

ANNEX 22



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE



Office for Standards
in Education

Inspection report
Suffolk
14 to 19 Area Inspection

Dates of inspection: 13–17 October and 24–28 November 2003

ANNEX 22

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Basic information about the area inspection

Name of area:	Suffolk
Reporting inspector:	Robert Avery HMI
Dates of inspection:	13–17 October and 24–28 November 2003

Introduction

The Learning and Skills Act 2000, as amended by the Education Act 2002, gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) of Schools the power, working with the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI), to inspect the provision of 14 to 19 education and training in an area. The *Area Inspection Framework* sets out the principles that apply to the inspections of the provision of non-higher education and training made by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), local education authorities (LEAs) and their partners within an area. This inspection was carried out under section 65 of the Learning and Skills Act by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) and the ALI.

This inspection covered the area of Suffolk. Inspectors analysed statistical and documentary evidence, considered the views of providers and of learners, and interviewed officers of the local LSC, LEA, Connexions and local learning partnerships; senior staff in schools, colleges, and training providers; elected members of the council; governors, parents and young people. Inspectors visited schools, colleges and training providers to evaluate the quality of provision for learners aged 14 to 19. Inspectors also took account of the evidence and findings of previous inspections of the Connexions partnership, the LEA, training providers, schools and colleges in the area.

Executive summary

The provision of education and training for young people aged 14 to 19 across Suffolk in meeting the needs of learners, employers and the community is satisfactory. The strategies for 14 to 19 education and training developed by the LEA and local LSC are congruent and have informed the development by key partners of a learning entitlement for students aged 14 to 19. However, key partners have yet to produce an explicit development plan for 14 to 19 provision to take forward the aims and objectives of the entitlement. Some effective countywide strategic partnerships and operational networks have been established, but further work remains to be done to ensure that partnership arrangements, with clear lines of accountability, reflect the needs of all learners in different parts of the county.

Strategies to improve attainment across the county at Key Stage 4 are proving to be successful. Attainment at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) has been rising at a faster rate than the national average, and in 2002 was 4% above the national average. Collaboration between many schools and the colleges has been effective in broadening the vocational opportunities available for students aged 14 to 16, specifically through the Increased Flexibility Programme (IFP) and New Start programmes. However, the strategies to increase post-16 participation and to raise attainment for students aged 16 to 19 are less well developed, and post-16 participation rates, although close to the national average, have stagnated. Nevertheless, strategies implemented by the LEA to improve the transport arrangements for those living in rural areas have helped to maintain the current level of participation. The overall attainment at General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced Subsidiary (AS) and Advanced (A) level in school sixth forms does not reflect the attainment of pupils at Key Stage 4. The overall success rates of students aged 16 to 19 on level 1 and level 2 courses in the four Suffolk colleges are improving and are just above the national averages for further education (FE) colleges, but although the overall success rate at level 3 is

improving, in 2002, it was 6% below the national average for FE colleges. Achievements of work-based learners are low.

Although there is collaboration between school sixth forms in the north of the county, intense competition between sixth forms in Ipswich often results in a restricted curriculum for those students continuing their education at school. There is insufficient alternative provision for those post-16 learners in schools and for whom GCE A/AS level courses are inappropriate. Teaching in schools is generally good, although the quality is more varied in the colleges. Support provided to learners by the Connexions partnership is good. However, some young people are inadequately informed about the full range of post-16 options open to them. Work-based learning is often poorly promoted, and is too often perceived as being more suitable for learners with few qualifications.

The key partners produced jointly a self-evaluation report for 14 to 19 provision in Suffolk prior to the area inspection. The report was comprehensive and based on carefully organised supporting evidence. Inspectors concurred with many of the findings given in the report, although they identified a few additional weaknesses. In some areas, particularly regarding post-16 provision, the report was insufficiently evaluative.

The following grades were allocated:

Aspect	Grade
1. Strategy for 14 to 19 education and training	Satisfactory
2. Achievement	Satisfactory
3. Access to, and participation in, education and training	Satisfactory
4. Quality of 14 to 19 education and training	Good
5. Guidance and support	Satisfactory
6. Leadership and management	Satisfactory
	Overall grade
How effective and efficient is the provision of education and training across the area in meeting the needs of learners, employers and the community?	Satisfactory

The grades are allocated according to the criteria contained in the area inspection framework and using the descriptors in the common inspection framework. And using the scale: outstanding, good, satisfactory, unsatisfactory and very weak.

Main findings

1. The LEA's and local LSC's strategies for 14 to 19 education and training are congruent and overarching for the county as a whole. The strategies are broadly reflected in the aims and objectives stated in the Suffolk 14 to 19 learning entitlement document. The LEA's strategies to raise attainment at Key Stage 4 are proving successful. Partnerships between schools and colleges, aimed at broadening the vocational curriculum for Key Stage 4 pupils, have been established to deliver the IFP and New Start curriculum. The strategies to raise post-16 attainment and participation are less well developed. The overarching strategies do not address sufficiently the significant variation in the quality of 16 to 19 provision offered in different parts of the county. Participation of 16-year-olds in education and training has stagnated for the last few years, although the level is close to the national rate. The LEA has developed and implemented strategies to improve the transport arrangements for those living in rural areas, to encourage greater participation. In school sixth forms, overall attainment at GCE AS/A level for the county is close to the national average, although one-third of schools add insufficient educational value during this phase. Key partners have yet to develop jointly a coherent 14 to 19 development plan which provides explicit direction to strategic and operational groups, schools, colleges and work-based learning providers in Suffolk. Although a number of strategic partnerships have been established recently, work remains to be done to further develop these structures and lines of accountability to reflect the needs of all learners, particularly those aged 16 to 19, in different parts of the county. Equality of opportunity is comprehensively addressed and well promoted in the strategies and work of key partners, schools, colleges and work-based learning providers.

2. The LEA provides good leadership and support for networks and schools at Key Stage 4. However, there is little co-ordination or shared direction in the leadership of 14 to 19 developments, as perceived by the majority of institutions. The local LSC has a robust system for managing performance of FE and work-based learning and is prepared to intervene where provision causes concern. A joint LEA–local LSC group now meets twice a month to review performance. There is, however, insufficient external challenging of school standards post-16. Insufficient progress has been made in reviewing value for money in respect of post-16 collaboration; as yet, there is no agreed strategy to address the issue of sixth form viability. The LEA provides very good performance data, especially pre-16. Effective sharing of data between key partners has not yet been established, although a new data-sharing group has been set up to remedy this. Within the limits of fair funding, resources are targeted effectively; there is satisfactory monitoring within the LEA of expenditure in schools. The local LSC ensures resources are used effectively to support the strategic priorities for the area.

3. The established 14 to 16 networks and IFPs are providing wider curriculum opportunities for young people. A significant majority of schools are offering access to vocational curriculum at Key Stage 4 although, across the county, the range of vocational subjects, including applied GCSEs, is not equally accessible to pupils in all schools. Some good collaborative partnerships and individual schools are beginning to develop innovative approaches to curriculum delivery. The LEA has placed significant focus on resolving transport issues to broaden access. However, the configuration of post-16 provision to meet the needs of all learners aged 16 to 19 across different parts of the county is less well

developed. Thorough mapping of the 14 to 19 curriculum and progression routes at local and area level has yet to be undertaken. The development of 14 to 19 learning opportunities across the area has been unco-ordinated and the curriculum lacks coherence. There is restricted breadth and choice in the small sixth forms and limited vocational provision at any level in schools post-16. In Ipswich, intense competition between schools and with the local FE college is resulting in a lack of collaboration on the post-16 offer and duplication of some provision. The number of referrals of young people to work-based learning providers has declined. There is insufficient capacity to meet the needs of some 'at risk' and excluded pupils. The capacity of FE colleges and other providers to meet the needs of all young people is becoming seriously stretched. The IFP is generally over-subscribed and some schools report difficulties in accessing places for excluded and 'at risk' pupils. There is low take-up of work-based learning: fewer than 9% of young people leave school at 16 to enter work-based learning.

4. The Connexions service provides effective support for learners at risk of not continuing in education, employment or training and for those with special educational needs (SEN) and those in special schools. Connexions Suffolk is a good partnership, working effectively to extend provision to meet the needs of young people requiring more intensive support. The most recent data for Suffolk show a slight upward trend in the numbers of young people who, having received intensive support from the Connexions service, have re-entered education, employment or training. The LEA monitors effectively the progress of different groups of pupils aged 14 to 16. There is good pastoral support for learners in schools and colleges. In some schools, insufficient information is made available to young people on the full range of post-16 learning opportunities offered. Too much emphasis is sometimes given to the provision available within the school's own sixth form or that offered by a partner school, rather than also explaining what is offered by other schools, colleges and work-based learning providers. Many young people who are well suited to work-based learning are not given the advice and guidance they need to make an informed choice. There is insufficient sharing of performance data for individual learners between schools, FE colleges and work-based learning providers to help identify support needs for individual learners.

5. Overall, the attainment of Key Stage 4 pupils in Suffolk has been consistently above the national average; in 2002, the proportion of pupils gaining five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C was 57%, some 4% above the national average. In the majority of schools, many pupils make good progress between Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. However, many students who remain in post-16 education in school sixth forms in Suffolk do not make the progress expected of them, based on their prior attainment at GCSE. Although the overall average GCE AS/A level and Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE) point scores for the county are close to the national average, in west Ipswich and the extreme southwest and northeast areas of the county, the point scores are significantly lower than the national average. There have been improvements in the progress made by African-Caribbean pupils and in the participation of travellers' children, as a result of effective intervention by specialist LEA advisors. Aggregated data for the four colleges show that success rates on level 1 and level 2 courses have improved slightly over the period 1999/2000 to 2001/02 and are just above the national averages for FE colleges. Although overall success rates on level 3 courses have improved over the same period, these remain below the national averages for FE colleges. Overall achievement rates on work-based learning programmes are low,

although this reflects the national picture. According to the local LSC database, only 32% of modern apprentices successfully complete apprenticeship programmes.

6. In secondary schools, teaching and learning are consistently good; the proportion of lessons judged to be good or better in recent inspections is above the national average. Recent inspection reports also show that teaching in school sixth forms is good. However, teaching and learning in the four Suffolk colleges are variable. Recent inspections show that, overall, teaching is good at West Suffolk College, satisfactory at Suffolk College and Otley Colleges, but unsatisfactory in some curriculum areas at Lowestoft College. The quality of provision in these unsatisfactory areas is starting to be addressed. There is good provision for pupils with special educational needs at Key Stage 4. Development of literacy and numeracy skills for students aged 16 to 19 is inconsistent across the county. The development of key skills is cited as a weakness in three of the four college inspection reports. Very few school sixth forms have a coherent strategy to develop the key skills of their students.

7. Most schools have satisfactory or better learning resources, although approximately half of the schools inspected recently report some difficulties with information technology (IT) resources. There are generally good specialist resources at the four colleges. However, the colleges are finding difficulties in providing the additional accommodation required to meet the demand for places on the IFP and other Key Stage 4 alternative programmes. Generally, staffing is satisfactory in most of the schools that have been inspected recently. At the four colleges, most teachers are well qualified and have appropriate occupational experience. All four colleges have invested heavily in staff development activities to develop the teaching skills of their staff. In the work-based sector, some providers are finding that some staff do not have the competences required to teach the technical certificates in modern apprenticeship programmes, as they were originally recruited to provide only individual support and assessment.

8. The extent to which the funding available meets the needs of all young people is satisfactory overall. The Suffolk LEA budget per pupil is above the national average. Although the local LSC provides further funding to support alternative education projects, few projects have secure funding that will sustain them beyond one or two years.

9. This report identifies strengths that should be built upon and weaknesses that need to be addressed, if progress is to be made. To guide the local LSC, LEA and their partners, recommendations are included following each section of the report. The local LSC, LEA and partner organisations should consider these and incorporate suitable responses into the action plan for the further development of the 14 to 19 strategy for the area.

10. Strengths in the current provision, upon which improvement may be based, include:

- congruent, overarching 14 to 19 strategies set out by the LEA and the local LSC and reflected in the 14 to 19 learning entitlement
- strategies which promote inclusion and equality of opportunity effectively
- good operational support for assuring the quality of provision
- good leadership and support for schools and networks provided by the LEA at

Key Stage 4

- improved attainment at Key Stage 4 which has been consistently above the national average
- overall improving success rates in the four colleges
- improved opportunities for young people through the established 14 to 16 networks and IFPs
- a significant majority of schools that offer access to vocational curriculum at Key Stage 4
- effective support and guidance from the Connexions service for learners at risk of not continuing in education, employment or training, and for those with special educational needs and those in special schools
- effective monitoring by the LEA and schools of the progress of individual pupils, and groups of pupils aged 14 to 16
- teaching in Key Stage 4 which promotes good progress and achievement
- a good range of accommodation and resources that support learning in special schools.

11. The local LSC, the LEA and their partners have some weaknesses to overcome. The most significant, requiring concerted and urgent action, are:

- the absence of a joint 14 to 19 development plan to drive forward the aims and objectives set out in the 14 to 19 learning entitlement
- overarching strategies which do not take account of the cost-effectiveness of post-16 provision, and which do not contribute towards raising value added for post-16 learners
- insufficient external challenging of school standards, post-16
- lack of effective curriculum mapping to match provision to need
- restricted breadth and choice in the smaller sixth forms and at Key Stage 4 in some rural schools
- low take-up of work-based learning
- insufficient information made available to young people in some schools on the full range of learning opportunities offered across post-16 providers
- insufficient sharing of performance data for individual learners to support transition between schools and colleges
- low attainment at GCE AS/A level and AVCE in west Ipswich, the extreme

southwest of the county and the Lowestoft area

- inconsistent opportunities for key skill development for students aged 16 to 19
- the short-term nature and the inflexibility of some funding streams which inhibit the sustainable development of initiatives.

Features of the area and its context

12. The county of Suffolk is predominantly rural, with concentrations of population in and around Ipswich and the smaller towns of Bury St Edmunds, Felixstowe, Haverhill, Lowestoft, Mildenhall, Newmarket, Stowmarket and Sudbury. Some 42% of the population live in dispersed rural communities. There is considerable local variation in the communities served by the LEA and local LSC. Overall, the area is relatively prosperous, but there are numerous pockets of deprivation across the county, and specifically in some electoral wards of Ipswich and Lowestoft. The southern part of the county is economically buoyant, attracting new service and technological industries. Elsewhere in the county, the picture is more varied, particularly where decline in agricultural and fishing industries has brought unemployment levels to above the national average. The population continues to grow at approximately 1% per year and is currently around 680,000. The lack of public transport is a significant barrier to access for many young people to a range of public services, such as post-16 education, health, sport and leisure services, employment and training. The local LSC estimates that in Suffolk there are nearly 40,000 young people aged 14 to 19. Some 4% of young people identify themselves as belonging to a minority ethnic group.

13. Within Suffolk, there are 38 secondary schools. Of these, 30 have sixth forms. There are also nine special schools. There are three general FE colleges, located in Ipswich, Lowestoft and Bury St Edmunds. An agricultural and horticultural college, which also offers general FE, is located some nine miles from Ipswich. There are currently 31 work-based training providers.

14. For day-to-day administrative purposes, schools in Suffolk are organised by the LEA into three areas: northern area, with an area education office in Lowestoft; southern area, with an area education office in Ipswich; and western area, with an area education office in Bury St Edmunds. All maintained mainstream schools in Suffolk are comprehensive and co-educational. The majority of sixth forms operate an open access policy. Most children with SEN statements attend mainstream schools. The western area and part of the northern area have middle (classified as secondary) schools for children aged 9 to 13, and high or upper schools, for students aged 13 to 18. In the southern area and part of the northern area, schools are organised as secondary for students aged 11 to 16 or 11 to 18. The nine special schools for children with special educational needs work alongside mainstream schools and are seen as playing an increasing role in developing inclusive education. The four colleges are located as follows: Lowestoft College in the northern area; Suffolk College and Otley College in the southern area; West Suffolk College in the western area.

The strategy for 14 to 19 education and training

15. The strategies for 14 to 19 education and training in Suffolk are satisfactory. The local LSC, LEA and Connexions partnership are committed to establishing a coherent 14 to 19 phase of education within Suffolk. The local LSC and LEA have addressed the government's 14 to 19 priorities set out in *14 to 19 opportunity and excellence* within their strategic plans. The strategies are congruent and cover the county as a whole. In May 2003, following consultation with many schools, post-16 providers and young people, the young people's committee of the Suffolk Learning Partnership, comprising partners drawn from the LEA, the local LSC and the Suffolk Connexions partnership, published the document *A partnership approach to a 14 to 19 learning entitlement for Suffolk students*. The document sets out agreed principles, aims and objectives for 14 to 19 provision and reflects the LEA's and local LSC's strategies. Key partners, however, have yet to form a coherent, joint 14 to 19 development plan which sets out objectives for strategic and operational groups, schools, colleges and work-based learning providers, and which addresses the current variation in the quality of 14 to 19 provision across the county. Nevertheless, the LEA's strategies to raise attainment at Key Stage 4 across the county are proving successful, but the strategies of key partners to increase post-16 participation and to raise the attainment of students aged 17 and 18 are less well developed.

16. The strategic priorities of the LEA's EDP for 14 to 19 provision have been focused on raising pupils' attainment at Key Stage 4. The actions taken in response to these priorities have been successful. Over the last decade, pupils' attainment at GCSE and the General Certificate of Vocational Education (GNVQ) has improved at a faster rate than the national average. The EDP sets out challenging targets for attainment at GCSE for 2003 and 2004. In 2002, the LEA's target of 56% of Key Stage 4 pupils achieving five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C was exceeded slightly, and achievement was above the national average. Provisional data for 2003 indicate that the percentage of pupils in Suffolk schools gaining five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C has been maintained, remaining some 4% above the national average, although falling a little short of the target set. Attainment measured by the percentage of pupils gaining five or more GCSEs at grades A* to G and by the percentage of pupils gaining five or more GCSEs at grades A* to G including English and mathematics, although also above the national averages, is below the targets set by the LEA.

17. The EDP acknowledges that increasing participation and raising attainment at post-16 are priorities for action. Although the attainment at GCE AS/A level and AVCE of students in school sixth forms has risen over the last four years, it remains below that of statistical neighbours and slightly below the national average. Overall, post-16 participation rates have remained unchanged for the last few years. Strategies implemented by the LEA to improve transport arrangements for those living in rural areas have helped to maintain the current levels of participation. In a number of school sixth forms, particularly some of those clustered around the Ipswich area, the relatively low number of students on roll in the sixth forms restricts the choices available to them. The LEA recognises that many students in post-16 education in Suffolk schools achieve less well than at Key Stage 4. However, the actions designed to address this issue and raise participation and broaden choice for post-16 students, particularly for those for whom the GCE AS/A-level pathway is inappropriate, are insufficiently detailed and challenging for schools. Data provided by the LEA show that a

few school sixth forms add educational value between Key Stage 4 and GCE AS/A level, but the majority fail to do so. Work-based learning does not feature in the local authority planning for students aged 14 to 19.

18. Objectives for 14 to 19 provision given in the local LSC's strategic plan for 2002 to 2005 include: increasing post-16 participation; increasing the proportion of young people gaining higher level qualifications; widening the vocational options available to Key Stage 4 pupils in schools; providing improved and more accessible information to inform choices; and improving the quality of provision available for students aged 16 to 19. The local LSC is providing significant support for schools and colleges in developing vocational education for Key Stage 4 pupils, with the aim of improving post-16 participation. These initiatives include the IFP and New Start. Although the proportion of 16 year olds progressing to school sixth forms has declined slightly, the proportion entering the colleges has increased. For the period 1999/2000 to 2001/02, aggregated data for the four colleges show that the overall retention rates of students aged 16 to 19 are improving, but the colleges have been less successful in improving overall achievement rates.

19. The strategic and annual plans of the local LSC insufficiently address the low proportion of learners entering work-based learning and the low rates of achievement of modern apprenticeship frameworks. Learning providers are unaware of any overarching strategy for work-based learning and find the direction given by the local LSC unclear and inconsistent. The experience of some work-based learning providers is that work-based learning for Suffolk is poorly planned.

20. Relationships between the senior executive officers and senior managers of the LEA, local LSC and Connexions are good. The establishment of coherent strategic structures and partnerships for 14 to 19 provision within the county is in the early stages of development. Key partners acknowledge that much work remains to be done to develop clearer structures and lines of accountability which consider the weaknesses in configuration and the specific needs of 14 to 19 learners in different parts of the county. The 14 to 19 strategy group, comprising senior officers and senior managers from the LEA and local LSC, now meets regularly, but the group is yet to develop terms of reference with clear objectives. It is unclear how this group links with the young people's committee of the Learning Partnership, the 14 to 19 SEN strategic forum, the 14 to 19 curriculum network and other related groups. The 14 to 19 curriculum network has yet to include representatives from the four colleges. Some major providers are unaware of the range, purpose and membership of some of the newly established groups. Partnerships between schools and colleges, designed to broaden choice at Key Stage 4 through the 'New Start' and IFPs, are proving to be successful. Some of the 11 to 18 and 11 to 16 schools are working together to help to encourage post-16 participation, but these partnerships have made insufficient progress in broadening choice and raising attainment.

21. Equality of opportunity is comprehensively addressed in the strategies and work of key partners, schools, colleges and work-based learning providers. The LEA carefully monitors the progress of different groups of learners, and strategies to raise the attainment of some of these groups, particularly minority ethnic pupils at Key Stage 4, are having a positive impact.

22. Strategies for 14 to 16 provision take account of cost-effectiveness. However, the strategies for 16 to 19 provision do not take sufficient account of the cost-effectiveness of school sixth forms or the value added to individual learners. For example, in the Ipswich area, seven schools with sixth forms and one FE college continue to operate in intense competition for the limited number of students and there has been little collaboration to broaden the curriculum choices available for students aged 16 to 19.

Recommendations:

- a. Key partners should produce jointly an explicit 14 to 19 development plan which takes forward the aims and objectives set out in the 14 to 19 learning entitlement document. The plan should set out clear objectives for strategic and operational groups, schools, colleges and work-based learning providers.
- b. The current structure of 14 to 19 strategic partnerships and operational networks should be reviewed to ensure that the needs of all 14 to 19 learners in different parts of the county are met.

Leadership and management

23. Leadership and management of the development of 14 to 19 education and training are satisfactory overall. A corporate priority set out in the county council's Best Value Performance Plan is to lead and promote strategies for young people. The Learning for Life Overview and Scrutiny Committee acts as a select committee to receive regular reports on the implementation of strategies, including 14 to 19 education and training. The local LSC has adopted national vision and mission statements and is responding to these appropriately in a local context. At Key Stage 4, the LEA provides good leadership and support. The EDP addresses the priorities for this age range through a number of appropriate initiatives and these are reflected well in the improvement plans of many schools. The 2003 inspection report on the Connexions service stated that 'senior managers and the board are focused and provide clear direction'.

24. Although a useful entitlement document has been developed, a detailed action plan has yet to be produced to ensure its full implementation. The leadership exercised by the local LSC is variable. Too many institutions perceive a lack of co-ordinated leadership and shared direction post-16. Despite some visits by senior local LSC staff, few schools have any detailed awareness of the role of the local LSC in 14 to 19 education, other than as a funding agency. Action has been taken to address poorly performing providers and the number of work-based providers has been reduced from 41 to 31. However, some providers would like to see more decisive action taken by the local LSC across the area.

25. Many groups and networks are meeting at local and county level. At county level, the work undertaken is often reactive rather than proactive, dealing largely with operational matters. At the local level, partnership working develops all too often from local initiatives, rather than from joint strategic leadership at the centre. Whilst, in themselves, some local developments have been productive, a lack of clear direction is leading to disparate solutions which are not always in the best interest of learners.

26. At school, college and provider level, leadership and management are satisfactory overall and, in many cases, good or better. Recent inspection reports for the four Suffolk colleges indicate that leadership and management are satisfactory or better at Suffolk, Otley and West Suffolk colleges, but unsatisfactory at Lowestoft College. Here, a recent re-inspection visit found that reasonable progress was being made by the college in rectifying the issues identified during the main inspection. Of the 10 secondary schools most recently inspected, 1 had outstanding leadership, 5 had very good leadership and 2 had good leadership. Of the remaining two, one has leadership which sets a clear direction, and the other is improving with a new headteacher refocusing the leadership of the school. Of the eight sixth forms inspected, three were graded very good for leadership and management, one strong, two good and two effective.

27. There is strong LEA support for assuring the quality of provision, particularly at Key Stage 4. The EDP sets out a clear statement of intent and this is well supported by the school improvement service, within the principle of providing support in inverse proportion to success. Support to schools is managed through the three area offices, which enables corporate policy for Key Stage 4 to be integrated with specific local needs. Visits by link and subject advisers are generally valued. The LEA has established networks to support Key Stage 4 and these are appreciated by teachers. Support and challenge provided by the LEA for post-16 provision in schools are less strong. Some schools suggest they would benefit from informed challenge on performance at advanced and intermediate levels. One school felt that the only external challenge it was receiving on boys' underachievement was from inspection and that too often the LEA perceived that schools with overall good achievement and self-evaluation procedures did not need challenge in specific areas.

28. The local LSC has a robust system for managing performance, operating at two stages of review. It is prepared to intervene in colleges and other providers where performance causes concern. A joint LEA–local LSC group now meets twice a month to review performance. The performance review process is also embedded in work-based learning. Providers have the opportunity to discuss judgements before they are finalised. Some providers are proactive in performance review, whereas others feel it is a process that is done to them.

29. The key partners produced a self-evaluation report for 14 to 19 provision prior to the inspection. The report was comprehensive and supported by substantial evidence. Inspectors agreed with many of the report's findings but, in some areas, the report was insufficiently evaluative; inspectors identified some additional weaknesses pertaining to post-16 provision.

30. The LEA supports schools with excellent performance data, especially at pre-16. Schools find the analyses of data helpful, as benchmarking with other local schools is made possible. A detailed pupil-attainment database allows for comparisons and investigations into how individual students perform. The LEA constructively uses available data to review and monitor its priorities. Although there are reliable data provided by individual colleges, the management data available to the local LSC are, at present, more limited and less robust. This means that, until recently, the reviewing of priorities has been largely pragmatic. The local LSC accepts that it cannot rely solely on national systems, and the gathering and analysing of local management information are central to the Strategic Area Review. As yet, the sharing of performance and quality data between partners is inadequately developed, with

system and legal problems being cited for a lack of progress. A group with a remit to overcome these difficulties has now been established.

31. Value for money is satisfactory overall. LEA services to support schools are well managed and cost-effective, and lead to improvement. Partners use resources effectively to support the priorities of the area. The School Organisation Committee recommends that any new sixth form should have a minimum of 150 students, but there is a considerable number of established sixth forms with less than 150 students on roll. In 2002, five of the seven sixth forms in the Ipswich area had fewer than 200 students on roll. The proliferation of sixth forms around Ipswich has not increased post-16 participation. Together with evidence of insufficient collaboration between post-16 providers and intense competition between some schools and colleges, these factors give rise to concerns about value for money post-16 in some areas. Although a consultant is currently reviewing value for money in sixth forms as part of the strategic area review, little analysis has so far been undertaken of provision at Key Stage 4 and in school sixth forms and colleges to establish a more coherent configuration. Work-based learning providers co-operate effectively with each other but there is little communication with other organisations involved in 14 to 19 training, such as the Learning Partnership or the education business partnership (EBP).

32. The promotion of equal opportunities is a strength, particularly at Key Stage 4. Both the LEA and the local LSC have good policies and implementation procedures for equality and diversity issues. Good work is being achieved with African–Caribbean boys and with the traveller community. Comprehensive LEA data on attainment, attendance and exclusion of minority ethnic students allow schools to benchmark and set individual and group targets. The local LSC has a comprehensive equality and diversity plan and has begun to agree equality and diversity impact measures. The local LSC is prioritising areas for improving equal access, for example, the participation of women in construction and engineering work-based learning. One special school head teacher expressed concern at the low expectations of students with special educational needs who transfer to FE courses, but this was not a picture common across the area.

Recommendations:

- c. Key partners should develop and agree with sixth form leadership teams a sharper protocol for ensuring effective external monitoring and challenging of post-16 standards.
- d. Key partners should review the pattern of, and partnerships between, post-16 education and training providers to ensure better value for money.

Access to, and participation in, education and training

33. The configuration of provision is satisfactory in meeting the needs of most 14 to 19 learners. Overall, the 14 to 19 curriculum offered by schools and colleges in Suffolk enables learners to progress to FE, higher education (HE), training and employment. Participation in post-16 education rose steadily between 1986 and 1993, although it has remained relatively static since then, with rates varying between 71% and 74%. The proportion of Year 11 pupils progressing to FE colleges has increased slightly, although there has been a corresponding decline in the proportion going into school sixth forms. In 2003, recent data supplied by

Connexions show that 27% went on to full-time education in colleges and 44% went on to school sixth forms. Some schools have excellent retention rates in their sixth forms, but in colleges and in most schools there is a loss of students by the end of Year 12. Consequently, the overall participation rate of young people aged 16 to 18 in full-time education in Suffolk remains marginally below the national average. Figures provided by the Connexions service indicate that, in 2003, slightly less than 88% of all young people went on to full-time education, work or training at 16. Around 500 of these entered employment without training. The number of young people progressing to HE has risen slightly and in 2002, just over 50% of those completing level 3 courses went on to university.

34. At Key Stage 4, learners typically have access to an appropriately broad and balanced curriculum, but post-16 progression opportunities and, in particular, access to vocational subjects in school sixth forms, are less well developed. A significant majority of schools are offering vocational courses at Key Stage 4. The extent of this, within individual institutions, is subject to wide variation and ranges from a low number of pupils attending college courses to extensive take-up of GCSEs in vocational subjects in a few schools. Efforts to improve the perception of vocational qualifications, in schools and with parents, are beginning to have an impact. There is a clear commitment to a 'not just for the less able' approach in a growing number of schools. In a few small rural schools, Key Stage 4 options are restricted by the availability of relevant teacher expertise and the unrealistic travel-to-learn time entailed in attending vocational courses at a college.

35. Overall, little comprehensive research and analysis has been undertaken on the range and appropriateness of provision available to 14 to 19 learners across the county as a whole and within different areas of the county. Although the Connexions partnership recently produced a county-wide post-16 opportunities booklet, there is no clear mapping of the 14 to 19 curriculum or progression routes at local or area level. The development of 14 to 19 learning opportunities has not been well co-ordinated across the county and, consequently, curriculum planning lacks coherence. Some schools with smaller sixth forms provide insufficient choice and, in most schools, lower-achieving learners have too little opportunity to study courses at level 2. The majority of school sixth forms operate an open-access policy and, as a result, some learners are inappropriately following GCE AS/A-level courses. Key skills are not well promoted.

36. There are three general FE colleges and one specialist land-based college. The colleges offer a broad range of courses, including both academic and vocational options. West Suffolk College and Lowestoft College have recently refocused their level 3 provision and are no longer offering GCE AS/A-level courses. At Suffolk College, students taking discrete GCE AS/A-level courses account for around 10% of the college's enrolments of students aged 16 to 18.

37. The Suffolk learning entitlement document clearly sets out an entitlement to education model for young people aged 14 to 19, reflecting the curriculum aspirations of 'opportunity and excellence'. It provides a sound basis for development and to address the 14 to 19 agenda across the county. A similar entitlement has also been produced to ensure equal access to education for children and young people in care.

38. Overall, wider curriculum opportunities are being extended through the established 14 to 16 networks and the IFP. There are three IFPs involving the schools and all four colleges. In 2002/03, around 300 pupils from 26 schools were attending IFP courses. In 2003/04, that number has increased significantly and a further nine schools are involved in the project. Steering groups monitor the operational development of the provision, with regular contributions from schools, colleges and representatives of the local LSC. Demand for places on courses is high and the capacity of colleges to meet this demand is becoming increasingly stretched. The different partnerships across the county have not yet effectively identified how they might secure the longer-term sustainability of the provision or how private training providers might be used to increase the range of locations in which courses are offered. The programme has resulted in pupils having access to an improved range of work-related learning at Key Stage 4 and greater awareness of the wider post-16 progression opportunities. Most pupils respond well to studying in a different learning environment. Teachers report positively on the good progress pupils make and on their improved confidence, motivation and skills. In some rural partnerships, participation is constrained by high transport costs.

39. Good and improving collaboration at Key Stage 4 and effective partnership working are building on previous success. One school, located in a rural setting, has developed an enterprise and business network of 40 local companies. A key objective of the network is to promote and encourage the development of work-based learning opportunities and modern apprenticeships. Pupils currently benefit from work-experience placements with network members. The school is planning to develop a business intermediate GNVQ course for Year 12 pupils, with local LSC support and network sponsorship.

40. A small number of schools are implementing particularly innovative approaches to 14 to 16 curriculum delivery. For example, in one school, almost every pupil is following at least one vocational option at Key Stage 4, facilitated by new approaches to timetabling and effective partnership working with a local college. Another school has recently introduced six curriculum pathways into Key Stage 4. These include the opportunity to take GCSEs in vocational subjects and National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) alongside the more traditional qualifications. Higher-attaining pupils also have the opportunity to study AS critical thinking. Next year, this school has plans for an additional route that will lead to work-based learning. A college and other schools are also beginning to explore collaborative opportunities for opening up early access to work-based learning and modern apprenticeships. The EBP is active in supporting the development of the work-related curriculum through the promotion of science and technology, construction and business mentoring schemes for learners, and the organisation of professional development placements for teachers.

41. A number of schools are collaborating on a shared sixth form offer. For example, in the north, there has been a long-standing agreement between three Lowestoft schools and Lowestoft College to deliver a shared sixth form curriculum. Synchronised timetables and arranged transport allow students to move between the schools. Courses are mostly focused on level 3 options, although there is one GNVQ intermediate programme on offer. In the west of the county, two 13 to 18 schools, one and a half miles from each other, are collaborating to support the continuing viability of their respective sixth forms, which have relatively low student numbers. Across the county, the more difficult aspects of collaborative

working, such as those relating to quality and standards and the reduction of duplicated provision, have yet to be tackled. In the Ipswich area, the majority of secondary schools have sixth forms. Intense competition between the schools and with the local college has resulted in a lack of collaboration on provision for students aged 16 to 19, duplication and inefficient use of resources. Some sixth forms are relatively new, but the increased availability of provision has not led to an overall increase in participation. At one 11 to 16 school near Ipswich, the head teacher reports changing progression patterns: of those continuing in education at 16, around 40% progress to the FE college and a significant proportion of students cross the county boundary to attend a sixth form college in Essex. Few pupils from this school progress into Ipswich sixth forms. Reasons for selecting the Essex sixth form college include: the introduction of the International Baccalaureate, easier transport, its reputation, more options and good pastoral support.

42. There is a significant LEA focus on resolving transport issues to broaden access to education and training. Initiatives to improve travel difficulties include a £13 million investment in home to school or college transport and the removal of catchment criteria in awarding financial support. A 'moving people' project has already defined measures, introduced in September, to address post-16 travel assistance issues arising from new legislation and is currently investigating the feasibility of a county-wide concessionary travel scheme for young people.

43. There is good provision for pupils with special educational needs at Key Stage 4 in mainstream schools and in special schools, although places for learners requiring specialist residential accommodation and extended learning opportunities are insufficient. Consequently, a number of learners are being funded to pursue qualifications in residential institutions outside Suffolk. The FE colleges work in partnership with the special schools to provide a range of post-16 provision, including life skills and access to vocational education. The 14 to 19 SEN strategic group has identified the need to undertake an audit of provision for young people with special educational needs and to develop clear curriculum pathways to support participation and progression.

44. There is insufficient appropriate alternative provision for pupils who have been excluded. These young people frequently move between schools in Year 10 and many leave with no qualifications in Year 11. The LEA acknowledges the need to increase the number of alternative education places and is in the early stages of developing further provision with the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), Suretrust and Community Education. Service-level agreements are yet to be established. The LEA does not have a placement panel and there are no clear criteria for allocating pupils to the most appropriate alternative education setting. Individual schools approach alternative education providers rather than participate in a systematic approach to placement. The process focuses, at present, on those who have been excluded rather than those at risk of exclusion. One course running at Suffolk College for the last three years, with support from the LEA inclusion unit, meets the individual needs of around 20 learners with particular difficulties, for example, school refusers, victims of bullying, young people with challenging behaviour and those generally 'at risk'. Programmes such as this and the New Start provision, offering vocational opportunities for disaffected and 'at risk' pupils, are over-dependant on project and short-term funding arrangements.

45. The LEA actively supports social and educational inclusion through its policies and practice. The multicultural education support service and the traveller education service are working successfully to raise the attainment of African–Caribbean pupils and the children of travelling families. The LEA funds a tuition group, with crèche facilities, for young mothers of school age. Tuition provided supports the continuation of formal education and access to GCSE examinations.

46. The proportion of school leavers entering work-based learning is small. Connexions destination data indicate that fewer than 9% of young people leaving school at age 16 follow a work-based learning route. This is low and is unlikely to include all those young people for whom the work-based route offers the best option. Representatives from a college in the west of the county take time to visit all local schools to promote modern apprenticeships as a real alternative to the more traditional routes. In too many schools, however, young people receive insufficient information about work-based learning. Work-based learning is too often regarded as a lower-status option, suitable only for disaffected young people or those with few or no qualifications. The number of referrals of young people to work-based learning providers has declined. One provider identified that 90% of applications are now made through self-referral. Most apprentices are recruited through direct marketing by providers. The recently introduced Entry to Employment (E2E) is having some success in increasing participation. Co-ordination of the main providers by the local LSC has been very effective, although, in eastern parts of the county, participation is affected by the difficulty of travelling from rural areas to providers. The local LSC and individual providers have taken action to specifically increase participation by under-represented groups, although there are large differences in participation between males and females in specific occupational areas. There is insufficient awareness of work-based learning options on the part of school students and their parents. Employers involved with Work-based Learning do not contribute substantially to the work of the local LSC. The range of work-based learning provision is sufficiently broad, but is not effectively mapped against labour-market needs.

Recommendations

- e. Key partners should undertake extensive mapping of the 14 to 19 curriculum, at local and area level, to enable a thorough review of the configuration of provision, including access, progression, and alternative provision for post-16 students at all levels. The analysis should be used to extend collaboration and consortium arrangements.
- f. Key partners should ensure that individual post-16 consortia devise plans which are informed by the overall county-wide strategy for 14 to 19 education and training.
- g. Key partners should continue to widen the offer of 14 to 16 vocational courses in schools and improve collaborative links between work-based training providers and schools, in order to develop the capacity to meet the needs of all learning groups.

Guidance and support

47. Guidance and support for learners in Suffolk are satisfactory. The inspection of the Connexions Suffolk partnership in June 2003 found that Connexions Suffolk is a good partnership overall. A key priority of the partnership is to reduce the number of young

people who leave school without going into training, FE or employment. The partnership provides an effective service to its core clientele of young people, those at risk of disengaging from education, employment or training, and for those with special educational needs. In most schools and in colleges, Connexions advisors work with the staff to provide effective guidance and support for young people. Some schools and colleges, however, report a loss of service to the wider group of learners who have not been targeted for core support.

48. The partnership is successful in helping young people who face barriers to learning or are disaffected from mainstream provision. Multi-agency collaboration has developed effectively to provide support that impacts positively on the lives of young people. A recent conference, for example, involved Connexions staff, educational psychologists, young people from mainstream schools and representatives from health and social care, to consider transition reviews and the review process for young people. Most recent data across Suffolk show a slight upward trend in the numbers of young people who, having received intensive support from the Connexions service, have re-entered education, employment or training.

49. Schools and the LEA have adopted effective approaches to monitor the progress of students aged 14 to 16, measuring achievement against prior attainment. This includes monitoring the progress of different groups of learners, for example, travellers, minority ethnic groups, boys and girls. The outcomes inform the LEA's school improvement agenda. Raising the attainment of pupils in vulnerable groups and the attainment of boys are targeted areas for improvement in the LEA's EDP. The Connexions partnership also monitors the support needs of young people in Years 11, 12 and 13, and is developing a coherent framework for the assessment of young people's learning and support needs. The business plan for Connexions has a focus on partners working to support young people aged 16 to 18 who are not in learning or work-based training and vulnerable groups, for example, pregnant teenagers, young offenders, young mothers and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

50. There is insufficient sharing of information about the progress of young people at key points of transition, with no agreed system across the 14 to 19 phase to share performance data between different providers. For those students progressing from Key Stage 4 to school sixth forms, the performance data are often used effectively to inform support needs and for target setting. However, for those young people progressing from the school sector to FE colleges or other training providers, this information is not transferred with them. Colleges do not always receive information on the prior attainment of students aged 14 to 16 to help them provide the appropriate support for pupils attending the IFP and the New Start programme. The successful focus in special schools on developing learners' independence is not always continued when these learners progress to different providers after age 16. Although the Connexions service tracks information on individual learners, this does not include performance data.

51. Schools provide good personal support to individual pupils through tutors and Connexions personal advisers. There has been an increased emphasis on developing tutorial support and target setting in the FE colleges, building on existing good practice. In some schools, a universal guidance service is provided through the Connexions service, with effective careers education programmes and mock careers interviews for all pupils. In a minority of schools, careers education and guidance are more varied, with a proportion of

pupils not receiving sufficient guidance and support to make key choices about Year 10 and post-16 options.

52. A range of publications has been developed to support guidance for young people through school partnership working. For example, in Lowestoft, the three school sixth forms have produced a school sixth form prospectus. However, in some schools, insufficient information is made available to young people on the full range of post-16 learning opportunities. Often, greater emphasis is given to course provision offered at their own school sixth forms, and some students felt that there was insufficient guidance to support them in making decisions at 15 and that they wanted more information about other providers. FE colleges do not always participate in schools' careers open evenings and in some 11 to 18 schools they are not invited to such events.

53. Young people who might be better suited to work-based learning are often not given the advice and guidance they need to make an informed choice. Many of the students at most of the schools visited during the inspection were insufficiently aware of the modern apprenticeship pathway, often perceiving it as more appropriate for disaffected students and for those with few qualifications. It is not unusual for young people to be referred to a work-based learning provider without any prior discussion of what a particular career entails. The providers are often not passed information by Connexions about initial assessment and the aspirations of the trainees. Providers may start the process again, repeating many of the questions and tests that the young person has already been through, either with Connexions or with other providers. Learners, particularly those on the E2E programme, are given good support by providers on personal issues.

Recommendations

- h. Schools should improve the impartiality of the advice and guidance arrangements for young people to ensure that they are able to make informed post-16 choices during Key Stage 4.
- i. Key partners and providers should develop systems that allow the sharing of information on individual learners between all providers at key transition points.
- j. Key partners should improve the quality of information and guidance available on work-based learning programmes for young people.

The quality of 14 to 19 education and training

Achievement

54. Overall, the quality of 14 to 19 education and training in Suffolk is good. At Key Stage 4, the proportion of pupils in the county gaining five or more GCSEs at A* to C grades is above the national average. In 2003, provisional data show that just under 57% of pupils achieved five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C, 4% above the national average. Between 1998 and 2002, attainment at Key Stage 4 improved at a faster rate than the national rate, although there has been a slight decline in Suffolk, from 57.2% in 2002 to 56.8% in 2003, against a national improvement of around 1%. Consequently, the LEA's target of 58% has not been met and the LEA's target of 60% for 2004 appears to be very challenging indeed.

The number of Suffolk pupils achieving five or more GCSE A* to G grades, including English and mathematics, is 89%; 2.7% above the national average but below the LEA's target of 93.6% and below the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) 2004 target of 95%. The difference in attainment between boys and girls in Suffolk is slightly less than the national average.

55. Attainment of Key Stage 4 pupils varies widely across Suffolk schools. Around 66% of schools have attainment rates which are above the national average. In the highest-performing school, 94% of pupils gained five or more GCSE A* to C grades, compared with 18% of pupils in the lowest-performing school. Generally, the lower-performing schools rank highest for the proportion of pupils in receipt of free school meals or pupils with special educational needs. The majority of lower-attaining schools are clustered around western Ipswich and Lowestoft. Some 4.7% of Suffolk pupils fail to achieve a pass at GCSE or the GNVQ equivalent; this is slightly below the national average of 5.4%.

56. The LEA monitors the progress and achievement of specific groups, including those of African–Caribbean heritage, children of travelling families, children in public care, pupils with special educational needs, pupils with English as an additional language and teenage mothers. The officers with responsibility for these groups review the achievements of the various groups and their progress from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4. There have been some improvements in the attainment of some of the pupils in these specific groups. For example, the proportion of African–Caribbean pupils gaining five or more GCSE A* to C grades has risen from 22% to 37% over the last three years.

57. Young people continuing their education in Suffolk schools do not achieve as well at the age of 19 as they do at 16. Overall performance at age 19 indicates that much of the ground gained at Key Stage 4 has been lost and that a number of the more able students are travelling out of the county to access post-16 provision, particularly at level 3. GCE AS/A-level and AVCE average point scores, excluding key skills, are just below the national average, but are significantly below the national average in school sixth forms in west Ipswich, the Lowestoft area and in the extreme southwest of the county.

58. In the three Suffolk FE colleges and the specialist land-based college, aggregated data show that overall retention rates on level 1 courses have remained static for the period 1999/2000 to 2001/02 and are slightly above the national average for FE colleges. At level 2, overall retention rates have improved and in 2001/02, were 6% above the national average for FE colleges. On level 3 courses, overall retention rates have improved and in 2002, were close the national average. On level 1 courses, the pass rates have remained static and are close to the national averages for FE colleges. At level 2, overall pass rates have improved slightly and in 2002, were just above the national average for FE colleges. At level 3, pass rates have shown little improvement and have remained below national averages.

59. Data supplied by the local LSC show that approximately 30% of work-based learners on foundation and advanced modern apprenticeships complete the full framework. A further 15% achieve part of the framework, normally the NVQ. Although these figures are above the national rates, these achievements are unsatisfactory. There are significant variations in performance, ranging from an achievement rate of 70% in one specialist provider to under 30% in some others. At West Suffolk College, which is the largest

provider of work-based learning in the county, the number of framework completions in the past year has increased from 50 to 178 as a result of better tracking of learners' progress and early completion of key skills. Overall, however, achievement rates are not improving quickly enough and action planning for improvement is insufficiently rigorous.

Quality of education and training

60. The quality of teaching and learning in Suffolk secondary and special schools is good; the proportion of lessons considered to be good or better in recent inspections was above the national average. Most secondary schools manage pupils' attendance well but attendance is low in some areas, such as Lowestoft. However, teaching and learning in the FE colleges are more variable. Recent college inspections identified good teaching overall at West Suffolk College, satisfactory overall teaching at Suffolk and Otley colleges, and unsatisfactory teaching and learning in some curriculum areas at Lowestoft College. At this college, the overall attendance of students aged 16 to 19 at many lessons was poor. The teaching in the four pupil referral units (PRUs) ranges from very good to poor, with one unit being in special measures. The quality of teaching and learning in work-based learning is satisfactory overall.

61. Teaching in Key Stage 4 promotes progress and achievement well. Many pupils make better progress than anticipated by their levels of attainment at Key Stage 3. Teaching in the majority of school sixth forms promotes satisfactory progress, but about a third of sixth forms have too many students who make insufficient progress compared with their prior attainment at GCSE. In three of the four colleges, most students make satisfactory progress in lessons. At two special schools, pupils make very good progress and achieve well. Special schools make good use of data to track individual pupils' progress and to set challenging targets for them.

62. In general, the progress made by pupils in literacy and numeracy at Key Stage 4 is good. Literacy and numeracy are developed well in special schools. The progress of pupils in the PRUs is varied: the progress pupils make in literacy is very good in two PRUs, satisfactory in another and unsatisfactory in the PRU which is under special measures. The quality of provision of basic skills is good in two colleges, satisfactory in one, but unsatisfactory at the college in the north of the county. The development of key skills post-16 is weak. It is identified as a weakness in the inspection reports of three of the four colleges. Very few school sixth forms have a coherent strategy to develop key skills.

63. Teaching and training supports the educational inclusion of learners with special educational needs well. Support for pupils with special educational needs is good or better in nearly all of the schools that have been inspected recently. Many schools have modified the curriculum and provide effective additional learning support for pupils with special educational needs. Pupils at special schools in Suffolk make good progress. Special schools have a key focus on developing literacy and numeracy skills alongside a clear emphasis on developing the independence skills of pupils. Data are used well to improve individual students' performance and students are presented with a degree of challenge in their studies. The progress made by young people from special schools whilst at the colleges is variable. At two of the colleges, students with learning difficulties make good progress; teaching is good and most students are well supported but the needs of some students are not always met.

At one college, the provision for students with learning difficulties is unsatisfactory.

64. Overall, the quality of work-based learning in Suffolk is satisfactory. There are some notable examples of high-quality training. The specialist provider of training in horse racing offers world-class training with excellent resources. A college in the west of the county has, as part of its quality improvement strategy, successfully raised the status of work-based learning by changing the way that work-based learning fits within the structure of the college. Action has been taken by the local LSC to remove providers who have failed to offer provision of at least a satisfactory standard.

Resources

65. The extent to which the funding available meets the needs of all young people is satisfactory overall. The Suffolk LEA budget per pupil is above the national average. Although the local LSC provides further funding to support alternative education projects, few projects have secure funding that will sustain them beyond one or two years. The short-term nature and the inflexibility of some funding streams inhibit the sustainable development of initiatives.

66. Generally, staffing is satisfactory in most of the schools that have been inspected recently. A few schools report that they have had some difficulty recruiting staff in areas such as mathematics. There is sometimes a mismatch between staff and teaching requirements. Smaller schools have difficulty in introducing vocational qualifications. The small size of schools in some isolated rural areas limits the range of provision at Key Stage 4, because of low staffing levels and an absence of expertise in vocational areas. At the four colleges, most teachers are well qualified and have appropriate occupational experience. Many part-time staff do not have teaching qualifications. All four colleges have invested heavily in staff development activities to improve the teaching skills of their staff. In the work-based sector, the learning providers have recently developed and implemented a programme of staff development. Some providers are finding that not all existing staff have the capability required to teach the technical certificates in modern apprenticeship programmes, as they were originally recruited to provide only individual support and assessment.

67. At the time of their inspections, most schools were judged to have mostly satisfactory or better learning resources, although about half of the schools recently inspected report some resourcing issues relating to IT. A few schools have invested in vocational accommodation. In one school in the north of the county, a purpose-built vocational block improves the teaching of vocational courses and enables local businesses to work with the school. Visits made by inspectors to special schools indicate good provision of resources to enable pupils to access learning and make good progress. There are generally good specialist resources at the four colleges. All of the colleges provide students with good access to information and communications technology (ICT) equipment. Students are able to use up-to-date computers and software, and many computers allow access to the internet. The colleges are finding they have a shortage of accommodation to meet the demand for the IFP and other Key Stage 4 alternative programmes.

68. Resources to enable young people living in remote locations to gain access to work-based learning are sometimes inadequate. This is more of a problem in the east of Suffolk.

The cost of transport is high, either to the learners, or to the providers if it is paid by them. The availability of public transport and the time taken to travel the long distances are barriers to access in some cases. Providers find it difficult to offer training in outreach centres. Some providers, including colleges and employers, are considering withdrawing from work-based learning because of the cost of the training and particularly the cost of the administration.

Recommendations

- k. The LEA, local LSC, schools and colleges should implement strategies to raise the educational value added to individual post-16 learners.
- l. Providers should extend the opportunities for post-16 students to develop key skills.
- m. Key partners should develop methodologies to share good practice among all post-16 providers, to improve the achievements of students aged 16 to 19.

