

W.P. NO: 0007R

LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT**EXECUTIVE MEETING****21.7.03**

FROM THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION, ARTS & LIBRARIES

NAME OF WARD(S)
ALL**REPORT TITLE: Inclusive Education Best Value Review****1.0 SUMMARY**

This report sets out the findings of the Best Value Review of Inclusive Education carried out in 2001/2. It also informs members of the steps taken by the Education Welfare Service in response to the review.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

That members note the report, the progress made by the Education Welfare Service in implementing the recommendations and the financial implications which will be considered as part of the 2004/5 budget setting process.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Inclusive Education Best Value Review produced 99 recommendations. Of these recommendations, 7 carry a cost element. These are outlined below.

1.	Update and reissue the School Attendance Policy and the Education Welfare Service Staff Handbook	£6,500 (one-off cost)
2.	Produce a set of posters covering attendance issues in different appropriate community languages.	£1,000 (one-off cost)
3.	Support Education Welfare Officers to gain professional qualifications	£1,500 (annual)
4.	Recruit an additional Educational Welfare Officer to increase support for Primary Schools in improving attendance and punctuality	£35,000 (annual)

5.	Recruit an additional Educational Welfare Officer to improve strategic and partnership working with key agencies	£35,000 (annual)
6.	Produce school attendance guidance (letters, booklets) and other information in community languages	£5,000 (one-off cost)
7.	Recruit an additional Educational Welfare Officer to develop a regular programme of site visits concerning children on part-time employment and entertainment licences making sure that legislation in terms of health and safety, child protection and licences are adhered to	£35,000 (annual)
	Total	£119,000

All these items will be the subject of a growth bid as part of the 2004/2005 budget process.

4.0 STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

If the recommendations are implemented, three additional Officers will be recruited to the Education Welfare Service. They will be able to address service issues that the review found were not being adequately addressed because of poor staffing levels.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The Education Welfare Service carries out statutory work on behalf of the LEA, in particular, enforcing pupil attendance and overseeing the employment of children (Entertainment and part-time work) in order to ensure that employers comply with legal requirements.

6.0 DETAIL

6.1 The Best Value Review was undertaken during the calendar years 2001 and 2002. The scope of the Review was as follows.

“The review will look in detail at the work of the Education Welfare Service and how it supports those pupils at risk of underachievement and educational exclusion. It should examine the effectiveness of the links between the Education Welfare Service and other Inclusive Education Services, specifically the Ethnic Minority and Travellers Achievement Project, Brent Education Support Service, the Inclusive Education Projects Team but also other services offering support to pupils at risk of educational exclusion.

“The review should determine:

- whether the Education Welfare Service and other services are targeting their resources effectively;
- whether there are other activities which could be undertaken to enhance support to schools and pupils;
- whether statutory functions are being effectively met;
- whether services could better be delivered by alternative providers;
- whether the current management arrangements and structure of the Education Welfare Service and other services to support educational inclusion are effective;
- whether services link effectively across EAL and with other key agencies such as Health, Social Services, the Police and Lifetime Careers; and
- how best to develop services to complement the introduction of the Connexions Service.”

6.2 The conclusions were extremely positive. The review concluded that the EWS made a valuable contribution to the corporate objectives, which includes

- raising standards and promoting lifelong learning;
- combating crime and promoting community safety;
- reducing social exclusion;
- contributing to creating a modern and well-managed authority; and
- providing good quality customer care.

6.3 According to the report’s findings, the EWS, contributes significantly towards

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

6.4 The Review Team strongly considered that the range of services currently expected of the EWS would be more effectively carried out if the service were realistically staffed with the appointment of three additional members of staff.

- One EWO would work strategically and in partnership with key agencies.
- The second would increase support for Primary Schools.
- The third would develop and implement a regular programme of site visits to employers who hired children for work.

6.4.1 The service is demand-led with referrals both from schools and from other agencies such as Social Services and the Health Service. The Review Team concluded that the EWS was not staffed adequately to meet the demands placed on it and stated that “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,”

Recruiting an EWO to work strategically and in partnership with key agencies would promote efficiency and effectiveness.

6.4.2 Apart from attendance-related issues the Service is asked to deal with the placement of pupils (50-60 cases at a time), carry out checks and make home visits on behalf of other services and deal with behaviour, exclusion, child protection and a host of other matters. In the light of this, the review recommended the recruitment of a second additional EWO to focus on primary work because of demands made on the EWS by the secondary sector.

6.4.3 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 were not undertaken. The main reason for this was that the EWS did not have the staff to fully meet its statutory responsibilities. As a result of resource constraints (staff and money), this area of work was and still is allocated a low priority within the EWS, and is not carried out to a satisfactory standard. This was, therefore, an area of concern for the Review Team and the service.

The review recommended the recruitment of a third officer, who would provide the following.

- A programme of site visits to employers likely to be employing children will be constructed, making sure that legislation in terms of health and safety, child protection and licences is followed and not breached.
- Guidance will be provided to advise children and employers of the requirements concerning child employment so that employment licences can be issued as and when they required.

6.4.4 When the unit costs of the EWS was compared to other London Boroughs for 2000-01 it was discovered that Brent had the fifth lowest spend in London at £8.95 per pupil. Taking the 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.

6.4.5 If three additional Officers were appointed the Service will have a total of 12.5 EWOs. Even with this level of additional staffing the Education Welfare Service will still have one of the lowest levels of spend in London.

6.4.6 As it stood, the review concluded that the EWS was providing a competitive service, drawing on the following evidence.

- The cost of the service was very low compared to other London Boroughs.
- The number of staff employed by the EWS was low (at that time, seven staff to 80 schools).
- The performance of the service was "good to very good" compared to other London Boroughs.
- Schools, who are the main users of the service, were satisfied or very satisfied with the service.
- Stakeholders considered that the EWS was providing a good service.
- Schools were able to purchase additional support from the EWS through the "Traded Services" arrangements.
- Schools had the freedom to arrange and purchase additional support from alternative sources/providers.

6.5 In examining and challenging the service, a number of recommendations to improve the EWS were made. They included the following.

- Updating and re-issuing the school attendance policy, and the staff handbook.
- Professional training for Education Welfare Officers.
- Consulting with current staff on term-time working only and considering employing new staff on these revised conditions of service.

6.5.1 The first two of the above three have funding implications. For the first, once-and-for-all costs will be £6,500. For the second, annual provision will be required of £1,500.

6.5.2 Supporting Officers to gain professional qualifications, possibly from the University of the West of England which whom the EWS has close links, will add considerably to the motivation of staff and increase the effectiveness of the service. The intention is to nominate one officer annually in such a venture.

- 6.5.3 The Review Team also noted that arrangements need to be put into place to publish school attendance guidance by way of letters and booklets and other information in community languages. The review team was surprised to discover that guidance letters and booklets distributed by EWS were printed only in English. Also, it was understood that the home-school agreements were printed only in English. Given the ethnic profile of Brent residents, the review team recommended that an exercise be undertaken to translate these documents into appropriate community languages. The estimated costs for this work is £5,000.
- 6.6 Following publication of the Best Value Report and after approval by the Best Value Strategic Group the EWS produced an Action Plan based on the 99 recommendations. The full BVR report is attached as **Appendix 1**. The 99 recommendations contained in the BVR Action Plan are attached as **Appendix 2**. The Education Welfare Service Action Plan 2002 (Phase 1) sets out the objectives that have been achieved so far and is attached as **Appendix 3**.
- 6.6.1 Altogether, 24 recommendations have been thoroughly addressed and the action points arising from them have been taken. A number of associated issues need on-going attention – such as reminding schools to maintain up-to-date contact lists of pupils and providing guidance in certain problem areas such as dealing with the families of children who are taken on holiday during term time.
- 6.6.2 Some of the objectives are concerned with linkages with other agencies. The EWS has developed robust working arrangements with the new Connexions Service to secure the futures of young people at risk. The EWS and the Police now have a timetable where joint Truancy Sweeps are conducted three times annually. The EWS has developed and implemented a joint protocol with the Brent Education Tuition Service to support children who are excluded from school, and with On Track. The Officer within the Education Service who links with Social Services has proved instrumental in forging better partnership working between the EWS and the Social Services Department, particularly to promote the overall welfare of looked-after children. An EWO has also been designated to work with the Housing Department so that children in homeless families can be appropriately supported. The EWS is in the process of taking action to develop better contacts with other services in and outside the Education Service. Of particular concern is the liaison with key services to ensure that the EWS is immediately informed of children of school age whose families move into Brent, with a view to finding them suitable schools. In this regard, cross-border protocols are crucial. The EWS is actively addressing these issues.
- 6.6.3 The majority of the objectives have been fully met and work proceeds to address remaining objectives successfully within existing resources. Communications with schools are being reviewed, particularly in regard to guidance letters and booklets on attendance and supporting primary schools to develop attendance policies. Further clarification with schools about the role of Education Welfare Officers and the extent to which they can support staff and parents with attendance continues apace. This objective is on going, not least because headteachers, staff and governors change continually.

- 6.6.4 The influence of the EWS in spreading good practice in schools grows. For example, a number of schools have initiated a range of reward systems for pupil attendance because of EWO intervention. Where pupils are regularly late, the EWO will work with schools to welcome and meet parents at the school gate and address any ongoing difficulties.
- 6.6.5 Many of the recommendations are related to maintaining current good practice within the EWS. For example, retaining the current balance between meaningful support and prosecution and deploying the latter only as a last resort; continuing to operate the duty desk and Truancy Helpline and keeping the five day response time to all referrals.
- 6.6.6 It should also be noted that, since the Best Value Review of Inclusive Education was completed, OfSTED have reported on the work of the LEA, including support for school attendance. OfSTED findings are in line with those of the Best Value Review. OfSTED also concluded that the service is low cost and offers good value for money.

7.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The following papers were used in the compilation of this report:-

- i) Inclusive Education Services: Best Value Review 2001/2
- ii) Inclusive Education Best Value Review Action Plan
- iii) Education Welfare Service Action Plan 2002 (Phase 1)
- iv) Education Act 1996
- v) Inspection Report, Brent LEA, OfSTED 2003
- vi) Education, Arts & Libraries Service Development Plan 2003/2007

Any person wishing to inspect the above papers should contact Jonathan Braham, Head of Education Welfare Service, Centre for Staff Development, Brentfield Road, London NW10 8HB. Tel: 020 8937 3311, Fax: 020 8937 3320. jonathan.braham@brent.gov.uk

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