



Appendix 1

**London Borough of Brent  
Inclusive Education Services  
Best Value Review 2001-02**



**Executive  
21<sup>st</sup> July 2003**

# **Contents**

## **Report**

	<b><u>Page</u></b>
Introduction	3
Recommendations	3
Review Findings	4

## **Appendices**

1. Action Plan	11
2. Scope	32
3. Team Membership	33
4. Who was Consulted During the Review	34
5. How Comparison was Undertaken	36
6. How the Review was Challenged	37
7. How the Competition Element of the Review was Assessed	38
8. Baseline Report	39
9. Service Operational Plan (EWS)	58
10. Activity analysis Summary	73
11. Pupils out of school survey	74
12. Young People not in Education - detail of bid to Connexions	75
13. The EWS and Connexions – Summary	78
14. Consultation List	79
15. Stakeholder Focus Group	80
16. EWS Staff - Focus Group – Results	84
17. Head Teacher/Head of Year Focus Group Results	90
18. Schools Survey Form	93
19. Schools Survey – Results	94
20. Parents Survey – Form	100
21. Parents Survey – Results	102
22. Leavers Survey – Form	105
23. Leavers Survey – Results	107
24. Section 52 Unit Cost LA Comparison	108
25. Comparison of Attendance Rates - Primary Schools	109
26. Comparison of Attendance Rates - Secondary Schools	110
27. Education Welfare Service – Main, and Additional Functions	111

# Inclusive Education Services Best Value Review 2001-02

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report presents the outcome of the Best Value Review of Inclusive Education Services.
- 1.2 The agreed scope for the review is attached at appendix 2. A summary of that scope is set out below:-

*This review will examine the extent to which services in Education, Arts, & Libraries effectively target their work to support pupils who are at particular risk of educational exclusion and underachievement, and who are at most risk of experiencing disruption to their attendance and education.*

*The review will look in detail at the work of the Education Welfare Service (EWS) and how it supports those pupils at risk of underachievement and educational exclusion. It should examine the effectiveness of the links between the EWS and other Inclusive Education Services.*

- 1.3 The Education Welfare Service (EWS) supports the Local Education Authority (LEA) in discharging its legal obligation to provide education to children of a compulsory school age. Most of the functions undertaken by the EWS are statutory in nature, and the main roles are:-
- to assist the LEA to discharge its legal obligation to provide education to children of compulsory school age and where necessary enforce attendance
  - assist parents meet their statutory duty to ensure that their children of compulsory school age (5-16) receive efficient full time education
  - to assist the LEA to implement procedures for Inclusive Education projects by working in close partnerships
  - to issue entertainment and employment licenses, and license chaperones responsible for the welfare of young people taking part in entertainment.
- 1.4 The EWS works with the Borough's schools to secure and maintain satisfactory rates of pupil attendance. It maintains a dual role as provider of a service to schools and as a mediator between home and school.

## 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 A complete suite of 99 recommendations arising from this review are contained on the action plan at appendix 1.
- 2.2 It is also recommended that the EWS manager develops and implements effective monitoring arrangements for the implementation of the action plan.

### 3. **Review Findings**

3.1 A comprehensive set of detailed findings together with the related recommendations are set out on the action plan at appendix 1. A summary of the key issues and findings, categorised under the 4C's, are set out below.

#### **Challenge**

3.2 Appendix 6 sets out how the service was challenged in this review.

3.3 The EWS makes a valuable contribution to the following Corporate Priorities:-

- Achieving Best Value Services;
- Raising Education Standards & Promoting Lifelong Learning;
- Combating Crime and Promoting Community Safety;
- Reducing Poverty and Social Exclusion; and
- Creating a Modern, well-managed authority.

3.4 The EWS also contributes to the main aims set out in the Education, Arts & Libraries Service Development Plan:-

- To raise educational standards by challenging and supporting schools in their efforts to secure high attainment;
- To widen participation in learning for those most at risk of under-achievement and social exclusion;
- To develop EAL as a modern, well-managed department; and
- To provide good quality customer care.

The Education Development Plan sets out a range of clear targets around attendance, punctuality and parental involvement which the EWS is expected to achieve.

3.5 The review team found that the objectives for the EWS are clearly stated and that the Unit is doing the best that it can, within limited resources, to achieve those objectives.

3.6 Most of the services provided by the Education Welfare Service (EWS) at Brent are statutory and demand led (see appendix 27). The EWS also provides some additional non-statutory services (see appendix 27). There is discretion over the level of service that are provided and it was found that the level of service at Brent was low in comparison to other London Boroughs (based upon staffing numbers and costs).

3.7 The review team concluded that the services provided by the EWS are required by the LEA. There is however discretion in the way those Services are provided.

3.8 In considering alternative ways of providing the service, one of the main areas considered by the review team, was the devolution of the EWS budget and staff to schools. A number of other LEAs have participated in the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) pilot exercise to devolve EWS budgets and staff to schools. Some of the London Boroughs visited as part of the review have already devolved these to their secondary schools. The review team considered this area in particular depth at the consultation and comparison stages of the review, seeking to identify all the advantages and disadvantages

of devolution of this activity to schools. It concluded that for Brent, the disadvantages of devolution far outweigh the advantages. Furthermore, the DfES guidance in this area also states that devolving the service to schools should occur only where there is a genuine belief that this will improve the quality of the service. It is considered that this is not the case at Brent. Therefore part or full devolution to schools is not recommended.

- 3.9 The EWS provides a demand led service and the demand for the service is high. In order for the service to respond effectively to all its statutory, relevant and increasing demands and responsibility there must be a realistic level of staffing in the service. It is unrealistic, unfair and wrong to expect the service to respond well to all that is required of it while retaining the smallest staff in any comparable LEA in the country.
- 3.10 The sheer weight of demand on the service and the wide range of responsibilities and tasks expected of the EWS make it almost impossible to deliver an efficient service - something has to give. Apart from clear attendance related issues the service is asked to deal with Placement of Pupils (50-60 cases at a time), carry out checks and make home visits on behalf of other services, deal with Behaviour, Exclusion, Child Protection and a host of other matters. There needs to be greater clarity about the role and function of the EWS and not use it as a service to deal with "Welfare" matters (see recommendation 9). Furthermore, it is recommended that consideration be given to changing the name of the EWS to a title that better reflects the services that the Unit provides (see recommendation 45).
- 3.11 The review Team strongly considers that the range of services currently expected of the EWS would be more effectively carried out if the service were realistically staffed. The review Team has recommended the appointment of 3 new staff at a total annual cost of £105k. This would include one EWO to work strategically and in partnership with key agencies (see recommendation 56), one Education Welfare Officer (EWO) to increase support for Primary Schools (see recommendation 42), and one EWO to develop and implement a regular programme of site visits to employers likely to be employing children (see recommendation 90). This would result in a total of 12.5 EWOs (including managers and expected 1.5 EWO increase from connexions).
- 3.12 The review team looked at the way in which the EWS balances work between professional guidance and casework, and concluded that the present balance is satisfactory. There is a need however to ensure that this balance is reviewed regularly to ensure that the work of the EWS continues to be effective (see recommendation 11).
- 3.13 The development of the Connexions service in Brent provides a great opportunity to improve the services to school pupils. It is important that the links between the EWS and Connexions are effective. This requires that a clear definition of roles and responsibilities be developed between the EWS and Personal Advisors (within Connexions) and recommendations 20 to 25 are designed to achieve this.
- 3.14 It was noted that Brent prosecuted 30 parents for non-attendance in 2001-02 (8 in 2000-01). This level of prosecution is low in comparison to other LEAs. Some LEAs were found to set annual targets for prosecutions. Some schools consider that there are not enough prosecutions for hard/long term cases, and that prosecutions act as an effective deterrent for others. The effectiveness of

prosecutions generated a lot of debate within the review team, and the issue was highlighted nationally recently when a mother was jailed for 60 days (later revised) after she failed to stop her children playing truant. The review concluded that the EWS should continue with the current balance between meaningful support and prosecution, and that prosecution is used only as a last resort (see recommendations 27 and 28).

- 3.15 Truancy Sweeps are currently undertaken 3 times a year at Brent, and are popular with schools, who regard the publicity associated with the sweeps a good deterrent. Other boroughs that we visited had more frequent sweeps. The effectiveness of the truancy sweeps and their frequency generated considerable debate within the review. The review concluded that Truancy Sweeps should be less time consuming, better targeted and overall more effective. It is therefore suggested that alternative methods of identifying truants (such as the development of a truancy watch scheme) be developed and implemented (see recommendation 29). There is also scope for development of the liaison with school link police officers (see recommendation 31). Furthermore, it is recommended that a strategy to target parents' attitudes to truancy, in order to improve attendance, be developed and implemented (recommendation 34).
- 3.16 The review considered whether EWOs working from home or hot-desking would be more effective than the current arrangements. This would require work facilities at home and set up costs but may help efficiency and free up space at CSD for interview facilities or even savings in the medium to long term. One risk might be that professional knowledge sharing could be lost. This does fit with the travel plan and flexible working. In the longer term this may be possible to reduce travel and increase space. It was decided not to put this forward at this stage.
- 3.17 In order to reduce EWO travelling time (currently 20% of the working day) the re-allocation of some or all schools into geographical clusters was considered. This was explored but not agreed as a recommendation as this would upset the excellent relationship that EWO's presently have with their allocated schools. It is important to note here that the activity analysis (see appendix 10) undertaken during the review demonstrated that the EWO staff work approximately 20% more per day than their contracted hours - it therefore follows that the EWO travelling time is free to Brent!
- 3.18 In examining and challenging the service, a number of recommendations to improve the services currently provided have been made. These are all set out in the action plan, and include for example:-
- Updating and re-issuing the school attendance policy, and the staff handbook (see recommendations 1 to 4)
  - Professional training for EWOs (see recommendation 37)
  - EWOs working term time only (recommendations 46 and 47)
  - Developing and enhancing the EWS publicity strategy (recommendation 51).
- 3.19 It was found that some Inclusive Education Services at Brent are not effectively integrated, such as the Travellers Team and the Education Refugee Worker. It is recommended that the Director of Education review the

working arrangements of the service and develop closer links with other inclusion services (see recommendation 53).

- 3.20 There are weaknesses in the working arrangements between the EWS and the Brent Education and Tuition Service (BETS), and it is recommended that a joint protocol be developed and implemented between the two units (recommendation 55).
- 3.21 Significant weaknesses in the links with Childrens Services were found. I am however pleased to confirm that as a result of this review, significant improvements have since been made in this area (recommendations 57 to 67 refer). There are also proposals to more effectively monitor the attendance of Looked after Children (recommendations 68 and 69).
- 3.22 A key area of concern is children who are being "missed by the net". Example of areas of concern include:-
- the lack of a complete, up-to-date listing of children out of school in Brent;
  - there is no proper LEA mechanism for responding to children who are out of school and waiting for a place at a specific school;
  - Some children were not in school due to a shortage in the availability of secondary places; and
  - the lack of alternative options for Year 11 pupils not entered in exams.
- 3.23 Recommendations 72 to 80 on the action plan set out to address these and associated concerns. The action plan also includes proposals to consider extending the remit of the Case Management Group to include all pupils who are out of school (see recommendation 77), and to consider including "vulnerable pupils" in the secondary schools "excluded pupils" agreement (recommendation 75).
- 3.24 The review team was surprised to find that guidance letters and booklets produced and distributed by EWS are only printed in English. Also, it is understood that the home school agreements are only printed in English. Given the ethnic profile of Brent residents, the review recommends that an exercise should be undertaken to translate these documents into appropriate languages (recommendations 84 and 85).
- 3.25 There is a lack of integration amongst key education databases at Brent. Monitoring is undertaken on individual settings databases, including the EWS. There is significant scope for improvement here. Proposals for the development of an integrated database are already in hand within the Education Service, and this review endorses these proposals (see recommendation 96).
- 3.26 The number of employment licences issued by the EWS is low. Only seven employment licences were issued in 2001-02. In addition to the low level of licences issued, regular employer site checks are not undertaken. The main reason for this is that the EWS does not have the staff to fulfil its statutory responsibilities here. As a result of resource constraints (staff and money) this area of work is allocated a low priority within the EWS, and is not completed to a satisfactory standard. This is therefore an area of concern for the review.

There are recommendations in the action plan to address these concerns, which include:-

- recruiting an additional EWO at a cost of £35k p.a (recommendation 90).
- to develop a program of site visits to employers likely to be employing children, making sure that legislation in terms of health and safety, child protection and licences are adhered to (recommendation 90);
- to develop options to further advise children and employers of the requirements concerning child employment and to encourage take up of employment licences (recommendations 91 to 94).

3.27 There is scope to introduce charges for issuing entertainment licences. This has been included as a recommendation at 95.

### **Comparison**

3.28 Appendix 5 sets out how "comparison" was undertaken in this review.

3.29 Details of the Primary Schools national performance indicator for 2000-01 are set out on appendix 25. This appendix shows the percentage of half-days missed due to unauthorised absence in primary schools for Brent's family comparator authorities. It can be seen that Brent's performance, at 0.60%, is good in comparison with and above the London average. There is however scope for improvement.

3.30 Details of the Secondary Schools national performance indicator for 2000-01 are set out on appendix 26. This appendix shows the percentage of half-days missed due to unauthorised absence in secondary schools for Brent's family comparator authorities. It can be seen that Brent's performance, at 1.00%, is very good in comparison, with Brent appearing favourably in the lower quartile.

3.31 The unit cost of the EWS compared to other London Boroughs for 2000-01 is set out on appendix 24. It can be seen that Brent has the fifth lowest spend in London at £8.95 per pupil, and spends the lowest of its family authorities. Taking EWS as a percentage of delegated funding, Brent is the third lowest in London at 0.33% and is the lowest of its family authorities.

3.32 Dealing with "Out of Borough" cases is not as effective as it should be. The problems affect exclusions and placements, as well as non-attendance. There are problems with referrals, inter-Borough co-operation, and the casework is time-consuming in comparison with "In Borough" cases. All of the Boroughs visited in the review face similar problems. The devolution of funding to secondary schools in some Boroughs has led to a worsening of the communication links between Authorities. The Best Value review therefore make a recommendation that seeks to review, develop and implement effective cross border protocols (both ways) with all bordering Authorities (recommendation 81)

3.33 A number of areas of best practice have been identified in other Councils and recommendations to implement these in Brent are included in the action plan. These include:-

- Scope to develop and expand pupil reward schemes (see recommendations 12 to 15);



- the development of a suite of posters that seek to encourage attendance, for display in schools (see recommendation 18);
- Scope to develop a scheme to target vulnerable pupils (19);
- The development of a truancy watch strategy and the introduction of truancy watch stickers (recommendations 29 and 30);
- Support EWOs to gain professional qualifications (recommendation 37);
- To consider options for staff working term time only (recommendations 46 and 47);
- to consider options for a parent-friendly office/interview room (recommendation 48);
- to develop an integrated Education database (recommendations 96 and 97).

### **Competition**

- 3.34 Appendix 7 sets out how the competition element of the review was assessed.
- 3.35 The review has concluded that the EWS is providing a competitive service, and this is supported by the following evidence:-
- The cost of the service is very low compared to other London Boroughs (see appendix 24);
  - The number of staff employed by the EWS is low compared to other similar Authorities (seven staff for 80 schools)
  - The performance of the service is "good to very good" compared to other London Boroughs;
  - Schools, who are the main users of the service, are satisfied/very satisfied with the service (see appendix 19);
  - Stakeholders consider that the EWS is providing a good service.
  - Schools are able to purchase additional support from the EWS through the "Traded Services" arrangements; and
  - Schools have the freedom to arrange and purchase additional support from alternative sources/providers.

### **Consultation**

- 3.36 Appendix 4 sets out who was consulted during the review.
- 3.37 A summary of the results from each of the survey exercises is set out on appendices 11, 19, 21, and 23.
- 3.38 A summary of the outcomes from each of the focus groups is set out on appendices 15, 16 and 17.
- 3.39 Many of the themes and issues identified during the consultation exercises are reflected elsewhere within this report, and are not therefore repeated

here. However some of the key issues that are not mentioned elsewhere include the following:-

- Schools consider they are getting a helpful, timely and quality service;
- Schools are satisfied/very satisfied with the overall performance of the EWS;
- Primary schools would like more EWS visits and more support (recommendation 42).
- Some secondary schools would like more EWS visits and support
- Stakeholders consider the service to be good, it works well, and currently meets targets.
- Stakeholders consider the service has strong leadership, has effective and defined procedures, targets and work processes.
- Stakeholders consider that the EWS has committed and able staff.
- As a result of the small size of the service, it is very difficult to cover for absences. Fortunately, absence levels are historically very low.

The EWS clearly has an excellent and professional relationship with schools.

3.40 A number of issues were identified during the consultation exercises which, if addressed, would make improvements to the services delivered. Many of these are included elsewhere within the report. Some of the key issues that are not included elsewhere in the report, but are included on the action plan at appendix 1, include:-

- Obtaining Brent Parking permits for EWOs on duty (recommendation 41);
- Ensuring that all EWOs have a mobile telephone (recommendation 50);
- A review of staff Key Result Areas -KRAs (recommendations 35 and 36)
- Proposals for staff training options (recommendations 37, 38, 39 and 40);
- The development/expansion of parenting classes (recommendation 89);
- Development of more training opportunities for schools (recommendations 86 to 88).

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7 November 2002