



**Office for Standards  
in Education**

## **COMMUNITY COHESION IN LUTON**

**Brian Blake HMI**

**November 2002**

© Crown copyright 2002. This report may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that all extracts quoted are reproduced verbatim without adaptation and on condition that the source and date thereof are stated.

This report is on the OFSTED web site:  
([www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)).

Reference: 1330

<b>CONTENTS</b>	<b>PARAGRAPHS</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	1 - 3
<b>COMMENTARY</b>	4 - 11
<b>THE LUTON CONTEXT</b>	12 - 18
<b>THE COUNCIL'S STRATEGY</b>	19 - 34
<b>THE CONTRIBUTION OF SERVICES:</b>	
Support for schools	35 - 42
The contribution of community links and housing support	43 - 52
Support for access to education and liaison with social services	53 - 59
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	
<b>APPENDIX</b>	

## INTRODUCTION

1. Luton local education authority (LEA) was first inspected in May 2000. At the time of the inspection, the LEA was warned to expect a repeat visit after about two years, to focus particularly on the weaknesses identified during the first inspection. As the date of the second inspection approached, the LEA wrote to the chief inspector offering to participate in any thematic inspection that might be undertaken on issues relating to LEA provision in areas with large numbers of minority ethnic pupils. Ofsted has reported on the overall performance of the LEA, following an inspection conducted in spring, 2002. This report comments on the success of the council in dealing with the challenge of promoting community cohesion in an ethnically diverse town.
2. As this report goes on to indicate, the ethnic composition of Luton is, in many ways, similar to that of several of the large towns in which hostility between ethnic groups spilled over into violence during the summer of 2001. Luton has seen no such violence. Nevertheless, the council is rightly concerned to do all it can to promote community cohesion in the town, and it gives considerable attention to this issue in its corporate planning. Education is naturally regarded as having a principal role to play in this, as in many other council priorities. The LEA, therefore, asked Ofsted to examine how effectively its support to schools assisted the council in carrying forward its policy to support community cohesion and, reciprocally, what benefit accrued to the schools and their pupils from the council's co-ordination of services to achieve the desired contribution to the cohesion of the community.
3. It was understood that the issue was broader than the delivery of a particular service. Rather, Ofsted and the Audit Commission (AC) agreed to examine how, through the co-ordination of several services and the exercise of wider influence, the council was exercising an aspect of its broad power, under the Local Government Act 2000, to promote the well-being of the community. The decision was made, therefore, to broaden the educational focus of the inspection to look in more detail than usual at issues of social inclusion, particularly those relevant to ethnicity, and also to consider the contribution made by housing, services to children and families, and by the council's work on community regeneration. The inspection team was enhanced to include Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) with particular specialisms in ethnic and

cultural issues, a member of the Social Services Inspectorate and two additional members of the Audit Commission Inspection Service. Ofsted is grateful to these inspectorates for their generous co-operation. The presence of these inspectors on the team extended the professional expertise available, and made it possible to include a wider than usual range of evidence, particularly of the views of service-users, other stakeholders and community representatives.

## COMMENTARY

4. Luton is a large town, typical of many in England, in that it is home to a population, which is ethnically diverse and subject in some areas to considerable socio-economic disadvantage. As in other such towns, for a variety of reasons, a pattern of settlement has become established in which the various minority ethnic communities choose to live together in areas where they have access to particular religious or cultural facilities. There is, in particular, a large community of Pakistani heritage, which, for the most part, lives in defined areas of Luton. This topographical separation is reflected in the schools, some of which do not reflect in their intake the full range of ethnic and cultural identities present in the town.
  
5. Luton was not, however, one of the towns in which racial hostility erupted into violence during the summer of 2001 and, though there is certainly some racism in the town, the various communities live, for the most part, in reasonable harmony with each other. A variety of reasons for this were suggested: firstly, the leadership of the minority communities is more effective than in some other towns and cities and tends to seek agreement when problems arise; secondly, though Luton has its share of disadvantage, it does not have the deep and widespread poverty that afflicts some larger cities; thirdly, the policy of community policing is thought to have been effective in reducing tension; and fourthly, the town is relatively compact. The communities cannot, even if they wished to, avoid each other. A recent Home Office report on community cohesion (The Cattle Report) quoted a muslim of Pakistani origin as saying,

“When I have this meeting with you I will go home and not see another white face until I come back here next week.”

In Luton, that would not be conceivable.

6. A further reason for the degree of community cohesion that Luton enjoys is the enlightened goodwill and purposeful action of its council, about a third of which is drawn from the minority ethnic community. The council has made clear its ambition to involve all elements of the community in a socially harmonious and prosperous

future. Under effective political and professional leadership, the council is having some success in encouraging joint working between services to support vulnerable people, and, in particular, vulnerable children. It has made clear its commitment to social inclusion and to equalities, and lays great stress on combating racism. The general thrust of its policies is widely known, and most of the people interviewed for this inspection, not least those in the minority ethnic communities, feel that the council is responsive to their needs. The council knows its community, not only in the sense that it has excellent data and makes good use of it (though this is true), but also in the sense that it understands its aspirations and sympathises with them.

7. The council regards raising educational attainment as an essential prerequisite for a prosperous and harmonious future; it also believes that schools should serve community cohesion more directly by making children aware of and respectful towards a variety of faiths and customs. It needs an effective LEA to assist it in reaching these goals, and it has made some progress towards creating one since the LEA inspection of 2000, which found more weaknesses than strengths. The LEA has improved, and has strengths, for example, in its provision for minority ethnic pupils, that are highly relevant to the subject of this report. Moreover, it has greatly improved its provision for combating racism, and there are examples of effective joint working with social services, housing and community regeneration, which suggest that the council is having some success in assuring that its own approach is more coherent, and makes best use of its resources.
8. Those resources are not lavish. Some aspects of children's services appeared to be under stress; there are major defects in the housing stock; and inadequate staffing is part of the reason for the LEA's continued and crucial failure to offer schools effective behaviour support: a failure that has lost it considerable credibility among, especially, the secondary headteachers. The inspection team made no effort to inspect all the services provided by Luton council. The performance of those that were looked at was reasonable, but this is not good enough to deliver priorities as ambitious as those the council rightly has. Fortunately, the council's capacity to improve is considerable.

9. Secondary headteachers were highly critical of some aspects of the performance of the LEA. Some were critical of the council's commitment to the inclusion of pupils with behavioural needs, believing that insufficient support was being given to them to achieve this successfully.
10. The council's wish to promote greater social cohesion must, in the end, take full account of the fact that several of the primary schools and three of the secondary schools contain very few white pupils; indeed, several people interviewed for this inspection referred to them as "Asian schools". They are not; they are Luton schools, they and the mainly white schools are not representative of the town's great diversity. The existence of ethnically distinct schools could deny children the opportunity to work with and learn about others of different ethnicity and culture. The LEA is doing much, through twinning arrangements, visits, sporting occasions and in many other ways to try to ensure that this does not arise.
11. The LEA's helpful attempts to present diversity as a fact to be celebrated do not in themselves address the main issue. The existence of ethnically unbalanced schools is not a phenomenon that it has created, but it is one that it has to confront. Neither is the current positioning a fact of nature; it is the creation, over the years, of choice, and choice can be influenced. The LEA has little power over schools, but it should be seeking to influence admissions criteria for example, and discussing with schools ways in which their ethnic composition might, over time, begin to better reflect that of the town. Its relationship with its secondary schools does not, at present, assist it in addressing so delicate an issue; improving that relationship should be an urgent priority.



## THE LUTON CONTEXT

(This section is complemented by a set of statistical appendices)

12. Luton was, until local government reorganisation in 1998, the largest town in Bedfordshire. It has now been a unitary authority for five years. It is, on the whole, less affluent than other areas of the south-east. Despite the recent closure of one of the town's largest employers, unemployment is about the national average, and therefore high for the south-east. Moreover, six of the 16 wards in the authority are, by national standards, deprived, and two wards, Biscot and Dallow, rank in the bottom 10 per cent of wards nationally.
13. The population of Luton is approximately 183,000, and likely to fall by about 4,000 over the next decade. The town's patterns of demography and settlement resemble those of many other large towns and cities in England, especially those in the north. Around 23 per cent of the population is of minority ethnic heritage, of which the largest group is Pakistani, from the Mirpur area of Kashmir. The percentage of minority ethnic pupils in the schools is much higher, at 41.5 per cent, and has increased as a proportion of the whole school population in recent years, particularly in the primary schools. Bangladeshi children (6.8 per cent of the school population) African Caribbean children (4.8 per cent) and Indian children (3.7 per cent) also constitute a significant proportion of the cohort in schools. During the last two years, moreover, there has been a significant increase in the number of asylum seekers and refugees. The LEA predicts that by 2010, over 50 per cent of pupils will be from minority ethnic groups.
14. The minority ethnic population is by no means evenly distributed across the town. Appendix 1 suggests that people of ethnic heritage minority tend to live in areas which suffer relatively high levels of unemployment and housing deprivation and which, by comparison to the rest of the community, have limited access to the full range of local services. The unevenness of minority ethnic representation is, moreover, even more marked in the schools, though in this case the graphs set out in appendices 2 to 10 need to be interpreted with care, since the school data are more

up to date than the socio-economic statistics. Appendix 2 sets out the proportions of white and minority ethnic pupils in Luton's primary schools and appendix 3 does the same for the secondary schools. It will readily be seen that there are few, if any, schools which are all white, but that the concentration of minority ethnic pupils in particular schools is more intense than the general pattern of population in the town would suggest.

15. As interviews with residents, officers of the council and elected members repeatedly confirmed, the principal reason for this pattern of settlement and of schooling is that it represents the exercise of choice, albeit, in some cases, a choice, on the part of the people concerned, inevitably constrained by factors such as income. Many minority ethnic families choose, in Luton as elsewhere, to live in areas, which offer them cultural and religious facilities appropriate to their needs and wishes. There is no suggestion that council policies on, for example, the allocation of housing have, in any large measure, exacerbated the tendency of ethnic groups to wish to live separately from each other.
16. Nevertheless, where people live is clearly a prime influence on where their children go to school. When people live in distinct areas it is, *ipso facto*, likely that their children will also be educated separately. There was some evidence that current patterns of parental choice were exacerbating this tendency, and confronting the LEA with some difficult challenges with regard to admissions and the supply of school places. The authority has moved, during the course of the last year, from being a net exporter of pupils to being a net importer. There is migration out of the borough from schools on the fringes of it, but also substantially greater movement into the schools in the inner parts of the town, where some secondary schools are now admitting between 50 and 150 casual admissions a year. Because the overall birth-rate has fallen steadily for some years, the number of surplus places in primary schools is set to rise to 15.7 per cent in 2006 (from 12 per cent in January 2001). In some secondary schools, by contrast, there are too few places in some year groups.
17. Partly as a result of the settlement patterns already referred to, but partly also because of the lingering effects of decisions on catchment areas made as long ago as the 1980s, eleven Luton schools have a school population which is more than 90

per cent ethnic minority. Six, out of a total of 83, have fewer than 10 per cent minority ethnic pupils. In that sense, the pattern of representation of minority ethnic pupils differs from that of other, larger, towns in that there is no substantial number of all-white schools. Nevertheless, the concentration of minority ethnic pupils in three secondary schools gives some cause for concern, since this reduces the opportunities pupils have for contact outside their immediate community.

18. This pattern of schooling is not obviously conducive to mutual understanding across the complex patterns of ethnicity in the town. Nevertheless, a number of interviews made the point in the course of this inspection that the town was, on the whole, a racially harmonious place. Separation did not entail hostility; there had been no riots, and though there had been some natural tension following the attack on the World Trade Centre, that tension had been contained, and had not led to outbreaks of inter-communal violence. Luton has some similarities to Bradford, in that it possesses a relatively large, long-established Pakistani community, living in deprived and readily identifiable areas of the town. Lord Ouseley's report on race relations in Bradford was highly critical of community leadership in that city. This inspection suggested that such criticism did not apply to Luton, where the leadership of the minority ethnic communities gave no comfort to extremism. That goes some way to explain why, unlike Bradford, the minority community in Luton has not been the focus of sustained large-scale violence. Not all of those interviewed maintained this relatively optimistic view, and the council itself is sufficiently aware of the similarities with Bradford to be alarmed by them, and anxious to play its full part in promoting community cohesion. It seemed clear, however, that sufficient goodwill existed within and between the communities to facilitate that cohesion, and make the council's task marginally easier than that of councils in less fortunate areas.

## THE COUNCIL'S STRATEGY

19. The demographic challenges facing Luton council are, to a large extent, not of its own making. Moreover, to devise solutions to many of the problems presented by those challenges is beyond the power of local government. The council could not, if it wished to, amend the legal framework governing admissions to school. It cannot direct people to live, or not to live, in particular areas, and its power to influence patterns of settlement is limited and strictly long-term. Similarly, it cannot achieve the regeneration of inner urban areas overnight and, if it could, it could not guarantee that those who currently live there would necessarily be the main beneficiaries of any resulting improvement. Above all, it cannot compel understanding or goodwill between communities.
20. Nevertheless, the prime function of all government is to promote order, and in a democratic society, order preferably arises out of the will of the citizens to live harmoniously together, rather than as a result of coercion. Luton council wishes the ethnic diversity of its population to constitute a strength, rather than a cause of conflict, and has set itself to use its influence across a wide range of partnerships, its detailed local knowledge and, where appropriate, its powers to promote community cohesion.
21. Its success will depend partly on factors outside its control, but if it is to exert, to any pronounced degree, the influence it wishes to, it seems necessary that it should:
  - understand in detail the nature of the community it serves, and be able to demonstrate a high degree of empathy with all sections of it;
  - give emphasis to issues of equality and justice;
  - act cohesively and corporately as a council;
  - plan effectively; that is, plans should be internally consistent through the planning hierarchy, based on an audit of needs, focused on outcomes and rigorously reviewed;
  - be committed to the continuous improvement of services, with a clear focus on social inclusion;

- approach problems holistically, and be able to bring about effective joint working between different departments of the council;
- be successful in acquiring funding and innovative in its use of funding, drawing together a wide range of partners; and
- be able to communicate effectively with, and demonstrably consult, the people of Luton.

22. Overall, Luton council, and the LEA within it, has much to do, but is making progress, under effective political and professional leadership, in all of the above respects. Its influence is markedly on the positive side, and it is rapidly improving both its capacity to convince all concerned of its good faith, and its effectiveness. The inspection found clear evidence of a strategy, which consisted fundamentally of the following strands:

- the desire to act more cohesively as a council;
- a strong commitment to social inclusion;
- a drive for the improvement of services; and
- a commitment to the implementation of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act, 2000.

Most, if not all, of the people interviewed were clear about the centrality of the promotion of good race relations to the council's overall ambitions for the community. Not all agreed with it: a few felt that it was overemphasised; but virtually everyone was aware of the existence of the policy and of its overriding importance to the council.

23. Since the first inspection of the LEA, Luton has modernised its council structure. It has moved from a traditional committee structure to one which consists of a leader, deputy leader and eight portfolio holders, with four scrutiny committees, a scrutiny board that oversees the committee structure and two scrutiny panels, one of which focuses on community cohesion. This change, coupled with the recent appointment of a new chief executive, has helped to bring about more rapid and better informed decision-making, because the portfolio holders are responsible, not just for "their"

areas, but for the corporate progress of the council as a whole. This advance, which enables members to make decisions in the light of intended outcomes for the citizen, has been strongly supported by improved performance management, including an approach to Best Value that is based on more comprehensive information and is more focused on the improvement of services.

24. At the heart of better performance management, however, is greater clarity about objectives. When the LEA was first inspected in 2000, the council had no corporate plan, and the LEA operated in a vacuum, rather than within a framework of corporate intentions. This is no longer the case. The chief executive was largely responsible for a paper, '*Vision 2010*', which set seven strategic goals, all of which strongly focus on social inclusion. This paper is the basis for the Best Value Performance Plan (BVPP), which is an effective document that links together the various service plans.
  
25. Essential to the council's methodology is the careful use of management information to identify need and target resources to address the need, with an annual audit on progress, and a check on the impact of each policy on poverty, with a report to the executive. The impact of action on social inclusion is the prime consideration for all service planning. At the heart of the council's action to raise attainment in schools and, by doing so, ensure that educational improvement contributes to corporate goals is the corporate action schools' strategy, which is an attempt, recent in origin (September 2001), to ensure that the major services and agencies that have an impact on schools work effectively together in support of schools in more challenging circumstances, by ensuring their actions are based on shared, reliable management information.
  
26. The regeneration activity of the council has many strands. Luton has been successful in attracting additional funding: mostly the funding is directed towards initiatives that entail the provision of support to families alongside support to children, such as:
  - On Track – which aims at early prevention of offending by work with children aged 4-12 and with "hard to reach" families;
  - Children's Fund - focused on enhancing and complements services for children aged 4-13;

Sure Start;  
Flying Start;  
SRB / Regeneration projects;  
The Luton Drug Action Team;  
Community Safety Strategy; and  
The Crime and Disorder Executive.

Each of these has a strongly cross-service approach, and an emphasis on the earlier years of education.

27. As the council has become better informed about the community, so it has improved its means of consulting citizens and other service-users, notably schools. The number of consultative groups has been reduced since the last inspection, and the reduction has helped to facilitate the better communication with schools and the public, which has been noted in the second report on the LEA. The citizens panel and the race advisory panel are key elements in the council's strategy for wider consultation, and the Luton council of faiths and Luton multi-agency racist incident group act as more specialist fora.
  
28. There was general agreement among the groups and individuals interviewed for this inspection that communication and consultation had improved. Moreover, almost all believed that the authority, including the LEA, was entirely sincere in its desire to improve further in this respect. Remarkably, a number of members of the minority ethnic communities referred to the personal influence of the Chief Executive and the Leader in engendering an approach, which reflected greater understanding of the aspirations and values of the minority community. No one was in any doubt of the general emphasis placed by the council on social inclusion, and a variety of partners, from the police to the diocesan representatives, attested to the energy devoted by the council to consultation, and to a good deal of consensus about educational issues both across the political parties and among stakeholders.

29. Given the relatively brief time that has elapsed since the last LEA inspection, and since the introduction of the revised council structure and the appointment of the chief executive, the process of improving consultation is still incomplete. Moreover, the process is a two-way one. If there is an onus on the council to make clear its intentions, and to consult over its plans, there is equally an onus on consultees to listen, and exercise objective judgement. Entirely predictably, the inspection threw up many examples of individuals or groups, who did not understand all aspects of the council's detailed policies. The first report on the LEA contains the sentence, "Consultation is extensive, but particularly with secondary schools, is often ineffective." This is still, to some extent, the case. Despite improvements, the LEA continues to face a problem in amending the relationship with secondary headteachers. As a result of major reservations about the support provided by the LEA for challenging behaviour, some viewed the LEA's position on the inclusion of pupils with behavioural difficulties as implemented without due care for the interests of schools. If it is to achieve the influence over schools it needs to pursue its aspiration to lead. The council must work to mitigate the attitudes that lie behind these criticisms, and it is unlikely to be able to do so successfully against a background of continued service failures. At the same time, the schools could helpfully be less intractable.
30. Additionally, the schools and the LEA together clearly need to arrive at an approach to school places and admissions that offers some prospect of a reduction in the current ethnic polarisation of the town's schools. Some improvement in the relationship between the LEA and its secondary schools was, indeed, evident, partly because "Excellence in Luton" had provided a framework for a different and more fruitful partnership. However, some distrust remained, and there was a determined individualism among some of the headteachers that was unhelpful in the context of a policy focus on community cohesion.
31. The council is strongly committed to equalities, including the promotion of good race relations and the raising of educational standards across all sections of the population. The work on equality of opportunity has been very strongly led from the corporate centre, as part of the council's overall approach to performance management, linked to the appraisal of staff. All departments have equalities



monitoring, and the structure of each department has been checked against the requirements of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act, 2000. Equalities action plans are drawn up, and reports are made to the executive annually.

32. Within education specifically, the LEA has addressed the recommendation of its previous inspection report, and, as a result, its provision for combating racism is now satisfactory. It has responded well to the report of the inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence, and has introduced into schools procedures for monitoring and reporting racist incidents. Guidance and support to schools on implementation of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act, 2000 has been provided. The council has, at this point, no local race equality council, and, though it has a race equality forum, it does not prevent some groups feeling inadequately consulted.
33. In education, there is again a job of persuasion to do with the schools. Relatively few reports of racist incidents have, in the event, been made. Inspectors' discussions with schools confirmed that racial tension, though it exists, was not a major issue in any of them. Although the optimistic view to take would be that this is evidence that few occur, the LEA is more inclined to believe that it represents under-reporting.
34. In summary, the view of the inspection team was that Luton has made much progress towards operating more cohesively as a council. Strategies are corporately driven, and supported by good planning and effective performance management. The council has set out its stall on social inclusion, and has made very clear its commitment to equalities. It lays a strong emphasis on the promotion of good race relations. Not all stakeholders are yet fully aware of the details of council policy, and more needs to be done to develop the relationship between the LEA and its secondary schools.

## THE CONTRIBUTION OF SERVICES

### Support for schools

35. The council has set itself a complex agenda, and to have any hope of success it needs not only good performance from council services, but also highly effective interaction between them, and between them and other agencies. In relation to education, the evidence of the inspection of 2000 was that it needed an improved LEA.
36. Overall, the most recent inspection findings suggest that, within limits, that is what it now has. The LEA has made enough progress to be at a point where its strengths outweigh its weaknesses. It has made some good recent appointments and is operating in a more favourable corporate context than two years ago, with better professional and political leadership of the council. Its capacity to improve further is clear.
37. Support for school improvement is now, for the most part, satisfactory or better, though there is a clear distinction to be made between the support provided for primary and that for secondary schools. Although some secondary schools have received good inspection reports, the Ofsted evidence indicated that there are more secondary schools where management and leadership, including by the governing body, require much or some improvement than is the case nationally. The LEA is expanding its capacity to support them rather late in the day. Most special educational needs functions are adequately carried out, and the overall management and leadership of the LEA are at least satisfactory. The Ofsted/Audit Commission report sets out its findings in detail, and it is not germane to repeat them here. However, it is worth dwelling on some of the findings, particularly those relating to:
- admissions and the supply of school places;
  - support for the attainment of minority ethnic children; and
  - provision to combat racism and promote good race relations.

38. To take admissions and the supply of school places first. The LEA's performance of both functions is technically competent and though, as has already been stated, it faces increasing difficulties due to population shifts, the LEA is at least coping. It is, for example, addressing the rising number of surplus places in primary schools. It has a school organisation plan which requires only minor amendment, and it is taking steps to acquire better data on pupil mobility and better projections of the future demand for places.

39. In the Luton context, however, something more than "coping" is needed if the LEA is to exercise these statutory functions in such a way as to support the strategic thrust of the council. The Home Office report on community cohesion recommended that LEAs should:

"Encourage schools to attract an intake which reflects their community and promote cross cultural contact within the school and parental network."

The difficulty in achieving this or an approach to it, should not be underestimated. In relation to primary schools, because of their inevitably local nature, there may be little that can be done. There is potentially more flexibility where secondary schools are concerned, but in Luton any progress depends on a process of discussion and persuasion which is not, at this stage, happening.

40. The LEA does, however, do a great deal to mitigate the potential effects of separate education. For example, it seeks to influence curricular provision in schools so that multi-cultural awareness informs the curriculum in schools. It provides advice and resources to facilitate this, as well as a range of activities that enable children to mix with others from a different ethnic background and to learn about other faiths and cultures. Examples include sporting fixtures, music activities, links between secondary and primary pupils and activities for the gifted and talented. The Luton council of faiths arranges visits by schools to places of worship, and a start has been made on pairing schools with pupils of different ethnic backgrounds. Much of this is of relatively recent origin, but it constitutes a determined effort to ensure that diversity is valued.

41. The council takes the view that racial tension is less likely to be problematic in a community of which all elements are successful and prosperous. It therefore lays emphasis on the reduction of poverty, and raising attainment is both an end in itself and a means to greater affluence. The LEA's support for raising the attainment of minority ethnic pupils, including Travellers, was satisfactory at the time of the first Ofsted inspection, and is now good.
  
42. The ethnic minority strategy team is, first of all, managed within the school improvement division, so that its work is not disengaged from the LEA's main endeavour on school standards. It is well-led and effectively deployed, using the high quality data available to it. The team has forged good working links with a wide range of council agencies, as well as with the advisers and consultants leading on the major national strategies. It monitors and evaluates its own work effectively. The indications are that it is meeting with some success. The attainment of some minority groups, particularly Pakistani and Bangladeshi pupils, is beginning to rise, though the performance of African Caribbean pupils, as is the case nationally, remains a cause for concern.

## **The contribution of community links and housing support**

43. Raising attainment, like fostering community cohesion, is not a single task, but an outcome of a multiplicity of activities. It depends partly, and centrally, on improving schools, but it also depends on (and contributes to) improving the conditions faced by the communities which use the schools and on enlisting the support of that community in the process of achieving improvement. Inspectors therefore examined, in detail, the links between the schools and the community.
44. In particular, interviews were held with officers from the authority's housing services and visits were made to four wards, with significant proportions of minority ethnic groups, to meet with members of those communities to assess the impact of housing policy and housing conditions on their lives. The inspectors also spoke with a number of adults and young people to assess the quality of access to authority facilities and the degree of community cohesion.
45. Overall, the community sees Luton borough council as having changed its approach over the last three years. It is now tackling inclusion seriously and on a broad front, but there remains a need to develop further cross-cultural awareness. Those cross-cultural celebrations that are supported by the borough receive positive acclaim from different ethnic communities. Community members recognise the recent work of the chief executive in developing links with different communities, as part of the corporate approach to community cohesion, as a move in the right direction.
46. Although a number of those community residents spoken to during the inspection indicated that council members now show more understanding of their views and aspirations, there remains a lack of clarity both about the council's overall strategic approach and about the value that community organisations might bring to raising educational achievement, through positive role models, peer education, the provision of culturally appropriate services and venues, and through working sensitively with parents and young people who might otherwise be hard to reach. They do not always understand why grants are awarded to some projects and not others, nor are the links between projects always apparent.

For example, in 2001, the authority gave £2,000 to nine supplementary schools operated by community associations on a voluntary basis, but nothing to other community organisations for covering the costs of police checks relating to those volunteers working with children. There are also smaller community based organisations providing educational activities and out-of-school initiatives, which are under threat of losing their current grant funding. This is leading to a view, on the part of some of these groups, that they are not getting the recognition or support they deserve for their educational work in the communities that they service.

47. Although the LEA now gives a greater emphasis to community use of its schools, overall provision is patchy. Some schools link very well to their local community, with facilities open for use during the evening and through school holidays as part of an inclusive approach aimed at providing facilities and educational activities for children, their parents and families as a whole. Most members of the local community appreciate the availability and access to these facilities, and recognise that these schools are going some way to meet the needs of local people. However, more could be done to improve local access to more facilities.
48. Housing condition is of variable quality in the private sector (both for owner-occupiers and for those in rented accommodation.) In the two most deprived wards, Dallow and Biscot, both of which have significant proportions of minority ethnic groups, there are significant issues about the condition and quality of the housing. For understandable reasons, which include a lack of building space, there is a limited supply of social housing in this area, particularly of larger properties, which would provide more space for children to work adequately at home, and for younger people in poorly paid jobs: however, the council is taking steps to reduce this deficiency. There is also limited refuge space for women fleeing domestic violence.
49. The housing in this area also suffers from overcrowding (and suffers from tenant overcrowding), and in the private rented sector from some bad landlord practices.
50. These problems are exacerbated by a lack of accessible housing advice on both the assistance available through the grant system to improve properties and the rights

that tenants have when renting private accommodation. The information and application forms seemed excessively detailed and the English text is not always clear or readable or simple to translate to members of minority ethnic groups. Some members of these communities feel that the situation could be improved with better support and advice from the council, particularly for those whose first language is not English.

51. Recent work within the corporate action schools' group, the youth intervention group, and the council's overall housing strategy are beginning to link more effectively to the corporate agenda and the priorities for education. The council has also made some progress in linking with different community groups over the past 12 months. A number of housing initiatives within the borough, linked directly to particular community groups, is providing additional and appropriate housing. Some self-build schemes in the Lewsey ward and on the Marsh Farm estate, which spans the Sundon and Bramingham wards, have been targeted at disaffected adults, from the age of 18 to 25, who have left school with no qualifications. These schemes provided appropriate training opportunities to learn building skills, which are supplemented well through local college work. The council is also sensitive to the provision of accommodation for key workers, including teachers. Other initiatives are in train, including a starter homes initiative bid to offer 10 grants to assist teachers moving into the area to buy property.
52. There is no evidence to suggest that the allocation policy for social housing, which offers applicants areas of choice, leads to residential segregation. However, many minority ethnic families choose to live in those areas, which offer cultural and religious facilities appropriate to their needs and wishes. Although the council is making efforts to provide social housing in those areas, potential development sites are limited.

## **Support for access to education and liaison with social services**

53. The council understands well that, in its attempt to promote social inclusion, it must grapple, in a co-ordinated way, with issues of multiple deprivation. It has many of the basic tools to attempt the job. It has been successful in acquiring funding through, for example, New Deal for Communities, and it targets the use of that funding well.
54. The main emphasis is on the early years, and there are three strands to the strategy: Flying Start, On Track and Children's Fund. All the key schools (i.e. those in which deprivation is at its most concentrated) are covered by one or other of these initiatives, and in each of these schools there is a family worker. This is seen by both the schools and by social services as key in ensuring that the necessary detailed liaison between education and children's services operates, not just at a strategic level, but on the ground. More generally, operational links between education and social services are good, and facilitated by a joint planning team for children. Social services staff meet individual schools on a termly basis, but there is, nevertheless, some variability in schools' views of the effectiveness of liaison, partly because schools do not always fully understand the constraints on social services or the statutory framework within which they operate.
55. The impact of this effective joint working is analysed in detail in the LEA inspection report. The LEA's provision for vulnerable children varies from generally satisfactory to good, and the emphasis on early intervention gives some reason to hope that the scale of problems will decrease in the future. At present, the social services department's resources are under some stress. The number of children in public care, moreover, is high at 357, 30 per cent of whom are of minority ethnic heritage, and the threshold for entering public care is also high, indicating the existence of a large quantum of lower-level, but still significant need, again concentrated in particular areas.
56. Child protection case files show some evidence of racist comments, with which social workers are expected to deal. It has proved difficult to recruit either social workers or foster carers from a south Asian background, so, to that extent, social services is not



fully representative of the community, and the council is concerned to address this. The education welfare service is more representative.

57. The council, therefore, in general, manages well the interaction of the two departments to provide soundly for the protection of children, for children in public care, and for attendance at school. This generally satisfactory support for social inclusion is, however, vitiated by provision of behaviour support which the schools, with some reason, regard as poor. Despite improvements, this continued service failure does more, perhaps, than any other shortcoming in the LEA, to forfeit the confidence of schools.
58. To some extent, the problem may be explained by difficulties in recruiting staff. However that may be, the focus of the service on supporting individual pupils is not all that is required. There is insufficient emphasis on the provision of guidance to schools, and the written guidance on behaviour management, which was issued to schools in 2000, is in need of updating. The behaviour support service has, moreover, been compelled recently to withdraw staff from supporting schools in order to teach in the off-site centres for excluded pupils. The provision of education for pupils who are excluded was, nevertheless, judged to be satisfactory. However, since the LEA inspection, the pupil referral unit that had been brought out of special measures has been placed back in them.
59. Again, this is damaging to the confidence between the LEA and schools that is needed if real progress is to be made. The secondary headteachers were very critical, but the primary heads were critical too, and parents were aware of behaviour as an issue in Luton. It is hard to see how education can be a force for community cohesion, where there is a perception that the schools face behaviour with which they are struggling, without effective support, to cope.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following recommendations are additional to those set out in the LEA inspection report. However, the recommendations included in that report are, clearly, also relevant to the subject of this paper. Of particular importance are the recommendations on support for behaviour and admissions to school. These should be addressed with urgency.

In order to improve relationships with secondary schools, the LEA should make known to them the criticisms expressed in this paper and discuss them carefully. Both the schools and the LEA should take responsibility for improving the relationship.

The LEA should encourage schools to attract an intake that reflects the town's community and promote cross-cultural contact within the school and parental network.

Overtly exclusive admissions procedures should be challenged.

The LEA should audit the extent to which all schools are promoting multi-cultural awareness, and should challenge those schools which are not taking a positive view of their statutory duty under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act, 2000.

The council should provide training for schools and social workers on their respective roles, statutory duties and constraints.

The LEA should audit the voluntary sector's activities in support of education in order to better assess the value for money achieved and allocate further funding on a transparent basis, as part of a strategy aimed at harnessing the work of voluntary organisations and community groups in pursuit of its priorities.

Further community use of schools should be encouraged as an aid to supporting the educational involvement and achievement of all members of the community.

The council should develop further its policy and provision for housing, by adopting an approved landlord list, a deposit guarantee scheme, support systems for tenants whose first

language is not English and by improving liaison between all council officers who may visit local communities and individual households.

The council should examine the implications of its allocations policy in relation to educational choice and availability.

The council should develop improved ways of assisting minority ethnic households through information and systems to access housing, enforce their rights as tenants and improve the condition and energy efficiency of their homes.

**APPENDIX 1 The breakdown of population in Luton by indices of multiple deprivation**

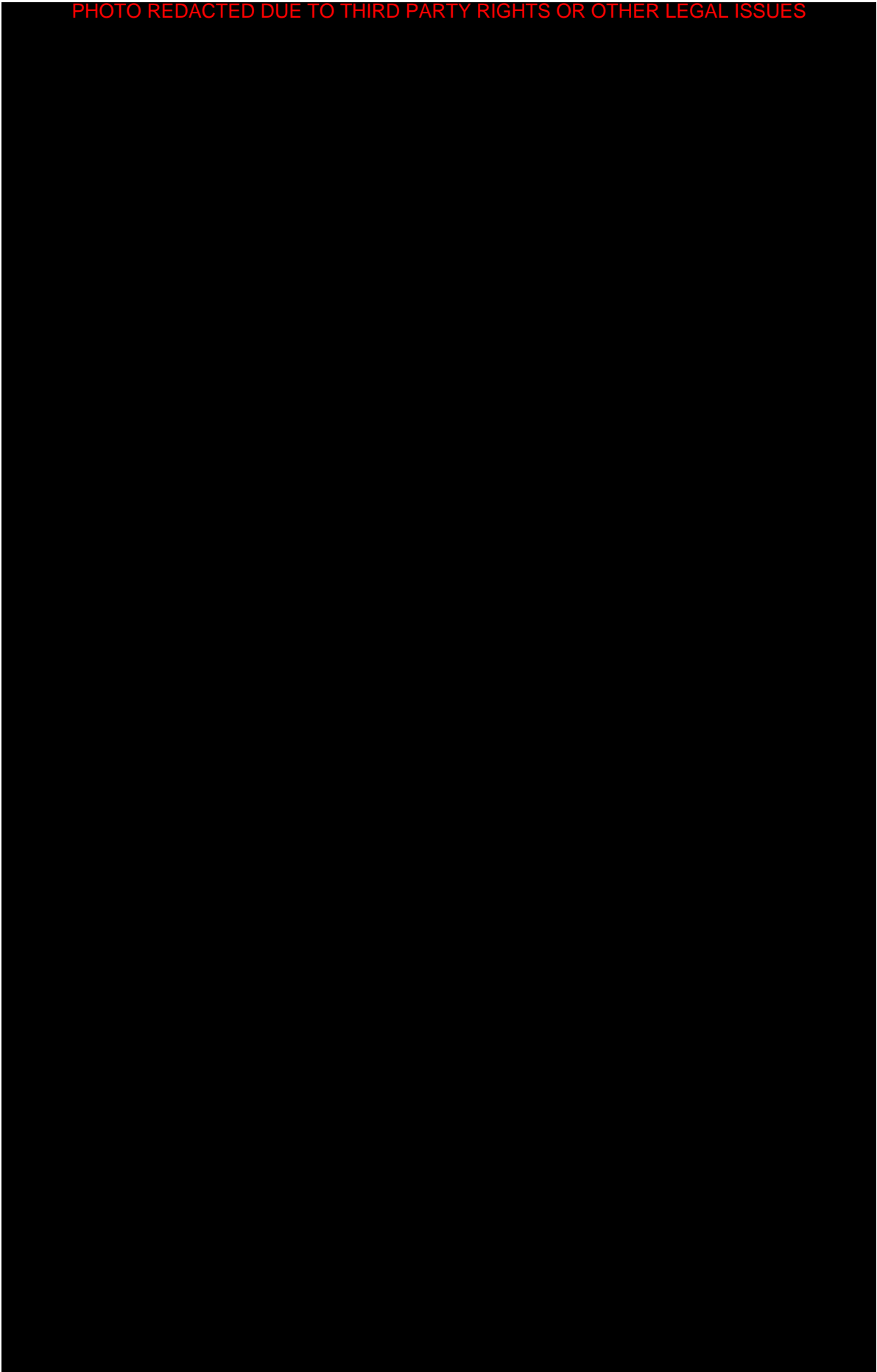


PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES

APPENDIX 2 The proportions of different ethnic groups in Luton primary schools

**APPENDIX 3 The proportions of different ethnic minority groups in Luton secondary schools**

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES



PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES

**APPENDIX 4 The proportions of different ethnic groups in Luton special schools**

**APPENDIX 5 The proportions of white and ethnic minority pupils in Luton primary schools**

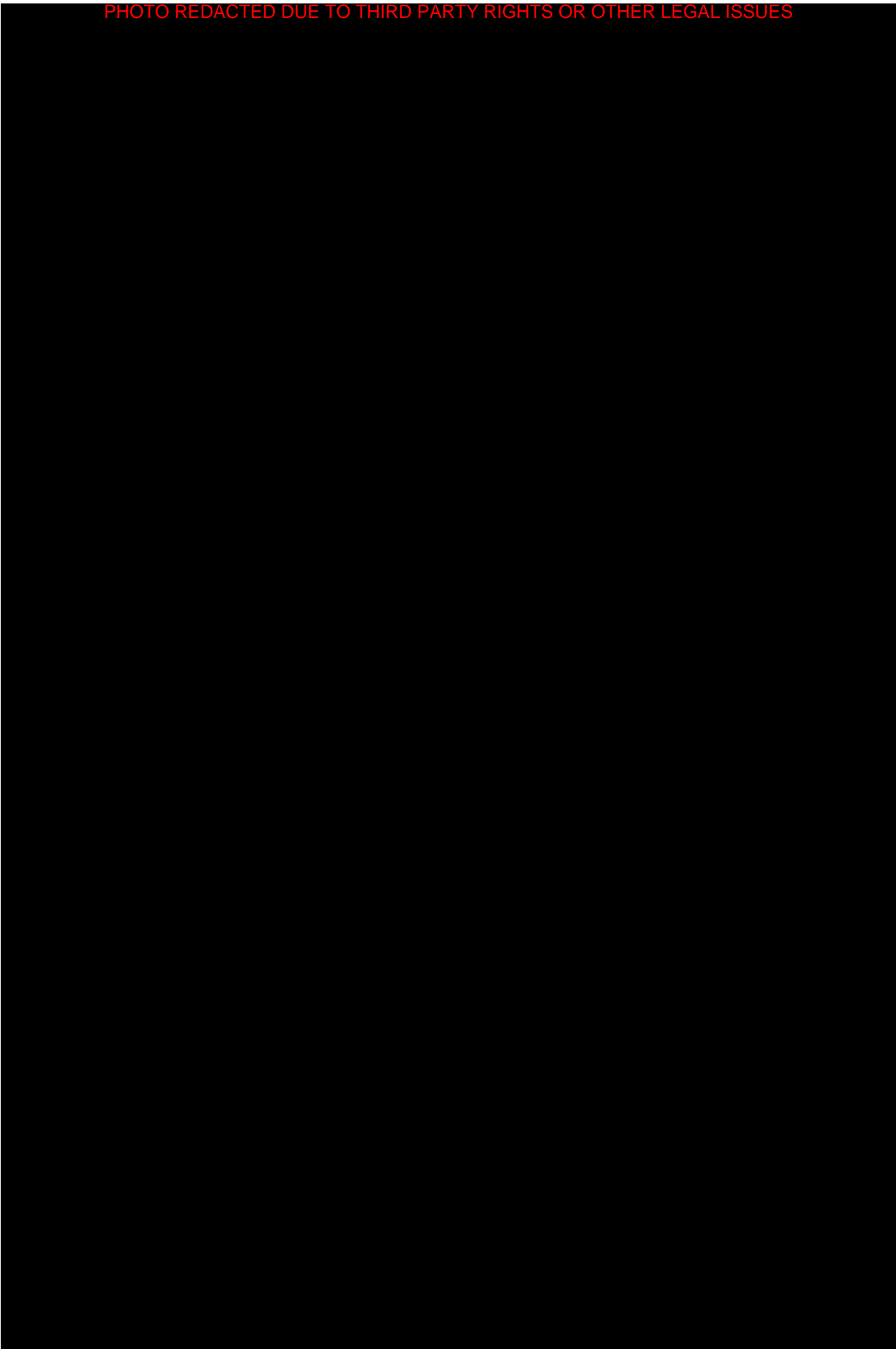


PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES



PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES

**APPENDIX 6 The proportions of white and ethnic minority groups in Luton secondary schools**

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES

**APPENDIX 7 The proportions of white and ethnic minority pupils in Luton special schools**

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES

**APPENDIX 8 Attendance in Luton primary schools by indices of multiple deprivation**

**APPENDIX 9 Attendance in Luton secondary schools by indices of multiple deprivation**

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES

**APPENDIX 10 Attendance in Luton special needs schools by indices of multiple deprivation**