figures for mathematics and science. At Key Stage 3, standards at Level 5 and above are below national averages. At Key Stages 1 to 3, higher level grades are below national figures, except for mathematics and science at Key Stage 2 for Level 5 and above, where results are in line with those found nationally.

22. GCSE results in 2001 indicate the percentage of pupils achieving five or more A* - C grades, and the average GCSE points score, to be below the national average. The percentage of pupils achieving one or more A* - G grades is in line with national figures. At age 18, the average point score is below the national average.

23. Since 1993, two primary schools have been judged to require special measures. Both have been removed from this category within the required timescale. Since 1997, five primary schools have been identified as having serious weaknesses. These weaknesses have been resolved in four schools; those in the fifth are being addressed within the expected timescale. In 2000, one primary school was identified by OFSTED as underachieving. Three primary schools, one secondary school and the PRU are currently causing concern to the LEA.

24. In 1999/2000, the rate of permanent exclusions was well above the national figure for primary schools. The rate of permanent exclusions from secondary schools was broadly in line with the national figure. This represents some reduction in the rate of permanent exclusion in primary schools, and a significant reduction in secondary schools since the last inspection.

25. In 1999/2000 attendance was well below the national figure for primary schools (93.0 per cent compared to 94.3 per cent), and below the national figure for secondary schools (89.9 per cent compared to 91.4 per cent). The level of unauthorised absence was well above the national figure for primary schools (1.4 per cent compared to 0.5 per cent), and above the national figure for secondary schools (1.7 per cent compared to 1.0 per cent). Since the last inspection, there has been little improvement in levels of attendance or unauthorised absence in primary schools. In secondary schools, unauthorised absence has reduced considerably and there has been some improvement in attendance. The LEA is well aware of the need for improvement.

Funding

26. The education service in Barking and Dagenham is well resourced. It has a Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) allocation for 2001/02 of £2962 per primary pupil and £3858 per secondary pupil. This compares favourably with the average for outer London boroughs of £2890 and £3708 respectively, although below the averages for Greater London as a whole of £3181 and £4082. Standard Spending Assessment allocations to Barking and Dagenham have grown somewhat more rapidly over the past three years than to other LEAs.

27. At the time of the last inspection, the LEA was funding the education service at 10 per cent above the level indicated by SSA. The education and social services budgets are now set at SSA levels.

28. The LEA has maintained a generous education capital programme. It has 'debt free' status and so is able to commit the notional debt charge element of the SSA to other services. It is also able to use receipts from the sale of capital assets without having to commit a proportion to debt repayment. The LEA has benefited from a steady stream of council house and other property sales and has committed these receipts to education capital improvements. An initial allocation of £35m in Private Finance Initiative (PFI) credits has been granted for a new secondary school, a new primary school, and major renovation at another secondary school.

29. The LEA has a policy of taking up its Standards Fund allocations in full and has always been able to provide the necessary matched funding. It is also pro-active and successful in seeking funding from other external sources including Excellence in Cities (EiC), Single Regeneration Budget (SRB), Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, New Opportunities Fund (NOF), European Funds, Neighbourhood Nurseries and Sure Start.

Council structure

30. The council comprises 51 councillors: 46 Labour, three from the Chadwell Heath Residents' Association, one Liberal Democrat and one Independent. It has a tradition of being Labour-led, and of having very large Labour majorities. The Labour leadership changed in 1998, and the current administration is committed to modernisation. This new direction for Barking and Dagenham is demonstrated through new political structures that came into effect in May 2000.

31. The modernised structure comprises a leader and eight-member executive cabinet, a scrutiny management board charged with holding the executive to account for its performance, and scrutiny and commissioning panels. Panels comprise members and representatives from the local community. A key feature of the political structure is six community forums based on groupings from the 17 electoral wards, and a youth forum. These are supported by departmental directors and provide members with a direct consultative link to the local community. An annual survey of local people and a citizen's panel provides feedback to the council on its operations and services. Lead members carry cross-service portfolios.

The LEA strategy for school improvement

32. The LEA has a good Education Development Plan (EDP). The previous inspection report identified strong strategic and operational planning for school improvement. This continues. The EDP, entitled 'High Standards for All', is wide-ranging and ambitious. It identifies key and appropriate areas for improvement up to March 2002. The plan reflects a continuing and resolute determination to raise the attainment levels of all pupils, initially to national averages and then to the performance of the top quartile, and indicates the department's significant contribution to community and lifelong learning.

33. The EDP strongly reflects corporate plans, incorporates the council's seven community priorities and links to other corporate initiatives, for example, partnerships with stakeholders. Good links have been made with other key plans including the Early Years and Child Care Development Plan (EYCDP), plans for information and communication technology (ICT), behaviour support plan (BSP), special educational needs (SEN) and lifelong learning; the Quality Protects management action plan and EiC initiatives. While the community inspectorate and advisory service (CIAS) provides the lead on school improvement, the EDP brings together the contribution of other divisions within the education, arts and libraries department.

34. Priorities are clearly articulated. These are firmly rooted in a comprehensive and detailed audit and analysis of school and community needs and take good account of national priorities. The EDP aims to:

- improve standards and skills for early years children;
- raise standards in literacy at all levels of attainment;
- raise standards in numeracy at all levels of attainment;
- raise attainment in primary schools;
- improve pupil progress and attainment at Key Stage 3;
- raise standards at GCSE and above;
- improve management in schools and focus on the methods of raising pupils' attainment;
- improve levels of attendance and address social exclusion;
- improve parents' and carers' understanding of how to help their children through their school career; and
- improve the teaching and use of ICT in schools.

Improved teaching quality underpins all ten priorities.

35. Priorities are well targeted and the rationale, responsibility and accountability for each are clear. Activities and actions are well linked. However, there is no clearly articulated strategy for pupils who have no school place. Total estimated costs and funding sources for each priority and activity are included, key targets and measurable success criteria enable actions to be evaluated for impact, and monitoring and evaluation strategies are well aligned to these. Quarterly and interim timescales for activities ensure effective monitoring of progress.

36. The high level of funding for the EDP reflects members' determination to raise pupils' attainment as well as to raise the expectations and aspirations of the local community.

Schools are aware of, and agree with this general stance and their own priorities reflect those in the EDP. The very extensive and extremely thorough consultation has included members, schools, governors, parents and a number of significant education partners, including diocesan boards. Targets, including local targets set for Key Stages 1 and 3 and for science at Key Stage 2, are very challenging.

37. Satisfactory progress has been made in implementing the EDP. Actions are mostly on track, and there is considerable evidence of successful outcomes in all but one priority area. The drive to raise standards has been relentless and successful, but progress in promoting aspects of social inclusion less so. Efforts to accelerate progress have met with some recent success.

38. Procedures for the regular checking and monitoring of progress against targets and priorities are very thorough and reflect corporate procedures for monitoring departmental and service performance. They include quarterly reporting to members on key performance indicators. Systematic consultation with schools and stakeholders has resulted in appropriate revisions to the plan. An extremely sharp and clearly presented annual evaluation identifies additional priorities and activities necessary to effect further improvement, as in priority 8. Targets have been continually reviewed and agreed with schools and governors in the light of success.

The allocation of resources to priorities

39. The allocation of resources to priorities is barely satisfactory. While spending on education overall is in line with long-standing council priorities, there has been little fundamental review of corporate budget-making practices, or of the formula used to allocate funds to schools.

40. The LEA has met all government spending targets in the past few years including the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) targets in respect of delegation. Of the 2001/02 Local Schools Budget, 86.2 per cent is delegated to schools. This is well over the minimum of 85 per cent, and just below the averages for all London authorities and England of 86.8 per cent and 86.5 per cent respectively. Individual Schools Budgets for 2000/01 were at £2066 per primary pupil and £2735 per secondary pupil; slightly above the averages for outer London boroughs of £2024 and £2729 respectively. Capital expenditure, at £458 per pupil, is almost double the averages for London and England.

41. The high priority that the LEA accords to raising standards is widely known and endorsed by schools. The entire budget for CIAS is retained centrally, in line with the successful emphasis that has been given to improving pedagogy as the route to school improvement. The allocation of advisory time to schools is very high, with an average of 100 days for each secondary school. This is carefully negotiated to meet EDP and individual school priorities. However, there is insufficient transparency in the financing of the CIAS. The service is funded from several sources including the LEA, Standards Fund and specific grants. Schools are aware of the overall cost of the service, but not of the full cost of the particular support they receive. Schools pay a subscription toward the cost of inservice training provision and the maintenance of the professional development centre, but this covers only a small fraction of the cost.

42. Within the budget retained by the LEA, expenditure on statutory and regulatory duties (£69 per pupil when compared with an outer London borough average of £54 and an average for England of £49), EDP preparation and management (£69 compared with £46 and £29), and education out of school (£50 compared with £9 and £9), is high. Early retirement costs (£3 compared with £27 and £31), provision for pupils with statements (£2 compared with £31 and £34), and specialist support for pupils with statements (£4 compared with £11 and £12) are low, as these items have been delegated to schools.

43. Budget making processes have not caught up with the council's modernised structures. Service budgets are based on those for the previous year with additions for inflation and growth items. There is little in depth review of current and future revenue spending needs. Budget monitoring has been regular and efficient but this has suffered badly in the past year because of serious problems arising from the introduction of a new financial management system. Plans to remedy this are on track.

44. The formula to distribute the Individual Schools Budget among schools was devised in the first days of local management of schools. This has been amended from time to time, in consultation with schools, to take account of legislative changes and other developments, but it has not been fundamentally reviewed since it was written.

45. The rationale behind the funding formula is not well understood by schools. Indeed, there are aspects of the formula for which the rationale was agreed some time ago, which are no longer widely understood within the LEA. The approach to extending delegation does not always serve to enhance school autonomy and discretion over how they can use delegated funds. Funding for pupils with statements of SEN was delegated this year for the first time. The formula funding mechanism allows schools little discretion over its use. Funding to cover the costs of early retirement is delegated, but each school receives an amount that exactly meets their commitments. So, providing they follow LEA advice, schools are spared the financial consequences of any early retirement decisions they make.

46. The LEA's arrangements for supporting grant bidding are sound. In order to expedite the drive to improve social inclusion and raise standards, the LEA has harnessed an extensive range of initiatives and funding streams which have been well managed by officers and advisers. Allocations to schools are broadly in line with need.

47. All schools purchase the LEA financial support service. Support to schools with significant budget deficits has been effective. End of year surpluses in primary schools are too high, with over half having a surplus of more than five per cent; of these, the surplus in one third is more than ten per cent. Some of these surpluses have accrued because of saving toward major projects or difficulties in recruiting staff. Balances are challenged as part of the advice provided to schools when preparing budgets for the following year. In the light of an upward trend, this challenge needs to become more robust.

Recommendation

In order to improve the allocation of resources to priorities:

- expedite the fundamental review of the formula used to allocate funding to schools to ensure that the Individual Schools Budget is distributed in line with the LEA's current priorities and in a way that supports school autonomy;
- cost agreements made with schools for CIAS support; and
- increase the level of challenge to schools where budget surpluses have accrued.

Structures for achieving Best Value

48. Weaknesses outweigh strengths in the LEA's structures for achieving Best Value. Best Value principles are not yet embedded in an overall strategy for continuous improvement, and not sufficiently incorporated into management practices to assure cost-effectiveness in service delivery.

49. However, the council's systems for gathering feedback from stakeholders are strong. In education, a comprehensive annual consultation with schools and a very thorough evaluation of the EDP is used well to inform action. Good use is made of external evaluators, external inspections, including OFSTED inspections of schools, and school performance data to guide LEA support activities.

50. Auditors' management letters have criticised the council for lack of a robust system of performance management. This is being addressed with vigour by the chief executive and a working, robust system will be in place for the start of the coming financial year. Good progress has been made in implementing this in education, but performance management is not sufficiently strongly linked to rigorous and accountable resource management. Budget ownership does not lie with budget managers. This limits decision-making in that it constrains effective strategic planning of resources; budgetary implications of management decisions cannot readily be assessed; cost-effectiveness against performance indicators cannot be readily determined, and value for money is not assured.

51. The auditor gave a minor qualification in the opinion on the council's Best Value Performance Plan (BVPP) for 2001/02, relating to the omission of a number of performance indicators, though none of these were education related. Deficiencies have now been addressed. In the annual audit letter the council was also criticised for lack of challenge in most of the first year's Best Value (BV) reviews. This weakness was evident. Challenge has not been sufficiently rigorous to ensure value for money. Best Value reviews have not been effective in fundamentally reviewing services; in all four cases, reviews were limited in scope. Little in the way of useful comparison was produced due

to difficulties with benchmarking. Competition has given insufficient attention to other options for service delivery. Improvement plans have lacked success criteria, resource allocations and milestones. The programme of BV reviews has now been revised, and the authority rightly proposes to undertake a smaller number of reviews covering larger areas.

52. Little information is provided to schools on how to find out about alternative providers of management services. Funding for several of the services is delegated as a lump sum exactly equivalent to the cost of buying back that service from the LEA. All services delegated in this way have achieved 100 per cent buy back. The LEA as a whole has only recently started to move away from the view that 'in house' provision is the best. In November, a policy statement was agreed by the executive which stated that the authority would identify and procure the method of service delivery which provided the highest standard of service at a cost that the council was prepared to pay. The authority's procurement manual provides guidance on how to implement this policy. Guidance to schools states that they are able to buy services for which funding has been delegated through the LEA, and outlines the benefits of purchasing from the council. The LEA rightly intends to review this guidance.

53. As part of the scheme for funding, schools are required to send the LEA a statement setting out how they will apply the principles of Best Value. Arrangements for the assessment of these statements are vague; this needs to be addressed.

Recommendation

In order to improve structures for achieving Best Value:

- make explicit the LEA's overall strategy for achieving Best Value;
- provide clear guidance to managers on its application so that cost-effectiveness and value for money in service provision are assured;
- implement plans to allocate budget management responsibilities to service heads;
- explicitly link performance management with accountable resource management;
- provide and implement guidance to schools on their Best Value responsibilities; and
- ensure that improvement plans from Best Value reviews have clear success criteria, resource allocations and milestones to enable effective monitoring and evaluation of progress.

SECTION 2: SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Summary of effectiveness of the LEA's support for school improvement

54. Services to support school improvement are good overall. The main contributor, CIAS, is a very high quality service, as the current part-time secondment of six of its staff to national initiatives suggests. It was already a good service at the time of the last inspection. Since then, it has done much to meet the particular needs of its local community by developing in partnership with schools, a variety of original approaches to teaching and the curriculum. Schools are effectively supported by management services which enable them to concentrate on raising standards. Standards are rising. The impact of services is clear, and their value for money is at least satisfactory.

Monitoring, challenge and intervention

55. Monitoring, challenge and intervention are very good. Monitoring is strong, challenge high, and intervention appropriate. At the time of the first inspection, this aspect of the LEA's work was identified as a strength, and this remains the case. Procedures have been modified in consultation with schools and a strong partnership in the drive to raise standards is very apparent.

The focusing of LEA support on areas of greatest need

56. Support is well targeted. Schools are clear that CIAS support is deployed through a formula based on staffing numbers. In addition, from a thorough analysis of school data and other information, and through discussions with inspectors, extra support is deployed in line with need. Despite this high level of good quality assistance, the LEA is clear that very few schools demonstrate sufficiently robust improvement and that the basis for sustained self-improvement is fragile in most. In this, it may be right. The findings of OFSTED inspections of schools show the percentage of good and very good schools to be considerably below the national figure, and identifies only four very good schools, all primary schools. Whether this is evidence to support the continuation of the LEA's current practice or to indicate that it is not working adequately is a moot point.

57. The LEA has now reached a critical point. Important strategic decisions will need to be made in moving this comprehensive support strategy into its next phase in line with statutory guidance in the Code of Practice. Through the EDP for 2002-2007, the LEA is working to develop the use of school effectiveness indicators. These are specifically linked to its overarching vision for improvement and are based on criteria currently used by inspectors as a measure for judging schools. As individual schools are identified as effective in sustaining their own improvement, so the rationale for retaining funding centrally will be less sustainable. This is not to reduce the level of support, nor schools' access to systematic visiting by inspectors, which has been fundamental in supporting change, but rather to locate the ultimate accountability for improvement within schools themselves in allowing them to assume responsibility for deciding the level and source of support required.

Recommendation

In order to improve the extent to which the LEA's support to schools is focused on areas of greatest need:

- consult with schools regarding the amount of centrally funded visiting to effective schools, while providing schools with an opportunity to buy into additional support to promote their own development.

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

58. The LEA's work in monitoring and challenging schools is good. Headteachers and governors confirm the rigour and challenge of the target setting and self-evaluation processes which strongly support the LEA's commitment to self-managing schools. Intervention is appropriate and clearly defined. Levels of support through systematic visits, extended visits to specialist areas, and commissioned audits and reviews are high, averaging 650 hours over a year for a secondary school. Visits to schools are well planned and subsequent reports summarise, in a consistent manner, main findings and appropriate lines of action.

59. From a very low base, the majority of schools have made considerable progress in raising the achievement of many pupils over the last four years. Most school inspection reports indicate significant improvements in the quality of teaching. The results of a few primary schools are in the upper quartile nationally, and, within the secondary sector, some subject departments are performing at a high standard. All schools have been actively involved in the process of self-evaluation. The LEA makes an important contribution to meeting the training needs of staff and governors and to supporting schools' capacity to provide a measure of independent moderation.

60. Data are being well used to set realistic and challenging targets in individual schools, to identify weaknesses, and to locate support in line with need. The provision of detailed information about the progress of pupils was identified as a strength in the first inspection. This good work has continued with schools being provided with analyses of their own performance, comparisons with other schools within the borough and nationally, and recent trends. The LEA analyses and publishes information about the performance of different groups of pupils and identifies where additional support may be needed.

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

61. Support for under-performing schools is very good. The LEA works effectively with schools causing concern or under-performing, identified either through external inspection or by its own procedures. Schools are systematically identified and given well-

targeted additional support which is rigorously monitored. This has led to considerable improvement. Initiatives such as EiC are used effectively to provide multi-disciplinary support to schools working in challenging circumstances.

62. Support from the CIAS team and the children's support division is primarily targeted at senior management, classrooms and governing bodies. When necessary, the LEA has strengthened governing bodies, used experienced headteachers in an advisory capacity, and withdrawn financial delegation. The progress of under-performing schools is closely monitored by the link inspector and exit strategies are agreed between CIAS, the headteacher and the governors. Senior officers from CIAS and the children's support division meet to consider the operation of the action plan, and elected members are kept well aware of progress.

63. Very few schools enter special measures or serious weaknesses, but where this has occurred, well-planned, targeted and co-ordinated support has enabled them to be removed within or before the required timescale. The school most recently judged as no longer having serious weaknesses improved very quickly.

Support for literacy

64. Support for literacy was not inspected in detail. At the time of the last inspection, the LEA had recently embarked on its own primary English project with the aim of raising standards, initially at Key Stage 2 and later at Key Stage 3. Provision was said to be good, although some schools lacked the leadership expertise and commitment to maximise the high quality support provided by the LEA. Since that time, LEA support has improved further and is now very good. The English and early years teams have developed a curriculum for the Foundation Stage; in addition, work now includes support for adults in developing basic literacy skills. The CIAS has been successful in aligning the English project with the National Literacy Strategy while retaining its key distinctive elements, in particular a strong focus on oral communication. Schools have responded well to this and results have risen considerably. At Key Stage 2, the performance of pupils at level 4 and above has risen from 52 per cent in 1997 to 72 per cent in 2001. The Key Stage 3 strategy has also been successfully implemented alongside the LEA's own project. A key aim of this work is to ensure curriculum continuity between Key Stages 2 and 3.

65. Although results have increased significantly the LEA still has a long way to go to meet its long-term goals, which would place attainment across the borough in the top quartile nationally. Schools are fully conversant with the LEA's approach to literacy and unequivocally credit the work of the CIAS, and an unrelenting focus on curriculum development and pedagogy, as being the key factors in the achievement of higher standards. Literacy activities have been very well led, the quality of training has been good, and schools place a high value on networking structures. Support materials are of high quality. Expertise within the LEA is considerable; members of the English team have made a significant contribution to national developments.

Support for numeracy

66. Support for numeracy was not inspected in detail, nor was it in the previous inspection, but at that time a pilot primary project was in place and a secondary project

was being developed. In the past four years, the LEA has extended its approach to numeracy, and support now secures a sound foundation of understanding, through targeted curriculum development, and the improvement of pedagogical skills. At Key Stage 2, improvement has been at a faster rate than that seen nationally; the performance of pupils has risen from 54 per cent in 1997 to 72 per cent in 2001. Additional work with identified schools has resulted in an accelerated rate of progress, and all schools have been well supported by LEA consultants and through networking activities. In addition, the LEA's work now includes support for adults in developing basic numeracy skills

67. Schools are fully supportive of the work undertaken by the LEA and describe it as very good. Some schools judge the impact of the LEA as outstanding. Leadership of numeracy is very good, and schools have valued high quality training and good support materials. The LEA's own primary scheme has been suitably aligned with the National Numeracy Strategy to maximise impact and is consistent with other LEA strategies and initiatives such as Excellence in Cities. At Key Stage 3, LEA work has been systematically incorporated into the Transforming Key Stage 3 pilot.

Support for information and communication technology (ICT)

68. The LEA's support for information and communications technology is good. Good progress has been made since the last inspection. Additional resources made available through the National Grid for Learning (NGfL) scheme have been well utilised. The LEA has supported schools in establishing interconnected hardware and has been very proactive in encouraging teachers to improve their levels of skills and confidence. In co-operation with primary schools, the LEA has constructed a framework for the teaching of ICT which aligns with, and considerably supports, national requirements. Good teaching materials for primary and secondary schools have been developed which make effective use of locally and nationally available resources. The LEA is benefiting from being part of the pilot ICT project at Key Stage 3.

69. The LEA has a clearly defined strategy to meet its ICT targets which addresses curriculum, infrastructure and training. A curriculum and professional development intranet has been developed containing support materials for all subjects. Its use will be more efficient when the broadband initiative is implemented later this year.

70. At primary level, the LEA is using an on-line monitoring and assessment tool which allows schools to recognise the performance level they have reached, set against a minimum expected standard. This enables schools to measure progress and the LEA to target additional support. The LEA carefully monitors schools' inspection reports: most schools are showing improvement from their previous inspection. There is still work to be done, as nationally, for teachers to gain confidence and consistency in the determination of pupil standards.

71. The central technical support scheme, to which all schools subscribe, has a single point of contact for all ICT related problems. Schools are kept well informed of progress if problems are not immediately solvable. There is a high level of satisfaction with this service.

72. ICT is well led, with good expertise and high quality support which is highly rated by schools. Training and support for ICT has been well thought through and ICT is well used across the curriculum. All schools have subscribed to the same NOF training provider, with about a third of teachers in each school completing the programme each year. Teachers are encouraged to gain formal accreditation. CIAS has provided additional support where needs have been identified.

73. The Key Stage 3 ICT pilot is developing teaching programmes which will be used in the national scheme from September 2002. Planning is well advanced to integrate the new City Learning Centre (CLC) facility with ICT across the curriculum, as well as discrete subject provision. The use of the CLC as community facility is underway; this is already being used as a training venue.

Support for raising standards at Key Stage 3

74. Support for raising standards at Key Stage 3 is good. The LEA welcomed participation in the pilot strategy and has made good progress in establishing the principal strands. Achievement at Key Stage 3 has already been identified as an issue of major concern, and reflected strongly in the EDP. The LEA has been able to build on its own strategies, particularly in literacy and numeracy, in developing work within the national strategy. All secondary schools are involved, and targets and objectives are clearly identified. The pilot is being well managed and links with EiC and the small EAZs are beginning to be established. The LEA is sensibly developing criteria by which to judge the impact of the strategy.

75. Training programmes are available for both senior management and subject teachers. Consultants are working closely with subject departments in all schools, giving additional support where this is shown to be necessary.

76. The provision of good baseline pupil information is being developed so that value added judgements can be made during each year of Key Stage 3. In particular, an on-line ICT skills audit will help to establish the position at the end of Year 6. The education department, in partnership with its primary schools, is establishing minimum expected standards at various stages during Key Stage 2 in all subjects. These are intended as a tool for raising standards and will be extended into the secondary schools in the near future.

77. The transition from primary to secondary school is the subject of a pupil attitudinal study being undertaken by Homerton College with pupils from Year 6 through to Year 8. Results will be used to inform the development of pedagogy within the early years of secondary schooling. Programmes of visits for secondary teachers to primary schools have been introduced to demonstrate teaching styles and to share standards of pupil work. This is proving useful to secondary teachers in modifying their schemes of work.

Support for ethnic minority groups including Travellers

78. Support for ethnic minority groups, including Travellers, is good. The LEA is rapidly developing the capacity to ensure that pupils from minority ethnic and Traveller groups are in a position to benefit from their education in the borough. The LEA has made good progress in addressing the challenges posed by the changing nature of its population. It

has found it difficult to manage and support the sudden arrival of asylum seekers during the year, particularly without an increase in the DfES funding, but has coped remarkably well. It is ensuring that pupils newly arrived into the country and in school, are integrated into mainstream schooling quickly. Pupils with English as an additional language (EAL) are being supported both by a small central team and in schools.

79. The language support service has been recently re-structured and a draft policy for supporting EAL learners and minority ethnic pupils is underway. Consultation is taking place with schools over the distribution of grant funding to agreed criteria; rightly, most teachers in the service are already in schools. The LEA rightly uses the skills of these teachers both for the immediate benefit of pupils and to increase the skills of other teachers. Grant funding is well managed and the language support service monitors and evaluates the impact of work in schools. As part of the gifted and talented initiative, some pupils with EAL have been involved in enrichment and extension courses within the curriculum and after school. The support provided by the LEA is regarded highly by the schools and they are becoming increasingly confident in supporting ethnic minority and Traveller pupils.

80. The LEA monitors attainment, attendance and exclusion rates by ethnic group and produces reports for schools with an appropriate commentary. This information is discussed at target setting meetings with inspectors.

81. The language needs of pupils newly arrived into the country are well met. In some schools, special induction classes provide an introduction to the English school system as well as support for the development of English. The language support service monitors progress and can demonstrate considerable success; most pupils are integrated into mainstream classes within two terms.

82. There are very few Travellers and the LEA is sensibly working co-operatively with a neighbouring borough where there is an established support team. The LEA plans for the arrival of circus travellers and is in a good position to respond when they arrive.

Support for gifted and talented pupils

83. Support for gifted and talented pupils is good. In partnership with its secondary schools, the LEA has made a promising start to this initiative and fully recognises its potential for further raising attainment. This has been identified as a continuing priority in EDP2. A clear policy indicates the aims of the project, methods of identifying the target groups, the range of potential activities and staff training needs. The recently appointed co-ordinator works closely with all secondary schools and project partnership is strong. Links are being developed with the other aspects of EiC, the small EAZs and the Key Stage 3 pilot. In-service training has been thorough and dissemination and evaluation strategies are being planned.

84. Pupils are identified for inclusion in the project in line with the agreed criteria. Sensibly, a number of projects are open to pupils who are not in the cohort. A good range of successful activities have included the introduction of Latin on-line, involving some 200 pupils, science Saturday clubs, mentoring of the very able, field excursions, master classes in music and dance and art study visits to Amsterdam and Padua.

Support for school management

85. Support for school leadership and management is good, except in the areas of procurement and support for securing Best Value. This was previously identified as weak. Much has been achieved from a very low base and schools are increasingly able to operate effectively.

86. Systematic visits by inspectors rigorously challenge improvement strategies used by senior and middle managers. Where these are insecure, intervention and extensive support follow. Actions have been well targeted and current needs continue to be supported through the EDP. Support provided for both senior and middle management is regarded highly by schools. The LEA has developed a consistent feedback procedure following visits. All such reports include advice to the headteacher to share key points with the chair of the school's governing body. Chairs are informed directly if concerns arise.

87. The LEA has actively supported the national schemes for leadership training and has provided effective courses for primary school leaders and those preparing for senior management. For the small number of secondary schools, the LEA has sensibly encouraged headteachers and other senior staff to take advantage of management courses provided elsewhere. The majority of primary headteachers have been trained in school self-evaluation. This has been supported by visits from the CIAS team. There is similar support for self-evaluation in secondary schools, both for senior and middle managers.

88. Good opportunities are provided for headteachers to observe international best practice in teaching and some are now leading developments in pedagogy in their own schools. Much of the training for middle managers, which is highly focused on improving teaching quality to raise standards, and has largely succeeded in doing so, is delivered in individual schools by the CIAS. The team also provides support for newly appointed senior staff.

89. Good progress has been made in the provision and analysis of school performance data. Prior to inspectors' first systematic visit of the year, schools are provided with a detailed analysis of pupil performance data and comparisons with other schools. All schools have been trained in data use, with a particular emphasis on measuring progress relative to other schools in the borough and against national trends. Inspectors report that schools are managing this process with confidence. Comparative financial information is not available in the same way to assist schools' in their overall analysis of value for money.

Support for governors

90. Support for governors is good. Following the previous report, the LEA took effective action to increase governors' involvement in the monitoring of standards in their schools. Communication and consultation, already strong, have further strengthened, and training programmes for governing bodies are more responsive to need. Although there have

been problems filling vacancies on some governing bodies, the LEA has developed appropriate strategies to remedy this, and the situation is easing.

91. Governors are provided with good benchmarked information on the performance of pupils in their schools which allows them to be effective in their support for improvement. Financial data regarding their own school and that for the LEA is not as systematically available. Such information, with suitable guidance, would add to governors' ability to act as critical friend to the senior management of the school.

92. The education department analyses schools' inspection reports for weakness in governance and has occasionally strengthened the governing body of a school in special measures. Good lessons have been learned and this process is now more effective. A small group of experienced volunteers are ready to act as additional governors when needed.

93. All schools buy back a service which includes both a clerking service and an LEA representative. Governing bodies continue to find this a useful channel for information, support and the exchange of views. Training is offered both centrally and, increasingly, for whole school governing bodies. This is highly regarded, and effective evaluation informs modifications to the programme. LEA induction procedures for new governors and those taking on the responsibility for chairing governing bodies are good. The LEA attends full governing body meetings and regards this provision as supporting increasing governor confidence and autonomy.

Recommendation

In order to improve support to school governors:

- consult with governing bodies regarding the balance of LEA support for governors in line with their increasing autonomy.

The effectiveness of services to support school management

94. LEA advice to schools for the independent procurement of management services is poor. However, management services provided by the LEA are at least satisfactory. Written information about services, prepared following discussion with a group of headteachers, is circulated to schools in late February along with a pro-forma asking schools if they wish to continue to buy services from the following April. This is too late to enable schools to evaluate alternative options before reaching a decision. Most of the services are offered as a single option with no opportunity for schools to choose a level of service most suited to their needs. Service level agreements vary in quality, and at least one has not apparently been revised since 1995. Services do not have consistent systems to monitor the use that schools make of them and hence evaluate the level of service needed. Nonetheless, there is regular discussion between LEA officers and schools about support service provision.

95. Support for **financial services** is satisfactory overall, although the effectiveness of financial systems and the preparation of regular budget monitoring information is, at

present, beset by problems associated with the introduction of a new corporate financial monitoring system. The LEA has set a very high priority on resolving these problems, and is on course to restore a satisfactory service by the end of the financial year. Internal audit practice is sound and the resultant reports thorough. Support and advice to headteachers and governors on setting and monitoring school budgets is good. The service prepares some financial benchmarking information to enable schools to compare financial performance and critically appraise budget allocations, but it does not circulate this widely.

96. Within the education department budget monitoring is sound and significant deviation from planned budgets is rare. However, active resource management by responsible officers is weak as finance officers act as budget holders. The introduction of cost centre management at the start of the 2002 financial year is intended to overcome this shortcoming.

97. At the present time the LEA provides satisfactory **personnel** support, though there are some weaknesses. At the time of the inspection, the two senior posts in the education personnel unit were vacant; the highly regarded head of the unit had left the previous summer and a new appointment was imminent. Schools value casework support in relation to grievance and discipline but contract administration and related functions do not always operate efficiently. The school's personnel handbook has not been updated regularly, although a new edition is in preparation. Much of the guidance contained in it concerns compliance with local procedures and policies rather than model policies for governors to adapt and adopt as their own. Effective support therefore depends on the presence of LEA officers. However, schools indicate that they are satisfied with the level of personnel support.

98. **Property services** are satisfactory. The assets team based in the education department provide good support and advice to schools on property matters. Schools are helped to make best use of all available resources, for example by programming work funded from delegated funds to take place alongside LEA funded work in order to get best value. Advice is given on a range of potential contractors. School buildings are in good condition. The services provided by some of the borough's other units, particularly technical services in relation to heating maintenance, are not always to the desired standard and some schools have decided to make alternative arrangements. The recent initiative on energy management is a welcome development.

99. The LEA provides satisfactory support for **administrative ICT**. It was one of the first authorities to get all schools on line and, three years ago, provided computers to each school to set up an administration network that was independent of the curriculum network. Telephone support from a unified corporate and curriculum ICT team is well managed and effective. The LEA successfully completed the electronic transfer of Plasc data in January 2002. A well-established intranet is used both by schools and the education department.

100. Several of the important developments in the education department, including admissions and children out of school, depend on the introduction of a new comprehensive pupil database. This is experiencing initial problems that are being addressed.

101. The LEA makes satisfactory provision for **catering, cleaning and ground maintenance**. This is endorsed by schools. Some schools employ their own cleaners rather than use the LEA contract; for these, client support arrangements are unclear. Similarly, some schools have sought an alternative contractor for grounds maintenance from that recommended by the LEA.

Recommendation

In order to improve the effectiveness of services to support school management:

- provide earlier information to schools as prospective purchasers;
- provide a range of service options so that schools can purchase services in a way that reflects their need for the service;
- indicate how schools can secure client advice when they wish to make their own arrangements;
- indicate how schools can obtain advice about alternative providers; and
- revise the Personnel /HR handbook to bring it up to date both in relation to the division of responsibility between LEA and schools, and to new legislation. Put in place a system to update individual sections as the need arises.

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

102. The LEA's strategy for the recruitment and retention of its teaching force is very successful. It is actively involved in a range of recruitment strategies, one of which is a partnership with a commercial recruitment agency, supported by the secondment of a deputy headteacher, which recruits both new and experienced teachers from abroad. The borough has provided good accommodation for new teachers for ten years. Currently 56 teachers are guaranteed a place each year. This is an attractive incentive, appreciated by headteachers. Other strategies include representation at recruitment fairs and links with teacher training institutions which include an innovative and successful project bringing students from a college in the north west of England to complete their final teaching practice in the borough's schools. The LEA is actively involved in the graduate and registered training programme. Nevertheless, recruitment and retention remain ongoing concerns.

103. Newly appointed teachers receive a thorough induction programme and are guaranteed jobs from July. Newly qualified teachers have access to a wide range of courses and good LEA support. A good programme of in-service courses is available for all teachers; some are held centrally whilst other training is school based. For the senior management of schools, the LEA actively encourages participation in national schemes.

The effectiveness of services to support school improvement

104. Leadership of services to support school improvement is good. In the previous inspection, services were judged to be effective and well led. This remains the case. As a result of restructuring and new appointments, high quality, effective and well-regarded

leadership is now in place across all services. Service plans emanate directly from the council's community priorities and the LEA's vision for school improvement. These are effectively implemented overall. School improvement services are highly regarded by schools and are generally impacting positively on standards, although attendance and exclusion figures remain causes of concern.

105. In the previous inspection, deployment of staff was said to be good. In the intervening years, this has continued in CIAS, although there have been staffing difficulties in the previous education welfare team. Individuals' expertise is utilised well. Where the LEA is unable to respond to requests, as is the case for business studies, external support is identified. The connection between school improvement, attendance and behaviour is strengthening and some good cross-service working is beginning.

106. Strategic planning of services is satisfactory. The strategic, service and financial plan for the department of education, arts and libraries is of good quality and clearly details how each of the 13 service units within the department delivers community priorities alongside corporate plans and departmental objectives. Since the last inspection, strategic planning has remained good for CIAS. Restructuring, and the emergence of the children's support division, has recently improved planning for aspects of social inclusion.

107. Performance management of services to support school improvement is good, and ensures a consistent and effective service. The clear lines of responsibility for monitoring and quality assurance referred to in the previous inspection have been reinforced by the procedures for responsibility and accountability detailed in the EDP, and will further strengthen as a new and robust performance management system replaces the current appraisal process and incorporates rigorous and accountable resource management, which is currently an area of weakness.

108. High professional standards are demanded from the CIAS. A rigorous analysis of performance against service targets occurs through an annual consultation survey sent to schools; results are openly shared with stakeholders. Induction processes are effective, and well received. Induction for inspectors is set against a management competency framework. Monthly team meetings identify and resolve barriers to progress in meeting service targets.

109. Previously, the expertise of school improvement staff was judged to be good. It remains at least at this level. Advisers, consultants and teacher advisers within the CIAS are well informed and knowledgeable in their own areas of expertise and their varied strengths are highly regarded by schools. There is a very good balance of background and experience across the team and all curriculum areas are covered or are brokered from elsewhere. Very high priority is given to continuing professional development, significantly through pioneering work on approaches to teaching and learning, for example, interactive whole class teaching and vocational GCSEs.

SECTION 3: SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

Summary of effectiveness of the LEA's special educational needs provision

110. Provision for pupils with special educational needs, though not previously inspected, is recognised by the LEA as being in need of improvement. Progress in a number of areas is evident, but overall provision for SEN is not yet sufficiently secure and value for money is not assured. A carefully thought-out strategy is in place, but long-term plans are not sufficiently robust, and inter-divisional working, although improving, is not sufficiently co-ordinated. The determination to improve standards has been hampered by a requirement to re-write all statements. Managers' ability to make cost-effective decisions is limited because they do not yet have control of their budgets.

111. Fundamental restructuring, including the children's support division and the recent appointment of high calibre senior officers, has accelerated progress during the past year, but there has not been enough time for this work to have sufficient impact. A sound basis for improvement is now in place, but it is vital that the level of activity and priority given to resourcing this area evident in recent months is sustained if long-term improvement is to come about.

The LEA's strategy for special educational needs

112. The LEA's strategy for SEN is satisfactory, but there are some significant weaknesses in the planning of resources. From a clear vision of inclusion, the LEA has embarked on a major programme to improve the quality of support for pupils. Considerable progress has been made since the reorganisation of the children's support division in 2000; the quality of senior officers appointed to the new structure is impressive. The Director personally chairs the regular SEN strategy group. Much of the implementation is at an early stage, although progress is accelerating with the provision of additional resources in the past few months.

113. The LEA's draft inclusion policy aims to support greater inclusion through earlier intervention, increased capacity at school level, and improved monitoring. The policy also proposes improved partnership working, more effective support to parents, and a strong focus on raising attainment for all. The LEA's special school is integral to improvement and, as a Beacon school, it is developing as a centre of excellence and providing outreach work. The existing policy for SEN is sound and being used effectively during the transition to the new Code of Practice.

114. The strategy for SEN has been carefully planned, and consultation has been effective. The LEA's move to strengthen its inclusion policy is well understood and supported by schools. The educational psychology service is at the forefront of change. It is well led and has clear objectives. Developments are underpinned by an extensive training programme, and schools can also bid for advisory support from CIAS. The Best Value review of SEN, which commenced in January 2001, has not yet reported.

115. A detailed action plan guides the implementation of this major policy change. This is based on a sound analysis of need, but is set over a very short timescale which extends only to August 2002 and does not provide for change to be fully embedded.

Long term financial planning is not secure, and current proposals are not accompanied by a plan for the deployment of resources. Currently, strategic objectives and resourcing decisions are not satisfactorily synchronised. A further weakness is the lack of financial accountability by the head of children's services and senior divisional staff. They are not budget holders and this impinges on their capacity to plan effectively for policy implementation.

116. Although work is proceeding to improve co-ordinated support for pupils with SEN, structural and management issues will need to be resolved to ensure close working between the children's support division and the CIAS.

Recommendation

In order to improve the effectiveness of the LEA's strategy for SEN:

- meet the requirements of the revised code of practice for special educational needs by completing and publishing the policy statement on inclusion as a matter of urgency;
- make the development plan feasible by drawing up for 2002/3 a fully costed and sequential plan to implement the LEA's inclusion strategy;
- address structural and management issues to ensure close working between CIAS and the children's support division; and
- improve the alignment of monitoring and resource delegation in order to effectively target resources to need.

Statutory obligations

117. Despite recent improvement, there are weaknesses in the measures taken to fulfil statutory obligations; provision is unsatisfactory, but improving. The LEA is now taking reasonable steps to meet its statutory obligations following a major reappraisal of its statementing policy in mid-2001. Managers are determined to tackle weaknesses and to establish effective systems and procedures. A clear plan details actions to improve both the rate and quality of statements. The recent decision to appoint two monitoring officers is appropriate in further strengthening the monitoring and review process.

118. The LEA's past performance in the statementing of pupils with special educational needs has been poor. In 1998/99 only seven per cent of statements, with exceptions, were prepared within 18 weeks. With the new assessment team, significant improvement was made in 2000/01 when 86 per cent were completed. There was also improvement in respect of statements involving other agencies; from five per cent in 1998/99 to 38 per cent in 2000/01. Nevertheless, the latter figure is still low by national standards.

119. In 2000, the LEA's procedure for banding provision in statements was challenged by an independent advisory service for parents on the grounds that the system did not provide a clear explanation of support. From August 2001, following DfES intervention, new statements were specific to individual need. An external team has been employed to rewrite all previous statements by August 2002. This major management challenge has meant a re-ordering of priorities for other SEN improvements. It has also meant that the

projected statementing rate for 2001/02 had declined to 69 per cent at the time of the inspection (excluding other agencies), and remained at 38 per cent with the inclusion of other agencies. The inter-agency rate, involving health and social services is of particular concern. Understandably, it has not yet been possible to address the overall strategy objective of working to reduce the number of statements. These levels are below the national average and the LEA's own targets. There is an increase in the rate of statementing in the current year. This is against an overall strategy of reducing the number of statements.

120. Arrangements for reviewing statements have improved during the past year. Educational psychologists attend transition and out-borough reviews. The LEA is also represented at about one third of reviews. Both health and social services contribute appropriately to a multi-agency panel, which has been recently reviewed to include school representation. Early years' developments are helping to bring agencies together.

121. The LEA provides satisfactory information for parents and extends its contact through 'Parents in Partnership', an independent parental support service. It has taken recent initiatives to improve communication and to develop its responsiveness. Parents are well advised of their rights of appeal in correspondence relating to statements.

122. The LEA had five SEN Tribunal cases in 2000/01, of which four were upheld. There were seven in 2001, one of which was upheld, with two not yet resolved. In general, successful appeals were against the LEA's refusal to carry out a statutory assessment.

123. Schools rightly identify a need to improve links with social services and express concern about the statementing process. However, it is clear that headteachers are aware of the improvements the LEA is seeking to make and are supportive of these.

Recommendation

In order improve steps taken to meet statutory obligations in respect of SEN:

- closely monitor plans to improve co-ordination with other agencies in the production of statements, and ensure rigorous procedures for monitoring and review.

School improvement

124. The LEA has maintained the generally sound level of SEN support for school improvement noted in the 1997 OFSTED inspection. Overall, there is much that is positive, but closer co-ordination of management, monitoring, resourcing and professional development is now needed.

125. Schools have high levels of support, including access to centrally-funded SEN advisory teachers through a bidding system, as well as CIAS support with 'catch-up' materials. The school focus on pupils with SEN is good and is supported by a strong programme of training which includes accredited courses for teaching and support staff. SENCOs are very well supported; in particular, half termly 'business' meetings at each school provide an opportunity for the attached educational psychologist and advisory teacher to meet with the headteacher, SENCO and others to plan together. The LEA has included pupils with SEN appropriately in their strategies for raising standards of literacy and numeracy and the LEA's data indicates fewer pupils achieving below Level 2 at the end of Key Stage 1. Support services are well regarded by schools. A review of support for pupils with hearing and sensory needs has just been completed and a plan for restructuring is about to be implemented.

126. Schools are well served and know it, but arrangements to monitor and assess the impact of LEA support are not yet sufficiently well developed.

Value for money

127. Overall costs for SEN are broadly in line with similar LEAs. Corporate budgetary monitoring is satisfactory and includes SEN functions. Budgetary control and routine monitoring are reasonable. However, an estimated overspend in the current financial year for the cost of re-writing statements, and additional expenditure for SEN transport, is being met by a supplementary estimate.

128. Active budget management is unsatisfactory since budget ownership lies with the finance team. The proposed introduction of cost centre management will improve this, but currently, a lack of financial control means that managers are unable to assess the budgetary implications of decisions across linked activities. This does not ensure effective management, for example, in judging value for money when considering the SEN transport budget against the cost of alternative, more local, provision. It also makes effective strategic planning of resources very difficult.

129. Since April 2001, schools have received delegated resources for both statemented and non-statemented SEN support. Criteria for the deployment of resources are clear, but are rightly under review to ensure a more effective system for resource allocation. However, delegation has not been accompanied by rigorous monitoring. In particular, weaknesses in the system of statementing mean that there can be no consistent monitoring of provision in line with learning objectives. The current review of statements, now focusing on levels of provision, will improve the allocation of resources in line with need. At present very few statements are withdrawn.

130. The LEA makes significant use of out-borough placements. In the past three years there has been a reported increase of 40 per cent in the costs of day and residential placements for pupils with EBD. Monitoring of out-borough schools has just begun. This will address the need to assess systematically both pupil progress and value for money.

131. On balance, until budgetary responsibilities are clearer and monitoring improved, weaknesses outweigh strengths and value for money is not assured.

Recommendation

In order to improve value for money for SEN:

- complete a monitored audit of school SEN expenditure and provision by no later than September 2002.

SECTION 4: PROMOTING SOCIAL INCLUSION

Summary of effectiveness in promoting social inclusion

132. Within education, inclusion has received sound attention as part of the LEA's approach to improving pedagogy. But for some pupils, this has not been enough. The drive to improve attendance, reduce exclusion and provide for pupils without a school place has not been as persistent or unswerving as that to raise standards. Departmental restructuring in the last two years, and particularly the appointment of high calibre officers, has greatly improved support for inclusion. Progress is evident and the capacity for improvement is promising.

The strategy to promote social inclusion

133. The LEA's promotion of social inclusion is satisfactory, but there are significant weaknesses in its support for groups of vulnerable pupils. The council has a strong corporate commitment to social inclusion and is clear about what this means for the local community and for its schools. This commitment is evident in corporate planning, and in actions now cascading through the council.

The supply of school places

134. Planning for the provision of mainstream school places is good, and places are well matched to need. The LEA's approach is set out clearly in the school organisation plan, and the school organisation committee is working effectively.

135. The main issue in recent years has been the need to secure sufficient school places, particularly for new entrants of secondary school age. The LEA is taking appropriate action in response to this. Additional accommodation has been provided at four existing secondary schools over the past three years, and a new community secondary school will open on a temporary site in September 2002, moving to its permanent location in September 2005.

136. Five out of the eight sixth forms in mainstream schools are small. Schools in the north of the borough, supported by the LEA, have formed a consortium in order to make sixth form provision more cost effective; discussion is taking place about a similar arrangement in the south.

137. Forecasting the number of pupils has not been consistently accurate enough. A research project is underway to determine ways to improve accuracy. With the temporary exception of the late admission of one pupil, the LEA met the infant class size pledge through a combination of adjusting standard numbers, providing additional accommodation and employing extra teachers.

Asset management

138. Asset management planning is good, and in some respects, excellent. All three components of the asset management plan (AMP) have been completed satisfactorily within DfES timetables. The LEA has invested in appropriate software to process AMP information; changes to school plans and condition assessments can now be accessed automatically by schools using the intranet.

139. Standards of maintenance and repair in school buildings are high. DfES figures show Barking and Dagenham to have the lowest backlog of condition work, at £147 per pupil, of any LEA in England. This compares very favourably with the second lowest LEA at £344, and an England average of £901. Headteachers are content to accept that their schools need less expenditure on condition work than in any other LEA. The LEA wisely continued to spend money on building repair and maintenance during the 1980s and 1990s when others did not. Currently, the LEA is working to improve access for disabled people to school buildings.

140. As a result of its 'debt free' status the LEA is able to invest in a comparatively large capital programme. The budget for capital spending in Education in 2000/01 was £8.7m, equivalent to £301 per pupil (£172 primary and £502 secondary); this is well above the averages for outer London and England. The capital budget has grown again in 2001/02 to £15.2m including £2.5m of grant income; of the total, £9.9m will go to secondary schools and £3.1 to primary. However, there has been some slippage in the authority's management of capital programmes. Steps have been taken to remove some of the blockages, but more active management is needed.

Admissions

141. Barking and Dagenham makes satisfactory arrangements for admission to schools. However, there are some important weaknesses. Casual admissions are not managed well. The practice of indefinitely maintaining waiting lists by secondary schools prevents the LEA from securing places for pupils currently out of school. The admissions service was the subject of a Best Value review. The inspection report is included as an appendix to this report.

142. Information booklets for parents are attractive, easy to read and present most of the necessary information clearly and succinctly. Parental preferences are largely met. The number of admissions appeals is rising in both phases. Secondary appeals are concluded successfully during the first half of the summer term so that pupils can join in induction activities.

143. The LEA has established an admissions forum that meets regularly; its remit includes the monitoring of pupils out of school and casual admissions. The LEA is the admissions authority for the great majority of schools it maintains and it has good links with the voluntary aided church schools in the area. Links with neighbouring LEAs are irregular and informal.

Recommendation

In order to improve admissions to schools:

- consult with schools to agree improved procedures for the management of waiting lists for school places.

In order to implement the recommendations of the Best Value review of the admissions service:

- carry out the proposed review of admissions criteria for primary and secondary schools including catchment areas, linked school arrangements, and procedures to ensure the inclusion of pupils with SEN; and
- identify relevant performance indicators for the Barking and Dagenham admissions service and establish a system to use this and other information to monitor and manage the performance of the service.

Provision of education for pupils who have no school place

144. The LEA's provision for pupils who are out of school is unsatisfactory. In the absence of urgent action based on sequenced and costed proposals, full-time education will not be available for all by September 2002. Undoubtedly, the LEA faces substantial pressures on school places from several sources, including children of refugees. However, too many pupils are out of school.

145. In 2000, it was estimated that over 250 pupils were without a school place. On the basis of information provided at the time of this inspection there were still about 130-160 pupils not in school, almost all of secondary age. Approximately half of the total had been allocated to a school: many to the same one. Most were not actually on roll and 'allocation' for many was little more than an LEA proposal, not necessarily agreed with the school. At the one school visited, fewer than one third of pupils on the LEA's list of pupils allocated to the school were actually on roll. Of those without an allocation, 65 children had no school or proposed provision. None were receiving home tuition and there was little indication of follow up action. A similar situation existed in the autumn term 2001.

146. A protocol for casual admissions has been drafted but not yet agreed by headteachers, despite the urgency of the situation. Over 60 letters directing admission were sent to schools last year. Schools maintain waiting lists for casual admissions, but the LEA does not have access to all of them. The 2000/01 Best Value review recommended that casual admissions should be centralised, but this has not yet been implemented.

147. For excluded pupils, a secondary phase PRU was established in January 2001. It is only now about to consider its strategic development plan. It has strong leadership but is still at an early stage of its organisational and curriculum development. It does not

have a discrete budget. There are exciting plans for a Community Health and Education Centre which will make provision for primary age pupils. The 'Focus' project at Barking College makes provision for pupils at risk of exclusion, although the majority of students are transferred to the roll of the PRU. The Home Tuition service, managed from the PRU, provides approximately five hours tuition for each pupil per week. There is little formal monitoring of outcomes and tuition is almost entirely on an individual basis. There was a recent review by an external consultant who was helpfully critical and made recommendations for improvement.

148. These initiatives have not yet been brought together into a coherent plan to meet the needs of pupils and new legislation. The DfES wrote to the authority in August expressing its concern. Unless there is a major shift of resources and priorities the LEA will not be able to provide 25 hours of education for pupils out of school by September 2002.

149. The LEA has not yet implemented some useful work undertaken on 'missing children'. It reviewed the reduction in the number of secondary pupils between Years 10 and 11. This shows significant differences between schools, including one with a fall in numbers of 14.8 per cent between the two years. Common reasons were 'parents educating elsewhere' and 'moved out of area'. However, none of the pupils identified at the four schools with the highest reductions could be found on the register of pupils receiving education other than at school. In very few instances was there evidence of follow-up action or identification of the need for a school place. There is the clear and serious possibility that such pupils are lost to the education system.

150. Monitoring arrangements for home-educated children are good. That apart, the LEA is failing to meet its statutory obligations in respect of children out of school and needs to implement its strategic intentions urgently.

Recommendation

In order to improve provision for pupils who have no school place:

- draw up a costed plan for the provision of full time education for those out of school and implement this as a matter of urgency so that legislative requirements can be met by September 2002;
- draw up an action plan to address the fall in the number of pupils in school between Years 10 and 11 and implement this by August 2002 to ensure that no pupils are lost to the education system; and
- the LEA should take the central role in managing casual admissions.

Attendance

151. Support for attendance is satisfactory. Attendance remains a concern, but was identified as a serious issue at the time of the first inspection. Weaknesses lie in support for primary schools where there has been little improvement in attendance and no improvement in unauthorised absence since the last inspection. In secondary schools, there has been some improvement in attendance, and a considerable reduction in unauthorised absence. Action has not been sufficiently prioritised until relatively recently.

152. Over the last two years, the education welfare team became depleted. Staffing difficulties were encountered last year. The service has now been restructured and strengthened. The capacity for further improvement is good. The access and attendance team operates within the new children's support division, working with pupils and their families and supporting schools. Additionally appointed officers support pupils in public care, young women of school age who are mothers and the increasing number of mobile pupils. In secondary schools, links with the learning mentors are used as a lever to improve attendance.

153. A new handbook has recently been launched. This is a model of good practice. It makes clear the roles and responsibilities of schools and officers; offers guidance on procedures and definitions, and gives good practical advice to schools. Previous inconsistencies in marking registers should now be eliminated, ensuring that attendance and unauthorised absence figures are more accurate, and court cases easier to substantiate.

154. Inspectors' first systematic visit of the year involves an access and attendance officer. Discussions with headteachers on attendance targets and exclusion issues have resulted in good plans for remedial action. There is already evidence of impact, particularly in highlighting underlying reasons for absence and negotiating appropriate remedial action with schools. The combination of this good intervention strategy, the new handbook, additional resources to schools through Standards Funding and newly appointed staff should ensure further improvement. Alongside this, a central pupil database is being introduced to allow closer and more rapid monitoring of attendance and exclusion.

155. Co-operation with other agencies, especially with social services and the police, is good. An access and attendance officer is a member of the youth offending team which has carried out truancy sweeps. Regular discussions with magistrates regarding court action proceedings result in a generally successful impact.

Behaviour support

156. Support for behaviour is satisfactory. The LEA's own evaluation indicates considerable concern with exclusions from its schools. Although good progress has been made in reducing the number of permanent exclusions from secondary schools, the number of fixed term exclusions is still at an unacceptably high level though there is a downward trend. At primary level, permanent exclusions are high, although there has been some reduction. Some primary schools had a relatively high rate of fixed term exclusions in 2000/2001.

157. Under these circumstances, the LEA has rightly planned an extensive review of its approach to behavioural support intended to build on the sound basis provided by the revised Behaviour Support Plan (BSP). This will include a broad range of representation from the LEA, schools and the recently established pupil referral unit (PRU). The review will consider the role of the access and attendance team and contributions through the EiC and small EAZ initiatives.

158. The formula for the distribution of the Pupil Retention Grant is appropriate and sensibly includes a pupil mobility element. Not all schools have returned action plans which makes it difficult for the LEA to determine how effectively this funding is being used. However, the response from one school sensibly includes policies on dealing with emotional difficulties, school refusers and the induction of casual admissions.

159. There are good examples of inter-agency and cross boundary co-operation for individual pupils, for instance, the community health and education centre. Acorns, an early intervention service supporting parents of young children with challenging behaviour, is evidence of a successful strategy. Vocational courses have been introduced for disaffected pupils at Key Stage 4 at Barking College. Learning Support Units are well established in secondary schools and, though there has not yet been a published evaluation, headteachers indicate that these are working well to improve behaviour. Learning mentors, building on a model established within the borough before the EiC initiative, are targeting some of their work towards disaffected pupils. The children's support division works co-operatively with voluntary agencies in helping to support pupils and their families who are at risk, or seen to be vulnerable. Initiatives are having some impact on rates of fixed term exclusion but there is still some way to go.

Recommendation

In order to improve support for behaviour:

- monitor and evaluate the impact of the Pupil Retention Grant on secondary schools and share good practice.

Health, safety, welfare and child protection

160. Support for health and safety, welfare and child protection is good. Multi-agency co-operation has been much improved since the previous inspection. There is close working between the education service, social services and the police. In addition, other agencies such as housing have been effectively involved when circumstances warrant. The borough's welfare officer, educational psychology service and industrial chaplain offer support and guidance to schools and families in cases of trauma. The Healthy Schools Initiative has successfully supported schools in developing health and education programmes. There is a good working arrangement with officers in surrounding boroughs. Sample guidelines on the use of minibuses, outdoor pursuits and risk assessment are available for schools. These were not examined as part of the inspection.

161. There has been a recent transfer of responsibilities for child protection to the access and attendance service. All schools have emergency contact numbers and officers are available to advise on cases either prior to, or at the time of a referral. A consultant is providing training and additional support to child protection co-ordinators. Course attendance is monitored and areas of concern well followed up. The existing policy and procedures document is being revised in consultation with schools.

Children in public care

162. Support for children in public care is satisfactory. The LEA meets its statutory requirements, and has in place both corporate commitment and a plan of action in order to secure further improvement. The newly devised EDP identifies the educational attainment of pupils in public care as a priority, and makes appropriate connections between activities, for example with the work of the language support team.

163. The role of corporate parent is being taken seriously. A scrutiny panel of members is monitoring provision for, and the performance of, children in public care. There are named contacts in each school and within the children's support division. All children in public care have a personal education plan.

164. A joint action plan has been agreed between education and social services. In particular, a new post specifically for children in public care has recently been established which has brought a new focus to this area of work. A training programme for schools has just started; this has been well received, as has cluster training including social workers, foster carers and learning mentors.

165. Good foundations have been laid to improve arrangements for the education of children in public care and they are beginning to be implemented. Data are improving but are not yet fully sufficient. For example, little is known about children in public care outside the borough, although this is being addressed. Support is joint funded by education and social services. Projects to improve attainment are at an early stage.

Recommendation

In order to improve support for children in public care:

- establish monitoring arrangements by August 2002, to include children placed outside the LEA; and
- include resource costs in key plans from April 2002.

Measures to combat racism

166. Measures to combat racism are satisfactory. One of the borough's seven community priorities is 'promoting equal opportunities and celebrating diversity'. The council has used the Local Government Association check-list well to determine its course of action. Planning at corporate level is thorough and deadlines clearly noted. All LEA staff have undergone mandatory training. The executive adopted the report of the committee of inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence definition of racist incidents and action for investigation of racial harassment and discrimination in June 2001. A seminar

on the implications of this was attended by officers, headteachers, governors and elected members.

167. The monitoring of racist incidents began in January 2001, with clear guidance and an incident form. Reporting to elected members, and subsequently to schools and governors, indicated very few reports had been submitted to the LEA and concluded that incidents were probably not being reported. Schools have requested additional training. This is planned for the Spring term, 2002. Officers also intend to review the incident form, which schools report as cumbersome.

168. Regular reporting on the performance of ethnic minority pupils includes information on attendance, attainment and exclusions, together with appropriate action for improvement. At both Key Stages 2 and 4, the majority of ethnic minority groups perform well. As many pupils begin their schooling in the borough late and are often not fluent in English, this represents considerable success. However, both fixed term and permanent exclusions relative to the percentage of minority ethnic pupils in the school population are a cause for concern.

169. The LEA is working with schools to develop model policies and procedures to ensure compliance with the Race Relations (Amendment) Act and based on the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) document 'Learning for All'. These are due to be completed by the end of May, 2002. The LEA is working with teachers and members of ethnic communities to develop teaching resources which take more account of other cultural groups. Cultural celebrations take place in schools and on a borough wide basis.

170. The council provides support for families who experience difficulty when arriving in the borough. An advocacy service has been established to help parents from minority ethnic groups to understand the workings of the education system within the borough and to assist them if the need arises. Members are aware of the need to increase minority ethnic representation on the community forums.

SECTION 5: CORPORATE ISSUES

Introduction to corporate issues

171. Since the last inspection, the authority has vigorously implemented an ambitious and extensive modernising agenda. This has resulted in considerable and positive change, including the appointment of a new chief executive, the implementation of new political structures and departmental restructuring. Changes have resulted in a more open and consultative culture; a strong focus on the performance of services; strengthened management capacity; improved corporate working and a strong community leadership role for the council.

172. In 1999, restructuring brought together provision for education, arts and libraries. Led by the director of education, arts and libraries, the department's long-term role in self-sustaining community regeneration is well articulated. The chief inspector now has additional responsibilities as the borough officer for community learning, and the inspection and advisory division has been re-organised to become CIAS. The role of the education service in support of corporate plans has been transformed. The department now has two officers on the management team of the authority, and is leading cross-service corporate initiatives. The formation of a children's support division within the department, although not fully operational until 2001, is resulting in improved inter-departmental and service working, particularly on social inclusion.

Corporate planning

173. Corporate planning is satisfactory with few weaknesses, but the capacity to implement medium-term plans is limited by the current mis-alignment of strategic and financial planning. The council's long-term vision for Barking and Dagenham is clearly rooted in its regeneration strategy and enacted through its draft community and neighbourhood renewal strategies. Seven community priorities, identified following extensive consultation with the local community, form the basis of a corporate strategy. A very high priority is given to education as the key to raising the aspirations and expectations of local residents. This underpins the council's '2020 vision'. The council has an unquestionable commitment to making this vision a reality and has invested a high level of resourcing to do so. Education features strongly in overarching corporate plans which are clearly presented, coherent and well sequenced.

174. Systems for communicating and co-ordinating corporate plans are strong and effective. The balanced scorecard is ensuring coherence between corporate goals and departmental and service plans and has greatly assisted cross-directorate and cross-service working. In particular, recent strategic and operational links between social services and education on developing a broader-based approach to inclusion for the most vulnerable pupils.

175. Procedures for implementing and evaluating corporate plans are satisfactory. Responsibilities and accountabilities are clear. Chief officers are strongly held to account for the successful implementation of council policies and for meeting local and national performance targets. The BVPP makes explicit the continuing local drive for minimum service standards, details clear and measurable performance indicators and demands a high level of accountability for service delivery. Progress against indicators is

systematically and thoroughly monitored and evaluated; this is effective in providing members with regular access to good information, which enables timely and well-informed decision-making. The balanced scorecard will undoubtedly strengthen further the implementation and evaluation of corporate plans across all council departments.

176. The corporate planning cycle has only recently been co-ordinated with the financial planning cycle. This means that the implementation of plans is not yet closely monitored against financial plans. A service and financial planning calendar clearly aligns corporate planning with departmental planning, review, monitoring and budgeting, but this will not become fully embedded until 2003.

Decision making

177. Corporate decision making through the executive works well, and is founded on good consultation. However, there are weaknesses in financial and budgetary decision making. The community forums and the youth forum are active and successful in enabling residents to influence council decision-making. Consultation with schools is varied. In relation to the EDP it is very good; in relation to finance and the funding formula it is less so. A consultation document on changes to the funding formula for April 2002 was circulated to schools very late, in mid January. Budget information for the coming year is circulated to schools late, after budgets have been agreed by the executive in February. There is no system for circulating indicative budgets earlier in order to facilitate schools' budget planning.

178. The LEA has retained central control of the budget for the CIAS and has set out very clear reasons for doing so; these are endorsed by schools. But in order to meet DfES targets for delegation it has delegated other items. The size of the education budget is set by reference to the SSA.

179. Delegation to officers is appropriate. The respective roles of officers and members are clear and decision making effective. Processes for management decision making are not sufficiently clarified in that the relationship between the responsibilities of budget manager, budget holder and professional decision maker is not well linked.

Leadership of officers and elected members

180. Leadership by elected members is very good. Members provide strong and committed leadership and have a clear vision for education within the corporate plans of the council. Members are very clear about their strategic leadership for education. Over the past ten years, the commitment to community regeneration through educational achievement has been steadfast. The previous OFSTED inspection acknowledged members' commitment to the funding of education. This has not changed: members provide the resources necessary to carry out corporate priorities. Schools value highly this unswerving pledge to education and fully accept a high level of accountability in return.

181. New political processes are working well and decision-making is effective and more transparent. Policy commissions, comprising working groups of members, officers and others advise on policy issues. Serious account is taken of the views of the local community in decision-making. Scrutiny by members is vigorous and well informed. All

key policies and plans are subject to effective democratic scrutiny; notably, executive meetings are open to other members and the public.

182. Members are directly engaged in school improvement. Monitoring of the education department, and of attainment levels in schools is systematic and thorough. A standing scrutiny panel meets regularly to review OFSTED inspection reports of all schools.

183. There is a strong emphasis on performance indicators and performance management by elected members. A good competency assessment framework is in place for the chief executive and the senior management team. The council has made good progress in developing its performance management system through the use of the balanced scorecard.

184. The leadership given by senior officers was strong at the time of the previous inspection and remains so. Leadership is effective and purposeful, but does not yet secure effective cross-departmental and inter-divisional working which ensures social and educational inclusion is integral to support for school improvement. The newly appointed chief executive gives an excellent lead in driving systematic change throughout the council and has signalled clearly that Barking and Dagenham stands for corporate working and continuous improvement. Carefully forged and maintained partnerships within and outside the community are key to the council's work and integral to successful planning and delivery of council priorities.

185. The director and borough officer for community learning, effectively supported by senior managers, have embarked on an ambitious programme of renewal and improvement that is fully aligned to the national and corporate agenda. Their leadership of this work in improving the LEA's schools has been decisive and unshakeable.

186. Officers have worked hard to build mutual trust between the LEA and schools, and have established very strong partnerships and networks, enabling improvement strategies to be implemented efficiently. Schools are in no doubt that the LEA provides the leadership, challenge and support for community priorities to become a reality through education. Many of the school improvement strategies are beginning to demonstrate success and a broader approach to social inclusion is beginning to impact on the structure and practice of the LEA.

187. Officers provide elected members, including non-executive and scrutiny members, with good and timely advice which is well informed by monitoring information from performance indicators.

Partnership

188. Partnerships with a wide range of agencies are good. Barking and Dagenham is involved in numerous and successful strategic and operational partnerships. Partners are keen to work with the council and a Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) has recently been established which comprises a broad range of stakeholders from the public, private and voluntary sectors, and representation from the community forums. This group has been active and successful in developing the community strategy and is currently working on the borough's Neighbourhood Renewal strategy. Regeneration partnerships are strong and include the Thames Gateway London Partnership working to provide sustainable

economic development and regeneration in the London Thames Gateway area, and partnerships successful in encouraging inward investment, job creation and development of the local area. The partnership between the council and the community through the community forums and youth forum is particularly impressive in enabling local people to influence council policy and direction.

189. The education department has developed a range of good strategic and operational partnerships with other council departments and with external agencies. These partnerships include higher education and lifelong learning providers, and a range of partnerships to promote social inclusion. Partnerships are well aligned to the borough's goals, education is given high priority and structures for ensuring co-ordinated action are clear. Planning takes appropriate account of shared accountabilities for meeting performance indicators. Partnerships with diocesan boards are very good and the standing advisory council for religious education (SACRE) is working well.

190. Work with partners is successful and productive at strategic and operational levels, although primary schools rate the impact of partnerships less highly than secondary schools. Successful inter-agency working within the Community Safety Strategic Partnership has led to a reduction in youth crime. The EYCDP is particularly dynamic: the development of a local foundation curriculum across providers has been a significantly good achievement. School-level partnership work has led to a significant beneficial impact. In particular the education business partnership has led to a good range of practical projects and activities linking schools with business. However, at an operational level, schools report poor communications with social services and unsatisfactory liaison with health.

APPENDIX 1: RECOMMENDATIONS

This report has made a number of fundamental recommendations, which are key to the further progress of the LEA. Work should begin on them immediately. They are:

In order to improve provision for pupils who have no school place:

- draw up a costed plan for the provision of full time education for those out of school and implementing this as a matter of urgency so that legislative requirements can be met by September 2002;
- draw up an action plan to address the fall in the numbers of pupils in school between Years 10 and 11 and implement this by August 2002 to ensure that no pupils are lost to the education system; and
- the LEA should take the central role in managing casual admissions.

In order to improve the effectiveness of the LEA's strategy for SEN:

- meet the requirements of the revised code of practice for special educational needs by completing and publishing the policy statement on inclusion as a matter of urgency;
- make the development plan feasible by drawing up for 2002/3 a fully costed and sequential plan to implement the LEA's inclusion strategy;
- address structural and management issues to ensure close working between CIAS and the children's support division; and
- improve the alignment of monitoring and resource delegation in order to effectively target resources to need.

In order to improve steps taken to meet statutory obligations in respect of SEN:

- closely monitor plans to improve co-ordination with other agencies in the production of statements, and ensure rigorous procedures for monitoring and review.

In order to improve value for money for SEN:

- complete a monitored audit of school SEN expenditure and provision by no later than September 2002.

In order to improve structures for achieving Best Value:

- make explicit the LEA's overall strategy for achieving Best Value;
- provide clear guidance to managers on its application so that cost-effectiveness and value for money in service provision are assured;
- implement plans to allocate budget management responsibilities to service heads;
- explicitly link performance management with accountable resource management;
- provide and implement guidance to school on their Best Value responsibilities; and

- ensure that improvement plans from Best Value reviews have clear success criteria, resource allocations and milestones to enable effective monitoring and evaluation of progress.

The report also makes the following recommendations. They are:

In order to improve the allocation of resources to priorities:

- expedite the fundamental review of the formula used to allocate funding to schools to ensure that the Individual Schools Budget is distributed in line with the LEA's current priorities and in a way that supports school autonomy;
- cost agreements made with schools for CIAS support; and
- increase the level of challenge to schools where budget surpluses have accrued.

In order to improve the extent to which the LEA's support to schools is focused on areas of greatest need:

- consult with schools regarding the amount of centrally funded visiting to effective schools, while providing schools with an opportunity to buy into additional support to promote their own development.

In order to improve support to school governors:

- consult with governing bodies regarding the balance of LEA support for governors in line with their increasing autonomy.

In order to improve the effectiveness of services to support school management:

- provide earlier information to schools as prospective purchasers;
- provide a range of service options so that schools can purchase services in a way that reflects their need for the service;
- indicate how schools can secure client advice when they wish to make their own arrangements;
- indicate how schools can obtain advice about alternative providers; and
- revise the Personnel /HR handbook to bring it up to date both in relation to the division of responsibility between LEA and schools, and to new legislation. Put in place a system to update individual sections as the need arises.

In order to improve admissions to schools:

- consult with schools to agree procedures for the maintenance of waiting lists for school places.

In order to implement the recommendations of the Best Value review of the admissions service:

- carry out the proposed review of admissions criteria for primary and secondary schools including catchment areas, linked school arrangements, and procedures to ensure the inclusion of pupils with SEN; and

- identify relevant performance indicators for the Barking and Dagenham admissions service and establish a system to use this and other information to monitor and manage the performance of the service.

In order to improve support for behaviour:

- monitor and evaluate the impact of the Pupil Retention Grant on secondary schools and share good practice.

In order to improve support for children in public care:

- establish monitoring arrangements by August 2002, to include children placed outside the LEA;
- include resource costs in key plans from April 2002.

APPENDIX 2:

THE BEST VALUE REVIEW OF SUPPORT FOR POST-14 (SCHOOLS) EDUCATION

1. The Best Value review (BV) review of support for post 14 (Schools) education took place during 2000 and the final report was produced at the end of March 2001. The scope of the review was too narrow and limited its potential impact from the outset. Difficulties were encountered conducting a BV review of part of a service, where realistic disaggregation of costs is difficult if not impossible, and partly because the LEA's focus was clearly on curriculum and academic, rather than organisational or financial matters. As such, the report deals solely with the post -14 work of the community inspectorate and advisory service (CIAS). It does not touch upon the question of small sixth forms or the impact of what schools do to raise standards. The review is forced into the position of assuming a direct but unproven link between CIAS activity and achievement by pupils. It was led by the lead officer for the service under review, and included other council officers.
2. The aims of the CIAS are to ensure, in accordance with corporate aims, that educational standards rise across all schools. The specific aims for the post 14 elements of the service are set out in Priority 6 of the EDP. They are ambitious and include raising attainment at GCSE and above in all subjects. The review uses exam results, which have improved at a faster rate than the national average, as proof of its contribution to raising standards. Progress is also evidenced by measurement against specific performance targets for particular strands of Priority 6. Evidence from schools, pupils and employers supports the view that the service is good.
3. The scoping of the review led to difficulties with comparisons. Few if any other LEAs operate services of a comparable size with a comparable brief. Thus there is no benchmarking of costs and the service is not able to provide conclusive evidence that it is cost effective despite considerable attempts to compare with similar authorities and provision in Holland.
4. The review is weak on both competition and challenge. In particular the competition section seriously considers only one narrow option, that of replacing the existing inspectors by consultants on a day rate. External consultants were employed to cost this option as the service heads do not carry budget responsibilities and lack experience of financial management. The accuracy of the basis for the figures used in these calculations is questionable. The review does not fundamentally challenge the existence or nature of the service; instead it interprets this requirement as referring to the service's own challenge to schools. There is no serious consideration of other options, such as delegating the resources to schools and allowing them to organise or purchase their own support.
5. Though expensive, time-consuming and deficient in a number of significant respects, the report has resulted in some improvement. Unacceptable inconsistencies in the procedures for working with schools and communicating with headteachers have mostly been addressed, arrangements to monitor progress against EDP priorities have been established and recording of work has been improved. The consultation with schools revealed a lack of expertise within the CIAS for supporting business studies, which is a major area for vocational development. This has been addressed.

There are now plans to strengthen support in this area but the timescale is lengthy. A major drive on support for post 16 education is planned. In the areas it does address, the plan is an appropriate response to the findings of the review, is sufficiently ambitious and is supported by members. Its implementation is being monitored and should lead to further improvement. What it signally fails to do, as does the review, is challenge the value for money represented by this extremely large inspection and advisory service.

6. A **satisfactory** service is provided with **promising** prospects of improvement

APPENDIX: 3

THE BEST VALUE REVIEW OF ADULT LITERACY

1. Barking and Dagenham LEA has given a high priority to the development of adult literacy within the borough. Following the targeted work in tackling under-achievement in schools, it became clear that adults needed to make similar progress, to reduce the ever-widening gap. The review itself was also given high priority, with elected members taking an active role within the process. This has been instrumental in ensuring that the service is maintained as a strategic priority of the council. The scope of the review was too narrow taking into account adult literacy only, rather than the Adult Education Service.
2. Consultation incorporated the views of many stakeholders. Although at the time of the review, retention on adult literacy programmes was a concern at the Adult College the views of early leavers were not sought. Additionally, the views of employers were not sufficiently taken into account. This is particularly important when considering the economic imperative to drive up literacy standards. A major finding was that the marketing of the programme of adult literacy is not effective. Challenge, although taking into account external service providers, was not sufficiently testing of the current service. Local providers in the private, public and voluntary sectors were considered, but insufficient data or analysis was obtained to draw meaningful conclusions. However, the real value came from the qualitative rather than the quantitative comparisons. A wide range of options was considered for the future of the service, but many were inappropriate due to contractual and funding constraints. Insufficient attention has been given to the alternative options identified.
3. The improvement plan contains many of the critical issues for the service. However, it lacks clear and specific targets for monitoring the achievement of learners. It is recognised within the LEA that raising achievement at individual and family level, and within the working environment is a long-term task that requires investment and focussed monitoring. To this end, the LEA has funded four additional posts. They have specific responsibility for basic skills, literacy, numeracy and training development within the council. An adult basic skills initiative steering group has also been established. This incorporates a range of council departments as well as key strategic partners. These actions are working well and are ensuring effective collaboration and liaison. They are intended to assist in the consistent and coherent development of additional provision across the borough, and in particular to regenerate the local community through wider participation in education.
4. The service is **satisfactory** and has **promising** prospects of improvement. It has already improved primarily as a result of the priority given to adult literacy within the LEA. The review and the consequent improvement plan have been contributory factors. Many of the improvements have been in strategic partnership development and planning, rather than in the quality of delivery or raising of standards. Nevertheless, some key building blocks have been put in place.

Recommendation

In order to improve provision for adult literacy:

meet increased student demand and improve the quality of provision for students by:

- ensuring that teachers and tutors have appropriate and relevant qualifications;
- producing timely curriculum and teaching materials which meet national standards;
- improving quality assurance systems;
- developing a borough-wide strategy for the teaching of Basic Skills and ESOL;
- develop ways of sharing good practice in, and better co-ordination of, the teaching of basic skills and ESOL between different partners within the borough;
- develop a more coherent programme of learning opportunities linked to national and local initiatives that makes best use of scarce resources and provides choice and clear progression routes for adult learners; and
- improve marketing and promotion of provision.

APPENDIX: 4

THE BEST VALUE REVIEW OF ADMISSIONS SERVICE

1. The admissions service was the subject of a favourable review by an external consultant in early 2000. The Best Value (BV) review then followed. The review began in June 2000, and was reported to the executive in July 2001.
2. The BV review team comprised officers from the education department, three members and an external consultant. For a review of a relatively small service, it was overly time consuming. While service improvements were introduced during that period, the extent to which they were a direct result of the review is not clear.
3. Challenge lacked rigour. The review looked at whether the service was necessary and who might be the most appropriate provider. It did not review the locally-determined admissions policies within which the service operates, and how these determine workload and other operational issues. The review recommended that these be reviewed. Consultation was appropriate. Parents and carers of children transferring to secondary school during the previous year were consulted by postal survey. Overall they gave a favourable response. Head teachers, the admissions forum, members of the appeals committee members and staff were consulted by telephone and through meetings. They report a satisfactory and improving service.
4. Like many LEAs the review team struggled to find meaningful comparative information. Visits were made to other authorities but different working circumstances diminished the value of any comparisons. There was no rigorous attempt to identify the most relevant performance indicators for Barking and Dagenham and then to compare service performance over the previous few years. This reflects a lack of rigour in performance management practice. The compete work, although required by council BV procedures did not serve much useful purpose. It is clear from documentation that admissions was thought of as a function that should be undertaken by the LEA. This is appropriate. The costs of the service are in line with the average for London boroughs.
5. The improvement plan is unsatisfactory. It consists of a list of tasks with vague timescales. Effective monitoring of progress is not supported by the identification of success criteria, and resource implications are not considered
6. A number of significant improvements to the admissions service took place during the time that the review was underway. Booklets for parents and carers outlining how to apply for places in reception classes and detailing transfer to secondary school were re-written and re-designed. Changes were made to the admissions timetable to comply with Audit Commission guidelines. Other areas for improvement were identified. The administration of waiting lists has returned from schools to the LEA, and there has been increased use of the LEA's power of direction where this is needed to secure a place for a particular pupil. Directions have been issued, but schools have not complied in all cases. Computerised systems were improved, a comprehensive pupil data base purchased and data loaded, but this is not yet fully functional. Difficulties remain: a new policy on casual admissions has been drafted but has yet to be agreed by headteachers.

7. Significant action has yet to be taken on some issues of concern identified by the review; specifically the need for a comprehensive review of admissions criteria including catchment areas for primary schools, linked school arrangements for secondary transfer and the inclusion of pupils with SEN.
8. A **satisfactory** service is provided, with **promising** prospects of improvement provided that the action plan is made more rigorous and then followed through.

APPENDIX: 5

THE BEST VALUE REVIEW OF PUPIL AND STUDENT SERVICES

1. The pupil and student services team administers a range of means tested financial benefits to enable children, young people and adult students to participate in education. These include student loans for higher education, education maintenance allowances, clothing grants, free school meals and transport allowances. This service was appropriately chosen for a Best Value (BV) review. It was performing poorly and housed in dingy, inaccessible offices. Staff morale was low, and levels of sickness absence high.
2. During the period of the review management of the service was transferred to the education finance section. That change was the catalyst for dramatic improvement. There is a new service manager and a new team. The team has been re-located to a relatively accessible position close to the main entrance of Barking town hall.
3. The review started in July 2000, and the review report was agreed by the executive in July 2001. Challenge was not rigorous; it considered service delivery but did not question the fundamental purposes of the service in widening participation in education, and so did not evaluate service effectiveness in relation to educational outcomes. A questionnaire was used to consult service users but only a few were completed. The team struggled to identify appropriate performance information and so came up with little in the way of useful comparison. Potential alternative providers were approached but none showed interest in running the service, so it was decided to retain it 'in house'. The review was conducted without rigour and while some useful outcomes were identified the review process was a cumbersome way to achieve them. The report to the executive made a series of appropriate proposals for future action.
4. The new service manager has overcome most of the shortcomings of the BV review and good performance management is now in place. The intention to widen access to the service is taken seriously and the team has planned to address 60 meetings in various settings to promote the service between December 2001 and April 2002. A system of regular telephone consultation with service users has been introduced along with a staff attitude survey. In the most recent survey 91 per cent of users reported to be satisfied, pleased or very pleased with the service. Relevant performance information has been collected and used to monitor progress. On the key indicator for higher education student awards, the proportion of new applications processed by the end of July, Barking and Dagenham showed the best performance of all London boroughs in 2001. The proportion of school clothing grant applications processed within seven days has risen from 52 per cent in 2000 to 97 per cent in 2001.
5. The service has a comprehensive, appropriate action plan but it lacks resource allocations. Service costs are in line with other LEAs. Progress is monitored regularly and the plan is updated and extended as a consequence.
6. This is now a **very good** service with **good** prospects of improvement.

APPENDIX 6:

EXCELLENCE IN CITIES THEMATIC INSPECTION

1. A good start has been made in implementing the EiC initiative and it is widely regarded as a key component in the borough's regeneration strategy. Actions are based on a clear vision for improvement, which is embedded in council and departmental plans, and challenging targets have been set. There is sound linkage between EiC initiatives, the two small EAZs and the LEA's school improvement plan articulated in the EDP.
2. The LEA has been pivotal in establishing the EiC partnership, initiating activities and co-ordinating tasks. Developments have built successfully on the culture of trust and the secure working relationships that already existed in the LEA and activities have thus progressed quickly. Some significant successes are already evident. The LEA's role as facilitator, rather than leader, is developing well. Good management and support structures have been put in place and all stakeholders are appropriately consulted and included in decision-making processes although partnership concerns about sustainability have not been addressed.

Recommendation

In order to improve support for Excellence in Cities:

- the LEA and EiC partnership should agree a strategy for sustaining the successful elements of the EiC initiative that goes beyond the EiC time-scale.

3. The LEA sources a wide range of funding streams to promote its school improvement and social inclusion agenda. These have been used strategically to supplement EiC funds and to strengthen elements of the programme. EiC resources are appropriately targeted on areas of need and the funding process is fair and transparent. Although the partnership board is fully cognisant of the EiC funds that are available, it has not carried out any detailed analysis of income and expenditure and full accounts have not been regularly presented to the board. No attempt has been made to evaluate the interim impact of the grant or to judge value for money in relation to performance indicators.

Recommendation

In order to improve support for Excellence in Cities:

- the LEA should ensure that EiC accounts are presented to the partnership board on a regular basis to enable budget monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the grant.

4. The staffing of EiC programmes has generally run smoothly and the LEA has supported schools fully through high quality training and induction programmes. Support mechanisms for key staff and co-ordinators are highly valued. Networking

between schools is strong and good informal systems operate for sharing practice. However, there is no dissemination strategy to ensure that the impact of initiatives is passed on to a wider audience.

Recommendation

In order to improve support for Excellence in Cities:

- the LEA and EiC partnership should develop a strategy for the dissemination and sharing of good practice that ensures all schools, elected members and the wider community are informed about EiC successes.

5. Monitoring of individual EiC activities has not been systematically linked to EDP targets although there is extensive anecdotal and qualitative evidence that the initiatives are making a difference to pupils, parents and the ethos of schools. The collection and analysis of EiC-specific data is at an early stage in schools but some good systems are developing, especially around the tracking of gifted and talented pupils. LEA plans to collate this information are tentative and are undocumented. Similarly, although learning mentors are working to school attendance targets and are clear about their contribution to the data on exclusions at LEA level, measurement against performance indicators for attendance has not been considered by the partnership board.

Recommendation

In order to improve support for Excellence in Cities:

- the LEA and EiC partnership should develop robust procedures for monitoring and evaluating the strategy as it is implemented in schools, ensuring that judgements are made against performance indicators that lead to the achievement of targets in the EDP.

6. The **gifted and talented** strand is strongly embedded in EDP priorities. Links with the national strategy for Key Stage 3, small EAZs and the excellence challenge initiative are appropriately addressed. Significant successful work is in evidence and some innovative ideas have caught the imagination and interest of students and teachers alike. Whilst it is unlikely that 2001 results have been affected by EiC implementation, some gains have been noted in higher level attainment at Key Stage 2 and at GCSE, which provide stimulus for further action. Standards at A level show no improvement and the establishment of excellence challenge work is timely and relevant.

7. The **learning mentor** strand is a key activity in the social inclusion priority of the EDP. Well-targeted and good quality training has been provided by the LEA, an audit of needs has been completed and a database is being developed which will track and hold information about school structures, personnel and effective practice. There has been no formal evaluation of impact set against EDP targets but schools are

enthusiastic about the value of the initiative. Students are growing in confidence, communications with parents and carers have improved, and more links with external agencies are evident. Learning mentors' work with gifted and talented pupils has been especially valued by schools in the drive to improve standards at higher levels. Schools are confident that the initiative will impact on attendance and disaffection in the medium term and are determined to find ways of continuing to fund the scheme beyond the time-scale of EiC.

8. The **learning support units** initiative in schools is being efficiently managed alongside the other strands and is central to the delivery of targets to reduce exclusions. In many schools, units are managed by learning mentors and are being used flexibly to support diverse local needs. The LEA's behaviour support, access and attendance, and educational psychology teams are providing good on-going support to the units. Good initial training was provided and this has continued as new learning mentors take up post. No external monitoring or evaluation has taken place, although the results of an internal evaluation are currently being analysed. Headteachers report that already the units are making a difference to the ethos and culture of schools.

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