



**OFFICE FOR STANDARDS
IN EDUCATION**

**INSPECTION OF
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LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY**

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CONTENTS	PARAGRAPHS
INTRODUCTION	1-3
COMMENTARY	4-9
CONTEXT	10-12
RESOURCING	13-15
 PROGRESS MADE ON PRIORITIES IN THE EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT PLAN	
Priority 1: Developing key skills in English, mathematics and information and communications technology	16-20
Priority 2: Improving the quality of teaching	21-25
Priority 3: Developing an authority strategy for supported school self evaluation	26-29
Priority 4: Improving the attendance of pupils and reducing the number of pupils excluded from school	30-31
Priority 5: Improving the quality of leadership and management	32-35
Priority 6: Supporting individual achievement and personal development	36-42
Priority 7: Supporting underachieving schools in raising standards	43-46
 PROGRESS MADE ON THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE 1999 REPORT	
Recommendation A	47-67
Recommendation B	68-73
Recommendation C	74-82
Recommendation D	83-84
Recommendation E	85-89
Recommendation F	90-92
 APPENDIX	

INTRODUCTION

1. This inspection was carried out by OFSTED in conjunction with the Audit Commission under Section 38 of the Education Act 1997. The inspection examined:

- the Education Development Plan;
- progress made on its priorities;
- progress made on implementing the recommendations of the report of June 1999;

focusing on the effectiveness of local education authority (LEA) work to support school improvement. The inspection also took account of the Local Government Act 1999, insofar as it relates to work undertaken by the LEA on Best Value.

2. The inspection was partly based on data, some of which was provided by the LEA, on school inspection information and audit reports, on documentation and on discussions with LEA officers and the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Education Committee. In addition, a questionnaire seeking views on aspects of the LEA's work was circulated to all schools. The response rate was 74 per cent.

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

COMMENTARY

4. The LEA's first inspection report was published in June 1999. It acknowledged that, historically, Buckinghamshire's schools had felt well supported by the LEA. Before the inspection, however, local government reorganisation, a simultaneous reduction in the education budget and a major reorganisation of schools conspired to reduce the quality of the LEA's service to its schools. The inspection revealed a number of considerable strengths and some significant weaknesses. Some of the weaknesses arose from this turbulence prior to the inspection, some from certain policy decisions and others from the way in which services were run. Overall, the LEA's contribution to school improvement in the run up to the inspection was deemed to be "less effective than it should have been".

5. In the brief time since these conclusions were drawn, the LEA has worked vigorously to build on its strengths and eradicate its weaknesses. It has done so within a broader campaign to change its policy from one which focused on providing services to schools to one in which it monitors its schools effectively and is able to give support and challenge in inverse proportion to success. Much has been done to improve its relationships with schools, soured in the recent past by funding shortfalls, a complex reorganisation and the shrinkage of services in the wake of local government reorganisation. A strong view nevertheless remains in the schools that the LEA has more to do to mend this bridge.

6. The Education Development Plan (EDP), which was written before the original inspection, and the post-inspection improvement plan, have been effective guides to progress. Their intentions are appropriate, the activities to achieve them have been well managed, resources have been deployed to good effect and monitoring of progress has been vigilant. Virtually all activities within the two plans are on target to meet their objectives, and some have already done so. It is too early to judge the overall impact in each activity but there are clear signs of improved effectiveness in most of the LEA's work in schools. Standards are already high in national terms and they continue to rise.

7. Significant progress has been made in each of the seven priorities of the EDP. Procedures to improve teaching, to raise standards in key skills, and to sharpen up the management and self evaluation of schools are particularly noteworthy. New arrangements for dealing with schools causing concern are well conceived, and are beginning to influence some of the weak schools. However, schools continue to be diagnosed by OFSTED as weak, and the LEA has much more to do to promote consistent improvement, particularly in areas of social disadvantage.

8. Significant progress has also been made in the recommendations from the first inspection. This is especially so in those services engaged in front line school improvement, such as the advisory service and the area teams. The LEA now has rigorous and effective means of monitoring the quality of services to schools and to make them more accountable. Support for pupils with special educational needs is being reorganised and has improved. The LEA has a clear, long term strategy and has improved its statementing procedures and support for pupils with special needs in mainstream schools. There is still further to go, particularly in detailed forward planning and in helping schools to secure social inclusion.

9. This report evaluates in detail the progress made in the priorities of the EDP and the inspection recommendations. The LEA has worked strenuously to achieve this progress and put matters right. There are clear signs of success. Time is now needed for these and future efforts to bed down. We believe that the LEA has the capacity and the will to ensure that its endeavours will bear fruit.

CONTEXT

10. The economic, political and social characteristics of the county remain as they were when the LEA was inspected in Summer 1999. The LEA currently maintains four nursery schools; 195 primary schools, of which 69 serve infants, 32 juniors and 94 infants and juniors combined; 34 secondary schools, of which 21 are upper schools and 13 are grammar schools; and 14 special schools. One hundred and forty schools are community, 13 are foundation and 76 are voluntary aided or controlled. The schools together serve 75,590 pupils. There are seven beacon schools and 23 schools have been awarded Investors in People (IIP) status. Six schools have been identified by OFSTED as requiring special measures and 9 have serious weaknesses.

11. At all stages of compulsory education, and for some time, the overall attainment of pupils has been well above national averages. It improved further in 1999. The schools collectively are in line to meet the targets for 2002 which were set in the EDP. The following examples illustrate the current performance of schools:

- at Key Stage 2, the percentage of pupils reaching Level 4 or above in the English tests has risen steadily since 1995. In 1999 it stood at 77.6 per cent compared with 70.4 per cent nationally. Similarly, in mathematics, the percentage in 1999 was 73.6 compared with 69 nationally;
- at GCSE, the percentage of pupils gaining five or more grades A*-C rose from 61.3 in 1998 to 62.7 in 1999 compared with an increase nationally from 44.7 to 46.6;
- levels of attendance remain above national averages, with unauthorised absence remaining below. The rate of permanent exclusions from primary schools lies at the national average and for secondary schools it lies below;
- boys and girls achieve similar standards in mathematics and science at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 but boys achieve significantly lower results than girls in English; also
- there is a wide variation in standards overall between schools of similar types.

12. The County Council is made up of 38 Conservative, one Independent, five Labour and 10 Liberal Democrat councillors. The education department has the same structure and remit as that existing during the last inspection. Its directorate has a director, two assistant directors and a chief adviser, augmented by the head of planning and information, and the head of resources. The department's work is carried out by 13 centrally organised services working in conjunction with three area school support teams.

RESOURCING

Arrangements Relating to Best Value

13. The LEA's 'Root and Branch' review process has been in recent years a key vehicle to improve services in the County Council. Recent review reports of education services are clearly written, but do not explain well the context within which improvement is sought. Key information in appendices is not integrated sufficiently in the text of the report. There is inadequate customer focus and options for change are not evaluated with enough rigour. The Council acknowledges that cultural change is necessary. It has begun to move from being a 'task focused' authority to one that has an overriding emphasis on outcomes. A key instrument for this change is the Council's Best Value framework, which sets high standards for Best Value reviews. This framework addresses the basic requirements of Best Value adequately and explains very clearly how corporate, department and service plans are being aligned. The education department has had some success with this, although recommendations made by the district auditor on the Best Value performance plan provide a clear focus for further improvement.

Resource Allocation and Funding Priorities

14. The Council's expenditure on education has been one per cent below the Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) in recent years and in 2000/2001 it passed on the full increase in the education SSA to the education service. It has also met all of the Secretary of State's funding targets for this year. The LEA has delegated 80.5 per cent of its Local Schools Budget (LSB) and increased delegated budgets to schools by 6.6 per cent. Age weighted pupil units have increased by 3.5 to 9.5 per cent and the cost of central administration is £41 per pupil, well within the target of £65 per pupil for LEAs outside London. It has, though, two significant growth pressures to manage in 2000/2001. These are: an increase of 14 per cent on planned expenditure on Special Educational Needs (SEN); and a 28 per cent increase in the budget for home to school transport. The SEN expenditure is largely accounted for by an increase in the cost per statement for pupils with SEN. Higher transport costs are attributable to big rises in the costs of contracts.

15. The LEA has introduced a wide range of appropriate and relevant measures to bring both areas of activity under greater control. It is too early judge their impact. The LEA accepts the need to improve funding levels for schools and in particular to deal with the 32 per cent of secondary schools with deficits of 2.5 per cent or more. Secondary schools appreciate the good quality of support on the planning and control of school budgets and the effort to maximise resources from the Standards Fund by top slicing the LSB. The LEA intends to target resources more closely to need. An example of this in 2000-2001 was the allocation of £250k to schools meeting the threshold criteria for additional needs.

PROGRESS MADE ON PRIORITIES IN THE EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT PLAN

PRIORITY 1: Developing key skills in English, mathematics and Information and Communications Technology.

16. Sustained progress has been made in the major activities of this priority. All are on target, and some have been completed. Resources have been well deployed to support the key actions and deadlines have been met.

17. The previous inspection showed the literacy plan, and its reflection in the EDP, to be ambitious, comprehensive and well grounded in an analysis of standards in schools. The National Literacy Strategy (NLS) is now fully implemented. Early teething problems in its management and in the effectiveness of consultancy in schools have been overcome. Schools are generally satisfied with LEA support for literacy, on the evidence from the school survey and the LEA's own evaluations. Attached advisers have improved their capacity to monitor and advise on literacy teaching in primary schools. Twenty five schools, where standards were too low, have received intensive or medium touch support, leading to rising standards. The LEA is appropriately keen to ensure that such schools have a good understanding of the teaching of literacy and effective practices before ending this additional support.

18. The proportion of pupils achieving level 4 or above at Key Stage 2 has risen by 3.3 percentage points since the introduction of the NLS. The LEA's ambitious target of 86 per cent in 2002 will require a further rise of 8.1 points in the next three years. This will need sustained effort on the part of schools and continued, effective LEA support. Improving the attainment of boys, and of pupils from ethnic minorities, should form an increasingly important part of this effort.

19. The National Numeracy Strategy (NNS) has been implemented in Buckinghamshire with fewer problems than were encountered in the NLS. The previous inspection showed the LEA to be well advanced in its plans to implement the NNS at Key Stage 2. It also showed that its training procedures and choice of schools for support in the first phase were well targeted. All of the major activities of the NNS are well managed. Headteachers are satisfied with NNS implementation, and many primary headteachers are highly satisfied. Training events are reported to be well organised and informative. Schools report good support from the three consultants, strong leadership and good communications. Standards are rising in mathematics throughout Key Stages 1, 2 and 3. For example, after a fall in 1998 at Key Stage 2, they rose from 65.1 per cent to 73.9 per cent in 1999. Although this is slightly below the national rate of improvement, the LEA appears to be in line to meet its Key Stage 2 targets of 79 per cent for 2002.

20. Progress has also been satisfactory in developing support for schools in information and communications technology. All aspects of the county's National Grid for learning project are developing to target. Inspection evidence shows improvements in teaching in 1999, markedly so in primary schools.

Recommendation

Improve support to raise standards in literacy by:

- increasing efforts to persuade schools to take effective action to improve the teaching of boys and underachieving pupils from ethnic minorities.

PRIORITY 2: Improving the quality of teaching

21. This EDP priority is being well managed. Progress in its implementation has been satisfactory. It is too early to judge the overall impact of this work on the quality of teaching.

22. The previous inspection report showed that the quality of teaching in the LEA's schools was similar to that nationally. A slightly higher proportion of good teaching was found in secondary than in primary schools. Enquiries in twenty five schools found that in 14 the LEA support to improve teaching was effective, whilst in 11 it was not effective. Two reasons advanced for this patchy state of affairs were the reluctance of some schools with delegated or devolved budgets to buy in advisory time, and inconsistency in the ways in which advisers worked with schools.

23. The LEA was thus right to place the improvement of support for teaching high on its list of priorities. A thorough analysis of teaching quality was published in the 1999 annual report of the chief adviser, based largely on inspection evidence. As the new system for attached advisers beds down, the LEA will be increasingly able to pinpoint weaknesses in teaching in specific schools and advise headteachers on ways to improve them. This should also benefit the county's pilot scheme for school self evaluation – which has already shown the capacity to improve systematic classroom monitoring in schools – as it spreads to the other schools.

24. EDP activities to improve teaching are appropriate to meet the development needs identified by the LEA. They include improving the subject knowledge and the pedagogical expertise of teachers, together with strengthening curriculum planning. There is a wide range of activities to promote excellence including collaborative work with institutions of higher education. A detailed manual entitled "Teaching Requirements" has been produced giving a great deal of good, practical advice to schools. Specifications for action have been precisely outlined and good procedures are in place to implement them and evaluate effectiveness. The LEA, however, has some way to go to convince many of its schools of the value of its advice on curriculum planning. Recent good quality LEA publications, for example on national curriculum changes, should go some way towards bringing this about.

25. Although it is too early to judge the overall impact of the implementation of this EDP priority on the development work of the schools, there are specific signs of success. For example, all primary schools have had structured support to improve teaching in literacy and numeracy, including lesson observations and detailed feedback to teachers from advisers. Headteachers are pleased with this and those interviewed argue that teaching has improved as a result. Standards rose again in 1999 in both literacy and numeracy and schools appear to be in line to meet the

2002 targets. More generally, most school inspection reports published in the last academic year show that the quality of teaching has improved since the last section 10 inspection. Nevertheless, weaknesses persist in a minority of schools. Overall, one lesson in eight remains unsatisfactory. Also, teacher recruitment is increasingly a problem in the county's upper schools, and in schools in socially disadvantaged areas, which give cause for concern.

Recommendation

Improve the quality of teaching by:

- continuing to give high priority to the recently established effort to reveal and improve weak teaching; and
- developing procedures to counteract the increasing difficulty of recruiting appropriately qualified teachers, especially for upper schools.

PRIORITY 3: Developing an authority strategy for supported school self evaluation

26. The LEA's developing systems for supporting schools in their self review are comprehensive. Good progress has been made in drawing up and trialling policy, procedures, training and support work in schools. These procedures now need to be introduced and consolidated throughout the county.

27. The LEA has chosen this priority as one of its means of spreading good management practices to all schools in order to raise standards. The first inspection noted that the LEA had issued guidance on self review. It also concluded that there was much to be done to put these proposals into effect.

28. The LEA has tackled this priority with vigour. Its activities have included the trialling, in 15 per cent of schools, of a clear and comprehensive framework for supported school self review which has been modified as a result of the trial; training programmes and support materials in the process of self review for school senior and middle managers and class teachers; the deployment of attached advisers to promote the use of the framework and to evaluate its validity in the schools to which they are linked; and improvements in information gathering and communication including the development of an "Alerts" system to identify concerns in specific schools.

29. The LEA's monitoring of this priority shows that the pilot schools believe the framework to be clear, useful and to have influenced their practice to the good. This is fair as the materials are of good quality. The school survey, however, shows overall levels of satisfaction with the LEA's support for self review to be more modest. However, most schools have not had the benefits of using the framework and its associated training and advice.

PRIORITY 4: Improving the attendance of pupils and reducing the number of pupils excluded from school

30. The LEA's activities in this EDP priority are appropriate and well thought through. Good progress has been made with their implementation. The targets set for both attendance and for exclusions are suitably challenging, and resources allocated are well aligned to activities. Support is provided to specific schools in need, with the educational psychology service introducing a banding system based on priority need in January 2000. Attendance is better than national levels and in line with similar authorities. Exclusion rates are slightly lower than similar authorities. Progress with the implementation of the behaviour support plan is subject to regular reporting to the SEN Panel.

31. However, LEA analysis of exclusions published in June this year shows some local trends causing concern that relate to different types of exclusion. For example, exclusions of less than 15 days in Aylesbury Vale increased from 1451 in 1998/99 to 2167 in 1999/2000 while showing smaller scale decreases in the other two parts of the county. Fixed term exclusions of 15 days or more increased from 206 to 784 in Aylesbury Vale, and from 165 to 303 in Wycombe. There was no change in Chiltern and South Buckinghamshire. Permanent exclusions have increased in Wycombe from 12 to 18 while remaining static in other areas. The LEA did not meet its target of 51 permanent exclusions by five in 1999/2000 and is also finding the 1999/2000 target for unauthorised absence challenging. It achieved a 0.81 per cent rate in autumn 1999 compared with a target rate of 0.37 per cent for 1999/2000. A large number of projects has been implemented by the education welfare and educational psychology services to deal with exclusions and attendance. Schools have indicated that the quality of support for attendance and behaviour has improved significantly since the last inspection. However, more time is needed for the full impact of the very wide ranging initiatives started by the LEA to become clear. The greater flexibility used by some schools for fixed term exclusions provides a clear focus to improve the LEA's targeting of its resources and to review the type and scope of support available.

Recommendation

Reduce the variation in and the number of fixed term exclusions by:

- analysing the reasons for the variation; and
- reviewing the scope of support and the related distribution of resources for the behaviour of pupils in order better to match the needs which vary between parts of the county.

PRIORITY 5: Improving the quality of leadership and management

32. The LEA has identified and implemented a wide range of activities which are appropriately matched to needs of schools. While there has been insufficient time since the approval of the EDP to assess the overall impact of LEA activity, the progress made with the implementation of this priority has been extensive. Resources identified in the EDP are well aligned with the activities chosen, and the targets selected are ambitious, though within the grasp of the LEA.

33. An 'Alerts' database is being developed which will be used alongside other information to identify good and poor practice in schools and to improve the LEA's targeting of support, building on its current reliance on monitoring by school improvement teams and on section 10 reports. The LEA recognises the importance of measuring the impact of its activities. It is becoming more skilled at this through improving its use of research methods and through improved training in the use of data related to target setting.

34. The needs audit of the EDP showed weaknesses in some schools in the monitoring of teaching and curriculum development, school self-evaluation, school development and strategic planning and support for middle management. The LEA is developing a database of successful headteachers who will work in schools with less effective leadership and management: some are already working in schools with serious weaknesses. Through a re-designation of existing responsibilities, an adviser for leadership and management has been identified who has led the development of comprehensive and detailed 'School Improvement Guidance'. This department-wide initiative builds on the OFSTED School Self Evaluation framework. The guidance explains well the importance of linking planning for school improvement with resourcing needs. This is a key issue given the state of some school balances in recent years. It also sets out very clearly the high standards for school performance and challenges a cross section of school staff and governors to adopt best practice. A useful audit tool has also been developed to assist attached advisers to evaluate the impact of 'School Improvement Guidance'.

35. The LEA has implemented with some success a wide range of initiatives in partnership with universities and other institutions. It has used national accreditation where possible to build on its local practice of action-based research that is commissioned in part by the Buckinghamshire Teaching and Learning Forum. There has been a large increase in the participation of headteachers and deputy headteachers in national training programmes. Support for new headteachers has improved greatly, and now involves a 'needs' assessment, a tailored induction programme, the support of the attached adviser, a mentor for three terms, a professional development plan, a new headteachers' conference and further training. The LEA has received accreditation for the induction of newly qualified teachers from the National Open College with 232 in the current cohort. Training is well received by schools and the drop out rate is less than one per cent. Performance profiling guidance has been produced to assist headteachers to develop middle management and to extend the continuing professional development profile. The LEA has given active support to schools for Investors in People with a target of fifty schools to be accredited by 2001. It has also supported schools seeking the Quality Mark and is already well placed to exceed its target of five, with three having achieved it, two with portfolios and six going through the process. The LEA has assisted seven schools to gain Beacon status and another two that are introducing the Business Excellence Model. Work is taking place with Beacon schools to make their leadership and management expertise more widely available to other schools.

PRIORITY 6: Supporting individual achievements and personal development

36. Substantial progress has been made across a broad range of activities to support the individual achievement and personal development of Buckinghamshire's pupils.

37. The LEA initially identified six activities to achieve the priority: raising the achievement of the most able pupils; raising the achievement of under-achieving boys; raising the achievement of pupils from ethnic minorities; supporting spiritual development; supporting pupils' cultural development; and raising the achievement of pupils with special educational needs. It later added a seventh, of improving support for personal, social and health education (PSHE) and citizenship.

38. The LEA now keeps a wide range of data on its schools and their pupils' performance. Through data analysis, the LEA has identified those schools where the achievement of able pupils, boys and minority ethnic pupils is high or low. The highest and lowest performing ten per cent of schools at each key stage have been identified. Workshop meetings have been held to identify and disseminate good practice. The outcomes are beginning to influence the work of the recently re-organised ethnic minority and travellers' achievement team and will be disseminated to schools through a report. This is a secure approach and one based firmly on evidence from, and practice within, the authority.

39. The LEA has responded thoroughly to the Stephen Lawrence inquiry report. It has developed a policy and strategy for racial equality and a code of practice for recording and reporting racist incidents. It is working to ensure that its schools' curricular provision reflects the diversity of local communities and to prevent the development of racist attitudes, particularly in very young children. The principles for equal opportunities which are reflected in the LEA's departmental documentation are to be incorporated into new County Council policy statements. Work is ongoing to improve the competency of school staff in dealing with racial harassment and developing confidence in challenging discrimination.

40. The LEA, in collaboration with the Westminster Institute, has established a four-year research project on the performance and progress of able pupils. As a result of phase 1, a number of primary schools have improved their practice, for example by helping teachers to extend their questioning techniques and to introduce more questioning into their teaching. Dissemination is carried out progressively as the project develops.

41. Schools have been identified which are making either good or poor provision for pupils' spiritual development. A working group has been established with broad representation from these schools, SACRE, the diocese and other faiths in order to plan how schools can be supported effectively in this aspect of their work. As a result of this initiative, a growing number of schools are beginning to be involved through their increased interest in promoting spiritual development. A broad range of relevant arts-related activities are presented to schools in order to improve their support for pupils' cultural development, and a recent, stimulating LEA conference for headteachers focused on promoting this aspect of education. Support for pupils with special educational needs is dealt with in paragraphs 68-73.

42. In April of this year, the additional priority was formed of supporting schools in PSHE and citizenship in order to encourage senior school managers to focus on and promote these areas of the curriculum. Satisfactory progress has been made in laying the foundations for developing this area of work.

PRIORITY 7: Supporting underachieving schools in raising standards

43. Satisfactory progress has been made in formalising and strengthening the support for under-achieving schools, but more is needed for the support to become fully effective. Too many schools are not improving fast enough and a number have deteriorated.

44. At the time of the previous inspection one primary school was subject to special measures and, between September 1997 and March 1999, nine primary schools and one secondary school had been identified as having serious weaknesses. Since this inspection, three primary schools which had been in the category of serious weakness, and three secondary schools, have been subjected to special measures. Nine schools are now in the category of having serious weaknesses. Of these six have been reported by OFSTED to be making satisfactory progress. Additionally, the LEA has identified four schools as causing concern.

45. The LEA, through its analysis of data, its reports from attached advisers and those resulting from literacy and numeracy monitoring, is able to identify schools causing concern. Details of the identification and classification of, and support programme for, underperforming schools were drawn up by a working party consisting of advisers and headteachers. They went to schools during the spring term for consultation. Final details have now been sent to all schools.

46. The procedures are sound and are beginning to result in a more accurate diagnosis of, and more consolidated support for, schools with weaknesses. In addition, the contribution from attached advisers and senior advisory officers, in their recently revised roles, is having a positive impact on the procedures and quality of support for schools in need. Although some schools have improved markedly, others are not making sufficient progress, mainly because they have not had time to respond to the LEA's more consolidated approach to support, or because of their specific needs, which arise from their social and economic circumstances, not being met appropriately by the LEA. It is unsatisfactory that other schools continue to be identified by OFSTED as having serious weaknesses or to require special measures. In the main, these are schools in which the LEA identified aspects of concern and provided support, but this has been insufficiently effective, and the schools have not improved enough.

Recommendation

Ensure that the impact of the revised procedures and support for underachieving schools results in improvement by:

- monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the refined procedures and their impact upon the identification of, and support for, schools;

- continue to ensure that resources are effectively targetted at those schools in areas of social disadvantage in order that they are supported to meet the particular challenges they face; and
- continue to work to raise the expectations of staff in those schools in areas of social disadvantage.

PROGRESS ON THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE 1999 REPORT

RECOMMENDATION A

Improve the quality and effectiveness of support to schools, and the accountability of service providers, by:

- (i) involving all schools in regular review of the quality of the services they receive, sharing the results with schools;*
- (ii) ensuring that where the quality of services falls below the required standard, remedial action is taken and followed through, and that schools are informed of the actions taken;*
- (iii) publishing the full cost of individual services, calculated on a per-pupil basis, so that schools can judge value for money;*
- (iv) ensuring that newly appointed headteachers receive appropriate and adequate support;*
- (v) implementing the planned arrangements for the provision and role of attached advisers to all schools;*
- (vi) establishing arrangements for LEA advisers to observe and monitor teaching and learning in schools where performance data reveals low standards of attainment or low expectations; and intensifying support to raising standards in numeracy in underperforming schools;*
- (vii) evaluating the value for money of central recharges, and examining Service Strategy and Regulations costs to ensure that resources are deployed to best effect;*
- (viii) improving communications with schools on financial matters, including early information on budget options, and on the pressure on other Council services;*
- (ix) clarifying the roles of the area offices, other services in the Education Department, and the corporate centre in supporting schools; and*
- (x) developing a clear and comprehensive administrative ICT strategy in consultation with schools.*

47. The last inspection took place during a difficult period of school re-organisation and budget reductions which placed significant pressures on schools and on many LEA services **(Ai and Aii)**. At the time there was dissatisfaction in schools with some services and concern about the ability of schools to influence the quality and shape of services they were receiving. The mechanism for the monitoring of service quality was not sufficiently rigorous or effective. Also, schools were not engaged enough in the evaluation of the LEA's services. Services were thus insufficiently accountable and there were inconsistencies in the LEA's responsiveness to school's concerns.

48. Since that time the LEA has taken significant steps to implement the first two recommendations. Comprehensive and accessible evaluation forms are sent to all schools annually. They cover both traded and non-traded services. The 'Services to Schools' board, that has headteacher and member representation, coordinates the analysis of the returns. It ensures that schools receive both a summary report and details of proposals for change to services. Heads of services are more accountable for the service quality and scrutiny than previously. Each head of service is required to produce a 'Statement of Action' and to undertake follow up visits and monitoring in response to comments from schools. The LEA now intends to monitor 'Statements of Action' to ensure these are fully implemented, and to align the work of the 'Services to Schools' board with the Best Value review process.

49. The LEA has made some progress in sharing the costs of services with schools. It has published a detailed breakdown of how it calculates its age-weighted pupil units and the costs per pupil of both strategic management and services delegated to schools. It now intends to provide comparative data on the costs of services so that schools are better able to make judgements about the value for money of services they receive.

50. The last inspection found that some newly appointed headteachers **(Aiv)** received good support from their attached advisers but that others received very little. Procedures for inducting new headteachers were underdeveloped and inconsistent. The LEA had identified this as an activity in its EDP priority which covers the leadership and management of schools. Since the inspection, the LEA has drawn up and implemented a comprehensive induction programme.

51. The programme includes a structured discussion between the attached adviser and the outgoing headteacher, from which the adviser is able to brief the incoming headteacher; briefings and detailed written guidance on LEA services and administrative procedures; a professional development programme including a new headteachers' conference, seminars, networking opportunities and support for access to national training schemes; the assignment of an experienced and practising headteacher to act as a mentor; and advisory help with needs identification and supported school self evaluation. The programme is efficiently managed within the advisory service. There is a high level of satisfaction amongst headteachers, most especially for the mentoring system. This satisfaction reflects the LEA's own evaluation. Induction of new headteachers is now well established. Although it is too early to judge the scale of its impact on the management of schools, it has the potential to be a positive force in the implementation of the EDP. The LEA plans to develop procedures further to alert governors to the demands of

being a new headteacher and to extend access to consultancy support for new headteachers from those more experienced. These are sensible intentions. The LEA needs to take further steps to convince all new headteachers of the value of taking time to carry out an early audit of their development needs.

52. Half of the recently appointed headteachers had been through the National Professional Qualification for Headteachers programme before taking up their posts. In the eyes of attached advisers they showed more confidence in leadership than their peers.

53. The previous inspection judged the advisory service (**Av**) to be well managed in implementing its business plan. However, it lacked the capacity to give all schools adequate monitoring, support and challenge. This was due to a policy through which schools with delegated or devolved budgets were able to choose not to buy in any advisory support. Even where the budget was not delegated, schools determined the focus of the work and the way it was to be undertaken. In consequence, there was too much variability in the way individual advisers did their jobs and provided feedback to schools. Headteachers were not clear about what they had a right to expect. This was recognised in the EDP which contained appropriate proposals to rationalise the provision of advisory support. Much has since been done to resolve the issues, in line with the LEA's post-inspection improvement plan. It will take more time for these initiatives to become fully effective.

54. A system is now in place to provide, free of charge, three days per year in which attached advisers work in each school. This work focuses on the priorities of the EDP and the development plans of the schools. Schools are informed about the system through concise documentation. Those headteachers interviewed report they are clear about, and content with, the new procedures. The LEA needs, however, to review this blanket deployment of advisory time once it has a secure knowledge of the performance of each school. This needs to be conducted with a view to strengthening support for schools causing concern whilst reducing the annual number of visits to successful schools.

55. The attached advisers have an annual programme of tasks to carry out in the schools. Headteachers are able to influence the ground covered in this work, which includes sessions on the analysis of performance data, target setting, school improvement planning and budgeting, and the production of an agreed statement on the health of the school. Headteachers can request extra time from the advisory service, free of charge, provided that this is in line with EDP priorities. Senior advisory officers in the area teams, and senior managers in the advisory service, have sound procedures for distributing this additional time so that the schools with the greatest need receive the most attention.

56. It is not possible at this time to make a definitive judgement about the impact of these new procedures on schools. They are, however, sharply focussed on EDP priorities. Resources are distributed equitably in order to discharge basic functions. Additional resources are distributed in line with the government's policy of intervention in inverse proportion to success. The LEA's various means of evaluation show high levels of satisfaction among headteachers. This was reflected in the interviews with groups of headteachers. The LEA has taken steps to improve

the consistency of advisory work, through, for example, agreed guidelines, good induction and training, the monitoring of field work, purposeful collaboration between advisers and other providers of school improvement services, and appraisal. A sample of advisers' notes of visits to schools showed rigour in the evaluation of teaching and gave detailed, useful feedback to schools. It is too early to judge the impact of the new system and for the LEA to know all of its schools in sufficient detail to be able to support and challenge them appropriately. The LEA rightly intends to continue to develop its performance management of attached advisers to ensure that schools receive consistently effective service.

57. At the time of the last inspection, the LEA's capacity to follow up weak teaching in general and in numeracy in particular (**Avi**) was judged to be limited. Arrangements for the deployment of a number of inter-related initiatives have been set in motion to address these issues. The deployment of attached advisers now ensures that all schools receive a minimum of monitoring visits and that these can be used for the observation of teaching as well as to evaluate school performance overall. Advisers read OFSTED inspection reports and use a newly devised form to analyse the strengths and weaknesses which they reveal in the schools. The resulting evaluations, along with a range of other data, are used in the multi-disciplinary school support team meetings which are held routinely to discuss performance in specific schools and to plan intervention strategies. In broader terms, a senior adviser has been assigned to oversee that priority in the EDP which seeks to improve the quality of teaching by making LEA support more systematically organised and effective.

58. The procedures for giving additional support to schools causing concern have been successful in the majority of cases. Six of the nine schools identified by OFSTED as having serious weaknesses have since been deemed to have made satisfactory progress. Both schools in special measures prior to April 2000 have been removed from that category. In all of these schools causing concern, the quality of teaching was a feature of the weaknesses.

59. More specifically 25 schools have been identified as needing intensive support for numeracy. Additional consultancy time of seven days, together with further training for teachers, has been allocated to each school.

60. The overall impact of these measures cannot yet be gauged. However, there are promising signs of improvements. The recent notes of visits produced by a sample of advisers show rigorous and detailed evaluation of teaching. Managers in the advisory service and area offices have an increasingly coherent knowledge of teaching quality in schools throughout the county. The headteachers interviewed are satisfied that the new procedures will enable the LEA to have a good overall grasp of the effectiveness of teaching. These procedures have the potential to address this issue fully.

61. Although the Council has taken a number of small but important steps it has some way to go before recommendation **Avii** is fully implemented. The Council has reviewed its provision for payroll, which is now provided externally, resulting in a saving of £130k, and this service is well received. It has through its 'Root and Branch' process reviewed, or nearly completed reviews of, audit, legal, and property

services, but the impact of this work is not yet known. Most corporate services provided to education will be subject to Best Value review this year, followed by accountancy in 2001/2002. As the Council has deferred the review of most of its corporate services to enable them to be subject to Best Value requirements, it cannot yet demonstrate that services re-charged to education provide value for money.

62. The LEA has taken relevant and purposeful steps to implement recommendation **Aviii**, although schools' concerns about the level of school funding continue to influence the judgements they make about consultation. Consultation on funding priorities has also taken place early and wide ranging information provided in the 'Modernising Local Funding' consultation document. The LEA introduced early budget information to schools this year, with draft budgets in schools by early January and final budgets by early March. It has undertaken consultation with schools on Fair Funding and supplemented paper-based consultation with the drop in sessions for school staff. School budget sheets have been improved and information to schools on their roles and responsibilities is better and supported by a new and accessible handbook. While officers have worked very hard to gain the trust of schools, and to make the process more open and transparent, some headteachers continue to have reservations about the effectiveness and impact of consultation, despite increases in age weighted pupil units of between 3.5 to 9.5 per cent this year.

63. At the time of the last inspection, the LEA's area teams had been adversely affected by local government reorganisation (**Aix**). Two offices and many personnel had been lost with major changes to the officers and advisers who had worked with schools. Some schools believed there had been a deterioration in the quality of some of the support provided. Also, schools were unclear about the respective roles of the area officers, the central education department and the corporate centre in supporting schools.

64. The roles of these sources of school support have since been clarified. A recently published document for schools – Factfile – gives a clear and easily accessible breakdown of the structures for education in the county. It also lists posts, how they relate to one another and how schools can make contact with particular teams or individual staff. This clarification has been based on a senior management review of services which has been discussed at area meetings for headteachers and communicated to schools via a circular. The administration of human resources and governor support has been centralised.

65. The area offices have been altered from their previous roles as administrative outposts of county hall. They are now local hubs of support for school improvement. Each is led by a senior advisory officer who manages a range of provision, including the gathering of intelligence on the performance of particular schools; the co-ordination of relevant support services to assist schools, especially those causing concern; providing assistance with the appointment of headteachers and their deputies; and chairing meetings of headteachers. They work in close association with a range of locally and centrally provided services, in particular the advisory service. The work of attached advisers to primary schools is coordinated in the area

offices, whereas that for special and secondary schools is co-ordinated centrally by the advisory service.

66. These changes are appropriate and have made clear for schools the respective roles of the various layers of school support, pending the forthcoming Best Value review of school support. Those headteachers interviewed were satisfied with the clarity of the arrangements. However, some concern was expressed at the reportedly longer waits for assistance from the centrally organised human resource provision than was seen to be the case in the past.

67. The LEA has developed a robust and wide-ranging strategy for ICT **(Ax)** that has support for administrative ICT as an integral part of its overall plan. Schools have welcomed the LEA's emphasis on reducing bureaucracy by making the data responsibilities of the school and the LEA more explicit. The LEA is also striving to eliminate duplication of information requested. A more proactive role in supporting the use of compatible systems is being developed and more efficient data exchange introduced. All schools will soon have an internet link funded through the National Grid for Learning. School based training and development needs are being evaluated by the Buckinghamshire management information support team which has now merged with the County's IT Unit. This merger has rationalised support for schools and given them access to new and more integrated service packages. Workshops are being introduced to update school staff. Since the last inspection, schools have observed a small but significant improvement in the support available for administrative ICT.

Recommendation

Improve the responsiveness of services by:

- ensuring that the centrally organised human resources team responds to schools' needs with appropriate speed.

RECOMMENDATION B

Improve the quality of support for special educational needs, by:

- (i) *ensuring that schools are clear about the basis and purpose of the SEN review, aware of the contents of the District Audit report, and involved fully in working with the LEA to address, as a matter of urgency, the issues raised on special needs policy, provision and resources;*
- (ii) *ensuring that SEN statements are produced within the deadlines of the SEN Code of Practice, improving the quality of statements of special educational need and ensuring that schools follow guidance given on the preparation of individual education plans; and*
- (iii) *reducing substantially the size of the SEN contingency and reallocating resources to develop in-County provision based on accurate forecasts of need.*

68. The LEA has made satisfactory progress in ensuring that schools are clear about the contents of the District Audit report **(Bi)** and has involved them fully in consultation about the special educational needs review, the special needs policy, provision and resources.

69. The LEA established robust consultative procedures through the multi-agency SEN strategy group and the local school consultative groups. Schools have been informed about the findings of the District Audit report and its recommendations have been taken into account in the draft innovative and ambitious SEN 'Policy and Strategy for the New Millennium'. This has been the subject of consultation with schools and stakeholders and the LEA is now ready to develop it further. Importantly, the LEA has established a partnership with its schools and stakeholders in its vision for the educational provision for pupils with special educational needs.

70. The overall aims to reduce the number of pupils in special schools and to develop provision for them in mainstream schools are appropriate. The strategy to achieve these over a ten-year period, though, lacks details about short and medium term plans and resources. These cannot be added until further work has been done to model the provision which the LEA envisages for its schools and support services. The LEA recognises the work that remains to be done and has plans to carry it out.

71. The LEA has improved the process of writing, issuing and reviewing statements of special educational needs **(Bii)**, through the appointment of additional staff and the restructuring of the pupil support administrative team, the writing of new guidance for the completion of statements, and the introduction of computerised systems. There has been improvement in the degree of specific information in the statements and in the meeting of deadlines. Detailed monthly checks of progress are in place, and while there is need for further improvement towards meeting the 18 week target the LEA has made significant progress in this regard. The formal assessment placement group is to provide further guidance to schools to reduce inappropriate referrals.

72. Detailed and helpful draft guidelines have been prepared on the preparation of individual education plans (IEPs) and these are shortly to be sent to schools. IEP training has been provided for special educational needs co-ordinators and sixty have undergone in-service training to an accredited level. In addition, one hundred learning support assistants have also received training. The monitoring of the effectiveness of these recently introduced strategies is to be carried out through the learning support and educational psychology teams.

73. The LEA has reduced the size of its SEN contingent reserve from £2.24 millions in 1998/99 to £0.3 million in 2000/2001. This funding has been re-allocated to delegated school budgets, centrally held budgets, and to central budgets where the LEA had already predicted need or growth. The LEA has undertaken extensive analysis of its considerable data on SEN. It has identified trends in needs which are now being translated into plans for new provision. This is a crucial step, and as its analysis of SEN data becomes more sophisticated, the LEA should be better placed to meet SEN demand from within planned budgets. The LEA now intends to review in detail the existing placements of pupils with SEN in order to plan its future provision. The LEA is considering the nature and range of provision to be made in

special schools and departments in mainstream schools, in order to bring it in line with the recently proposed 10-year 'SEN Policy and Strategy for the New Millennium'. There is a particular challenge to the authority to ensure that their policy of inclusion is suitably supported across all schools, both selective and non-selective; the three-year Inclusion Project is providing valuable information to assist the LEA in its planning.

Recommendations

Improve further the strategy to support pupils with SEN by:

- finalising the 10 year strategy and action plan and developing short and medium targets, suitably costed, with details as to how the targets will be reached;
- continuing to increase the proportion of statements produced within the statutory time limit;
- evaluating the effectiveness of statements written to the revised guidance, as well as the use by schools of the guidance designed to reduce inappropriate referrals for statutory assessment; and
- demonstrating through guidance, procedures and the appropriate allocation of resources, how both selective and non-selective schools will be supported in their development of a policy of inclusion, within the LEA's current policies and their future SEN strategy and action plan.

RECOMMENDATION C

Improve the support provided to schools causing concern, by:

- (i) agreeing with schools criteria for the identification of schools causing concern, and establishing clear criteria for intervention and support; and*
- (ii) following through weaknesses identified in Section 10 reports until there is measurable improvement, and monitoring more consistently schools' implementation of their post-inspection action plans.*

74. The first inspection found that the LEA did not have a clear mechanism for identifying schools that are at risk of being identified as having serious weaknesses or requiring special measures **C(i)**.

75. The LEA has made substantial progress in formulating measures which specify trigger points at which the performance of a school is classified as unsatisfactory. The draft procedures, which are a refinement and strengthening of practices which have been developing over the last year, were submitted to the education committee in February. After this, schools and diocesan representatives were consulted fully about their content and application.

76. The procedures are sound and take account of the Code of Practice for LEA-School Relations and of the LEA's statutory obligations. They spell out how concerns might be diagnosed and followed up. Schools causing concern are placed in one of three categories: focus school, school giving cause for concern, and school giving cause for serious concern. The criteria are clear, as are the roles and responsibilities of schools and officers. The support programme for needy schools and the process for monitoring progress are also clear.

77. The LEA is developing an IT program 'Alerts' which, once data has been installed, draws the user's attention to the thresholds and areas of potential concern. Alongside training in self-evaluation which schools are undertaking, they are trialling the completion of an annual return which the LEA will require them to complete from the summer of 2001. Headteachers, in consultation with the chairs of their governing bodies, will complete a report on their schools which includes an evaluation of standards, pupils' development, teaching, leadership and management, and finance.

78. There has been insufficient time to judge the impact of the LEA's improved procedures. However, its thorough analysis of data and the contribution of the attached advisers and senior advisory officers to the monitoring and evaluation of, and support for, schools provide the LEA with the information it needs and its schools with the necessary support.

79. The LEA carries out thorough analyses **Cii** of OFSTED inspection reports of all its schools. It has formalised and strengthened procedures for supporting, monitoring and challenging those schools where there are significant weaknesses.

80. Once a school has been identified by either OFSTED inspectors or the LEA as having significant weaknesses, a monitoring group is convened comprising the headteacher, chair of governors, chief adviser, attached adviser and senior advisory officer. Other officers become involved if the school's needs warrant wider representation. This group meets as soon as concerns arise and is responsible for monitoring and evaluating the progress of the school against its action plan. The senior advisory officer has direct responsibility for overseeing the work of the group and monitoring and evaluating the progress of schools with weaknesses. These procedures are effective.

81. The attached adviser plays a crucial role in working with the headteacher to draw up the school's action plan and, in consultation with the senior advisory officer, securing relevant LEA support. The level and type of support are determined by the particular needs of the school and the help the school will need to achieve its action plan targets. The quantity and quality of support are at least satisfactory. Although support is assigned closely to accord with the action plan priorities and timescales, some schools perceive that the LEA will respond to all their requests. In reality this is not so: support is closely aligned to meeting the school's defined needs within specified timescales. The attached adviser works most closely with the school's senior managers to monitor, support or challenge.

82. The procedures are clear and the systems sufficiently rigorous to bring about improvements in schools. There is marked improvement over the systems operating at the time of the first inspection, although the new procedures have had insufficient

time to bed down and bring about consistent improvement across all schools with weaknesses which, in the main, tend to be in the more disadvantaged areas of the county.

Recommendation

Improve further support for schools causing concern by:

- ensuring that those schools receiving support are fully aware of the level and timescales of the support they are receiving and the targets at which the support is aimed; and
- ensuring, as far as it is possible, that all officers and schools accept and recognise schools' weaknesses in order that they can improve more rapidly.

RECOMMENDATION D

Improve the discharge of the LEA's statutory responsibilities, by:

- (i) re-establishing a programme of appraisal for headteachers and supporting them in developing a comprehensive programme for appraising staff; and*
- (ii) addressing health and safety issues identified in individual schools.*

83. In January 2000, the Minister of State in the DfEE advised the LEA to postpone action on **(Di)**, given the Teachers' Green Paper proposals on performance management and pay, until settlement of the final framework. Accordingly no appraisal programmes for headteachers have been re-established; nor has the LEA intervened in schools' appraisal procedures. However, much has been done to create a framework for school self-evaluation as is shown in paragraphs 26-29 of the report. Also, the LEA has responded in detail to the DfEE's performance management framework proposals. This has included developments in its strategic management, providing information to and consultation with schools, and the provision of substantial training for senior managers and governors, some of which links appraisal, performance, management and IIP procedures.

84. The school visits in the last inspection revealed a number of health and safety issues **(Dii)** in need of rapid resolution, including separating vehicles from pupils, the provision of escorts for pupils with SEN, dangerous windows and inadequate shower and changing arrangements. Improvements have been made, in response partly to those criticisms and partly to those raised in a Health and Safety Executive report in 1998. These include a revised health and safety handbook for schools which is clear and comprehensive; the routine analysis of OFSTED inspection reports and subsequent action to resolve health and safety issues; extensions to the free provision of courses for school health and safety co-ordinators, although attendance is diminished because of the costs to schools of supply cover; a compulsory three-yearly audit programme for secondary and special schools and a five-yearly programme for primary schools; asbestos awareness training to which all schools have sent a representative; block allocations to improve accommodation and vehicle access at identified establishments; and the provision of escorts for certain pupils

with SEN. The county is keen that its health and safety procedures should be consistently effective. It has done much to deal with the issues raised by the first inspection.

RECOMMENDATION E

Improve further the value of its data analysis and school profiles, by:

- (i) collecting and analysing data about the achievements of pupils from each minority ethnic group; and*
- (ii) extending profiles to include special schools, as planned.*

85. The previous inspection found that the LEA's support to schools in the collection and analysis of data on pupil performance was effective and appropriate **(Ei)**. However, the achievements of pupils from each minority ethnic group were not sufficiently analysed by the LEA or its schools.

86. Much has been done to correct this deficiency. The LEA's action plan for its Ethnic Minority and Traveller Achievement Grant has led to the gathering of data on achievement, its analysis, and to the setting of achievement targets for 2000-2002. Similarly, the EDP sets out activities to raise the achievement of ethnic minority pupils at risk of underachievement. This has so far involved the collection of data, its analysis to detect high or low achievement, the deployment of specialist staff to schools where underachievement is concentrated, and the promotion of school planning and target setting in schools and the raising of awareness therein through discussions at headteachers' meetings.

87. The LEA is now part of the way to the resolution of this issue and has set in train the necessary activities for full resolution. Schools and parents are now reportedly clearer on the type of data which schools need to collect. This data is currently collected manually. The county admissions form for parents, which is currently being developed to promote consistency in the collection of data, will be ready to use after the start of the autumn term 2000. A new infrastructure for data exchange between schools and LEA is now in place. There are proposals to use this to improve the tracking of achievement of pupils from ethnic minorities. The LEA now needs to develop effective tracking procedures and to update the school profile. Also, current plans to identify the nature of good practice in schools in countering underachievement need to be implemented, both by studying schools in the LEA and proven effective strategies elsewhere.

88. The LEA has made good progress in compiling data for special schools and producing draft profiles **(Eii)**. A working group of officers, advisers and headteachers has worked to identify the information which would assist special schools to target their resources more accurately to raise the achievements of their pupils. The LEA has used well the experience it gained producing the profiles for mainstream schools and the additional data which it has recently gathered. It is also drawing on the skills of those mainstream headteachers who are confident with data to contribute to the content of profiles and to devise and deliver training.

89. Profiles have been designed and have been the subject of consultation with all headteachers of special schools. They contain a range of relevant, current and useful information. Headteachers are content not only to have their schools identified in the data for benchmarking purposes but also to encourage informal comparisons and contacts. The profiles are now complete and, at the request of schools, will be distributed early in the autumn term. Later in the term, training for headteachers and governors of special schools is planned in order to help them interpret and use the data effectively.

Recommendation

Improve further the data analysis service to schools by:

- the school profile taking account of ethnicity in categorising pupil attainment; and
- effective tracking procedures for the attainment of specific pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds should be developed.

RECOMMENDATION F

Reduce levels of dissatisfaction with the LEA's responsiveness, by:

- i) improving the rate of response to communications and complaints from the public; and*
- ii) improving mediation arrangements in order to reduce the number of appeals against the LEA's decisions on school placements.*

90. The LEA has made good progress with recommendation Fi. It set up two working groups: a cross-departmental staff group and a headteachers' group to diagnose the causes of unsatisfactory performance and to identify specific actions most likely to yield positive results. This led to redesigned processes within both Admissions and SEN, and a considerable strengthening of staffing within SEN. A corporate 'complaints procedure' and a code of practice were also introduced early this year with 'awareness raising' a priority of all service managers. Together these documents set out clear expectations and standards for all staff. Although monitoring of communications and complaints is taking place by service managers, there is not yet any central coordination by the education department or a process for providing feedback to individual services on performance against published standards. This shortcoming is being rectified in the autumn term when new software is being introduced department-wide to facilitate central coordination and to make services more accountable. A departmental 'complaints' officer has also been appointed.

91. The LEA has taken relevant and appropriate steps to reduce the need for admission appeals (**Fii**). A training pack for headteachers was prepared last summer on legal aspects of admissions to help raise their capacity to support parents. This was supplemented by joint targeted support to heads. Eleven plus test outcomes were made available in January of each year, followed by an

evidence-based review process involving parents and headteachers. Feedback was given to parents in March when places were allocated. Information to parents is clearer and now gives the number of first preferences for the previous year for each school. The LEA's data on appeals for this year indicates that 1200 appeals have been registered with an estimated 1000 going to appeal hearing. This is a big reduction from the 1600 appeals lodged last year and 1300 heard by appeal panels. Although it is unsurprising that some parents unsuccessful in obtaining a grammar school place for their child want to use the appeal process, the action taken by the LEA should help to reduce the number of appeals in the future.

92. The LEA has also implemented a range of actions to reduce appeals to the SEN Tribunal. Twenty appeals were dealt by the SEN Tribunal over the last twelve months and eighteen were upheld. The LEA has responded by introducing a conciliation service for parents in January this year. This is beginning to have a positive impact. It has dealt with eleven cases, with four ongoing, six resolved and one that has gone to appeal. The department is working to build on its repertoire of conciliation strategies and is reviewing its support materials for parents so that these are fit for purpose. Support for parents is now also offered to all parents that have a child starting statutory assessment.

APPENDIX: RECOMMENDATIONS

Improve support to raise standards in literacy by:

- increasing efforts to persuade schools to take effective action to improve the teaching of boys and underachieving pupils from ethnic minorities.

Improve the quality of teaching by:

- continuing to give high priority to the recently established effort to reveal and improve weak teaching; and
- developing procedures to counteract the increasing difficulty of recruiting appropriately qualified teachers, especially for upper schools.

Reduce the variation in and the number of fixed term exclusions by:

- analysing the reasons for the variation; and
- reviewing the scope of support and the related distribution of resources for the behaviour of pupils in order better to match the needs which vary between parts of the county.

Ensure that the impact of the revised procedures and support for underachieving schools results in improvement by:

- monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the refined procedures and their impact upon the identification of, and support for, schools;
- continue to ensure that resources are effectively targetted at those schools in areas of social disadvantage in order that they are supported to meet the particular challenges they face; and
- continue to work to raise the expectations of staff in those schools in areas of social disadvantage.

Improve the responsiveness of services by:

- ensuring that the centrally organised human resources team responds to schools' needs with appropriate speed.

Improve further the strategy to support pupils with SEN by:

- finalising the 10 year Strategy and action plan and developing short and medium targets, suitably costed, with details as to how the targets will be reached;
- continuing to increase the proportion of statements produced within the statutory time limit;

- evaluating the effectiveness of statements written to the revised guidance, as well as the use by schools of the recently produced additional guidance designed to reduce inappropriate referrals for statutory assessment; and
- demonstrating through guidance, procedures and the appropriate allocation of resources, how both selective and non-selective schools will be supported in their development of a policy of inclusion, within the LEA's current policies and their future SEN strategy and action plan.

Improve further support for schools causing concern by:

- ensuring that those schools receiving support are fully aware of the level and timescales of the support they are receiving and the targets at which the support is aimed; and
- ensuring, as far as it is possible, that all officers and schools accept and recognise schools' weaknesses in order that they can improve more rapidly.

Improve further the data analysis service to schools by:

- the school profile taking account of ethnicity in categorising pupil attainment; and
- effective tracking procedures for the attainment of specific pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds should be developed.

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