

Suffolk County Council

Local authority

Inspection dates		14–18 January 2013
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Requires improvement-3
	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory-3
Outcomes for learners		Requires improvement-3
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Requires improvement-3
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Requires improvement-3

Summary of key findings for learners

This provider requires improvement because:

- Success rates are not yet consistently good across all curriculum areas.
- Provision for learners following programmes in English, mathematics and Foundation Learning is not yet good enough.
- Not enough teaching and learning sessions are consistently good or better.
- A few tutors do not make sufficient use of the results of initial assessment to plan learning.
- The quality of assessment and feedback requires improvement.
- Tutors in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and in English and mathematics do not sufficiently integrate equality and diversity with the curriculum.
- The revised observation of teaching and learning process has not yet led to consistent improvements in teaching and learning across all curriculum areas.
- Arrangements for the strategic management and governance of the main subcontractor are not yet sufficiently established.

This provider has the following strengths:

- The large majority of learners make at least the progress expected of them given their starting points. They also develop useful personal, social and employability skills.
- Achievement and outcomes for learners on Foundation Learning and community development programmes are high.
- Learners on ICT programmes and community development programmes receive good quality teaching and learning.
- Arrangements for performance management of staff are robust.
- Safeguarding arrangements are good.
- Strategies to widen participation for the most under-represented groups are particularly effective.

Full report

What does Suffolk County Council ('the Council') need to do to improve further?

- Take decisive steps to raise standards, especially in English, mathematics and Foundation Learning, by continuing to monitor rigorously performance across all curriculum areas and taking prompt corrective actions.
- Raise the overall quality of teaching and learning, especially in English, mathematics and Foundation Learning, by continuing to apply:
 - rigorous performance management measures for tutors and managers;
 - the revised observation of teaching and learning process.
- Ensure that tutors plan learning more effectively to meet learners' individual needs by:
 - making better use of the results of initial assessment to plan learning;
 - improving assessment practice so that tutors provide learners with clear and constructive feedback and realistic and achievable learning targets.
- Support tutors in ICT, English and mathematics to develop the confidence and resources to integrate equality and diversity with the curriculum more effectively.
- Further develop the governance and performance management arrangements of the main subcontractor by ensuring that:
 - the subcontractor's board has representatives that can provide it with external challenge as well as scrutiny of self-assessment judgements;
 - the board quickly establishes frequent performance management meetings with the subcontractor's senior leaders to agree development plans and challenging improvement targets.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement
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- Outcomes for learners require improvement overall. Learners' achievements are high on Foundation Learning and community development programmes. Success rates for the majority of learners are either just at or below national rates, though they are significantly lower for those on English and mathematics programmes.
- The large majority of learners are making the progress expected of them from their starting points. Learners on community development programmes make particularly rapid progress given their barriers to learning. ICT learners develop good skills to help them shop online, send and receive emails, use the internet and write job application letters.
- Most learners develop a useful range of personal, social and employability skills. Foundation learners on English programmes learn to write instructions about fire evacuation procedures and become more aware of their personal safety in the home and workplace. Learners on Foundation Learning courses develop useful skills in counselling, listening and working with others, which improves their employability.
- The Council's accurate analysis of achievement, success and retention across the range of curriculum areas reveals that no significant performance differences exist between male and female learners. Learners with a disability do just as well as those without. Managers have identified under-achievement for learners from minority ethnic groups on English for Speakers of

Other Languages (ESOL) programmes and have begun to take appropriate actions to tackle this disparity.

- The Council recognises that it needs to improve the accuracy of its data on learner progression. Individual case studies show that progression onto higher level courses, employment, training or further education is generally satisfactory. Many learners progress from very low starting points before proceeding to further courses to improve their personal and emotional well-being, as well as their employability.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Teaching, learning and assessment require improvement. In better learning sessions, often found in ICT and community development, tutors are well prepared and provide a range of interactive and engaging activities that stretch and challenge learners. Learning activities are well chosen, relevant and exciting, which enables learners to complete their tasks successfully and develop new skills. Community development, English and mathematics tutors make good use of volunteers and support workers to enhance learning.
- The weaker lessons are poorly planned and fail to meet the individual needs of all learners. In these sessions, the narrow range of teaching and learning methods often fails to stretch and challenge learners sufficiently. Tutors tend to dominate and provide little opportunity for learners to work on their own or to engage with information and learning technology (ILT) resources.
- Staff are well qualified and experienced and they have high expectations of learners. They work hard to build up trust and confidence and successfully support many learners to overcome often significant barriers to learning. Learners rightly comment on the good support that their tutors provide.
- Tutors make effective use of learning resources. Venues are well-equipped and conducive to learning. However, in a minority of sessions, paper resources are dated, poorly copied and hinder learning.
- Learners receive satisfactory initial assessment which helps staff to place learners onto a suitable programme that matches their needs and interests. However, tutors do not make sufficient use of the results of initial assessment to plan effectively to meet the diverse needs of individual learners. The quality of feedback to learners on written and practical work is not always of sufficiently good quality and targets to help learners achieve are often unclear or insufficiently challenging.
- Tutors provide appropriate support for learners' English and mathematics skills. Learners become confident in applying literacy and numeracy in the home and work context. However, a few tutors on Foundation Learning and community development programmes often fail to take advantage of opportunities to integrate English and mathematics with the curriculum.
- Information, advice and guidance are satisfactory. Tutors provide prospective learners with clear and accurate advice on course content and suitability. Many learners have used their newly acquired skills to function more independently, improve their job prospects, gain promotion or change career.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is generally satisfactory. Tutors create a safe and inclusive learning environment for diverse learner groups. They know their learners well and peer support is encouraged. A few tutors in ICT and in English and mathematics lack the confidence to develop teaching and learning resources to integrate equality and diversity with the taught curriculum.

ICT for users**Learning programmes for 19+**

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good, as reflected in the good in-year success rates, especially on programmes for beginners. Learners enjoy their learning and are able confidently to demonstrate their improved ICT skills which include using a word processor to create posters, inserting and resizing graphics within documents, wrapping text around graphics and creating graphs in spread sheets.
- Highly supportive and knowledgeable tutors structure lessons well and learner participation in lessons is high. Activities in learning sessions are challenging and engaging and enable learners to complete tasks successfully. In IT User Qualification (ITQ) sessions, learners are able to work independently, progressing at their own pace on individual units through the use of well-designed specialist workbooks.
- Tutors promote safe working practices. Learners use their newly acquired skills in the community, as illustrated by one learner who has created a weekly attendance register for a local Catholic voluntary group and by another learner who designed a poster to promote an epilepsy support group that she runs as a volunteer.
- Initial assessment is satisfactory. Learners following the ITQ programme receive an informative individual skills assessment at the start of each new unit in order to identify previous knowledge and to enable tutors to plan effectively for individual learning. Learners on beginners' programmes receive an initial assessment within the first two weeks of the course, providing tutors with a helpful overview of each learner's ability and previous knowledge.
- The recent successful introduction of electronic individual learning plans enables learners to set personal learning targets each week and to record their progress against these targets. However, targets for ITQ learners in some sessions are not always easily measurable, though they do enable learners to log all tasks completed and tutors to enter written feedback.
- Tutors provide learners with constructive and detailed verbal feedback. This, together with written comments in their individual learning plans, helps learners to consolidate their understanding and make good progress towards their learning goals while gaining in confidence through the acquisition of new skills and knowledge.
- Enthusiastic tutors use learning sessions effectively to integrate English and mathematics skills with the ICT curriculum. Tutors make particularly good use of ICT topics such as on-line shopping activities, the use of popular internet auction sites, e-mail and word processing to develop these skills. The judicious use of spell checking applications to examine documents for typing errors is encouraged on all beginner courses before printing. This approach has significantly improved learners' confidence.
- Tutors provide appropriate information, advice and guidance. Prospective learners receive clear and accurate advice on course content and suitability from the provider's central administrative team. In the last two weeks of their course, tutors provide learners with helpful and detailed information about further courses that they might wish to study.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is broadly satisfactory. A minority of tutors incorporate cultural diversity with learning sessions well; one tutor encouraged learners to use their ICT skills to produce a poster celebrating the Scottish festival of Burns' Night. However, not all tutors are equally skilful at integrating equality and diversity with learning sessions.

English and mathematics**Foundation Learning**

Requires improvement

- Teaching, learning and assessment require improvement as reflected in the low overall success rates. However, current learners are making at least satisfactory progress and develop a suitable range of skills. Learners on English programmes learn to write clear instructions about fire evacuation procedures and become more aware of their personal safety in the home and at work. Intermediate learners in mathematics are able to calculate length accurately and apply the calculations to, for example, the amount of wood required to build a window frame.
- In the better learning sessions, tutors successfully encourage intermediate learners of English to correct their own work. Learners can identify and articulate differences between facts and opinions in more complex text. Intermediate learners of mathematics overcome their fear of numbers and adapt quickly to tutors' skilful use of everyday problems to apply mathematical skills to situations at work or in the home.
- Learners engage well in most sessions and participate fully in learning. Tutors make good use of support workers and volunteers to enhance the learning experience for learners, many of whom have multiple barriers to learning. Learners benefit from their help which supports them to achieve successfully their personalised learning goals.
- In the weaker sessions, tutors' planning does not always sufficiently meet each learner's needs. Lesson plans are often very simplistic and fail to include a sufficient range of stimulating learning and teaching activities and resources. Details about how tutors will assess learning are often absent. A small minority of tutors lack the expertise and subject specialist skills to plan and deliver learning for learners with different learning needs.
- Tutors do not make sufficient use of the available ILT to reduce dependency on paper based resources. A narrow range of learning activities and lack of creative and interactive resources fails to extend learning for all learners and a minority fail to achieve their potential.
- Managers have improved initial and diagnostic assessment to ensure that learners enrol on programmes that match their abilities and interests. However, insufficient use is made of the outcomes of initial and diagnostic assessment to plan learning or to set targets in individual learning plans. Targets set by tutors tend to be generic and without timescales and fail to help learners monitor their own progress.
- Assessment practice requires improvement. Tutors do not update or review learners' targets regularly and monitoring of learners' progress is often weak. In better sessions, learners receive feedback from tutors and record improvements they have made in their individual learning plan. In weaker sessions, the assessment does not focus sufficiently on learning and learners' comments tend to be about their experience in the classroom rather than about what they have learned.
- Information, advice and guidance are satisfactory. Learners like the promotional literature on the range of courses available and procedures for referring learners on to other programmes are good. Many learners use their newly acquired skills to become more independent, improve their job prospects, gain promotion or change career.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is generally satisfactory. Tutors create a safe and inclusive learning environment for the diverse groups of learners who attend sessions. They know their learners well and peer support is encouraged. However, a few tutors are less successful at fully integrating equality and diversity with teaching and learning in their subject.

Foundation learning

Learning programmes for 19+ Foundation Learning

Requires improvement

- Teaching, learning and assessment require improvement. However, overall achievement is high, largely because a minority of learners are on programmes which are insufficiently challenging for them. Learners develop self-confidence and self-esteem which assists in their preparation for employment. Most learners are well motivated and enjoy their learning. Learners on counselling, listening, and confidence building courses improve their communication and social skills, which enhances their employability.
- The Council's data on learners' progression indicates that the proportion of learners who progress on to further education, training or employment is satisfactory. Learners progress satisfactorily from short taster sessions to further short courses provided by the Council. Course tutors provide accurate information, advice and guidance for learners. They make effective use of individual learning plans and learners take ownership of them, recording and setting targets with tutors' help.
- Tutors do not make sufficient use of the outcomes of initial assessment to place learners on to an appropriate programme. Delays in providing tutors with the outcomes of initial assessment often prevents them from providing additional support for those learners identified as requiring extra help in class. Learning does not build sufficiently on learners' previous knowledge and experience. Consequently, these learners achieve their qualification but gain few personal benefits.
- Staff are well qualified and provide good expertise across the range of programmes offered. Learning resources are generally satisfactory. In better sessions, tutors plan learning satisfactorily, ensuring that it is well structured and includes an appropriate range of practical and interactive activities to involve learners fully.
- In the weaker sessions, lesson planning is weak. Tutors do not plan activities to meet the individual needs of all learners. Teaching sessions are tutor led, with little encouragement for learners to work on their own. Few sessions make use of ILT to enhance learning.
- Learners receive constructive written and verbal feedback which motivates them to achieve. Tutors mark learners' work well, with most errors correctly identified and constructive feedback given on how to improve. The standard of learners' work and pace of skill development are satisfactory.
- Although English and mathematics appear naturally in some of the teaching, learners are not always encouraged to develop their skills in these areas. Planned strategies to integrate the development of English and mathematics with the taught curriculum are relatively new and it is too soon to judge the impact.
- Tutors promote equality and diversity effectively through learners' induction and during sessions. Learners treat each with respect and courtesy and tutors set clear ground rules for behaviour at the beginning of the course. Tutors and learners have a satisfactory understanding of equality and diversity.

Community development**Learning programmes for 19+**

Good

- Learners on community development programmes, which are all non-accredited, achieve their learning outcomes well. The development of learners' personal, social and employability skills is consistently good across this wide range of carefully targeted provision. Although many learners progress onto higher level programmes or into employment or training, the Council does not currently have accurate destination data for all learners after they have completed their programme.
- Learners involved in regeneration and maintenance work as part of their learning programme develop a good range of skills in painting and decorating and they make a valuable contribution to community based projects. Learners in craft and enterprise projects produce work of a high standard which they then sell commercially. Learners on dance and art programmes significantly improve their physical and mental health.
- Staff are well qualified and experienced and have high expectations of their learners. They build up trust and confidence both with and between learners and support them very effectively in overcoming barriers to learning, such as mental health difficulties, low self-esteem and lack of confidence. Tutors in art and in dance classes adapt learning sessions skilfully to meet learners' personal, social and cultural needs.
- The use of learning resources is highly effective and supports learning well. In particular, music in the dance and exercise classes reflects the different cultures and experiences that learners bring with them to class, and makes very effective use of a wide range of modern and classical music, which supports the motifs of creative dance very well. In crafts and enterprise projects, the choice of practical tasks and materials enables learners to work creatively and to a high standard. Painting and decorating work takes place in a realistic working environment.
- Initial assessment is generally good and learners are able to build on their previous learning and to extend their knowledge and skills. In a community art class, learners with a wide range of abilities, ranging from those with a degree in art to complete beginners, are each able to make good progress given their starting points. In a small minority of projects, initial assessment is not yet sufficiently well tailored to assess learners' individual needs effectively, for example for learners with a range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
- Tutors do not assess and record learners' progress consistently well across the provision. Examples of good practice are evident in the regeneration and maintenance and the cycling projects, with clear identification of group and personalised learning targets, good use of photographic evidence and clear assessment and recording of learning by tutors and learners. However, assessment practice across the provision is not always done this well.
- The development of learners' skills in English and mathematics requires further improvement. Managers understand the importance of tutors maximising opportunities to develop these skills alongside other learning. However, not all tutors do this in practice. In painting and decorating, learners have good opportunities to develop their skills in mathematics, but fewer opportunities to develop their English skills; in dance and exercise, tutors do not maximise opportunities to develop and extend the language skills of learners who speak little English.
- Learners are on appropriate programmes, with good pre-course advice and guidance to ensure that they choose a course that meets their needs and interests. Learners are also clear about progression opportunities, with for example, learners on a regeneration and maintenance project already exploring their future employment options in the first two weeks of a nine week programme.

- The promotion of equality and diversity is good, with a strong and successful emphasis on meeting learners' individual learning needs and interests, as well as good account taken of learners' personal, social and cultural needs. Female learners in male dominated groups and learners from a range of different cultures feel well supported. Learners treat each other with respect and support each other well during learning sessions.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- The Council has ambitious targets for its programmes which staff understand well. It is committed to recruit learners with low educational achievement, and those from deprived communities. Senior leaders have satisfactorily managed the Council's recent decision to subcontract all of its provision and the subcontractor clearly understands the Council's vision and priorities for adult learning.
- The Council's recently established performance monitoring systems for effectively challenging and quality assuring the work of the subcontractor are appropriate. However, these arrangements are not yet fully developed and are very new. For example the performance governing board has not yet met and some senior Council officers who will provide strategic oversight of the provision are not yet in post.
- The service has identified accurately the improvements required in the provision and is making satisfactory progress in tackling them. However, these measures have not yet had time to bring about consistent improvement across the whole of the provision, particularly in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- The service has recently revised and improved the procedure for observation of tutor practice. Early indications suggest that this is contributing to raising standards, particularly in ICT and English and mathematics. However, it is too soon to judge the full impact of this process across all of the curriculum areas.
- The service has robust procedures for the performance management of staff. It uses performance management measures effectively as an improvement tool that has resulted in improvements in ICT and English and mathematics programmes. The service further promotes effective performance management by providing well-tailored staff development and support for tutors from its team of advanced practitioners.
- The self-assessment report accurately reflects the provision. Curriculum managers' evaluations of the service's key strengths and areas for improvements contribute to sound and well-supported judgements about the quality of provision. A peer reference group carries out a rigorous and thorough scrutiny of the self-assessment report. However, Council officers make little direct contribution to self-assessment judgements, though plans are in place to ensure that future self-assessment activity is more inclusive.
- The Council plans programmes well to meet local and national priorities; it places a strong emphasis on providing courses for those who are furthest away from the labour market. The planning of the community development programme is particularly effective in meeting the needs of voluntary organisations and providing tailored learning to individuals with specific and often complex needs.
- The service promotes its programmes well particularly to communities that are traditionally under-represented in learning. It has established centres in areas of disadvantage and in some locations, the centres are co-located within or close to Jobcentres or community organisations.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Tutors agree boundaries and behaviours very effectively at the start of a programme that promote respect and inclusion.
- The service successfully promotes social inclusion and participation in learning. Participation of learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is particularly high. Learners from deprived

communities represent about a third of all learners; male participation is increasing and the proportion of learners from minority ethnic groups reflects the communities that the Council serves.

- The service meets its statutory requirements for safeguarding learners. Rigorous safeguarding procedures apply to all learning programmes and enhanced arrangements are in place for staff teaching on family learning programmes. Staff have received safeguarding training appropriate to their job roles. All venues are risk assessed and health and safety and e-safety working practices receive careful attention. The service promotes safeguarding and health and safety well in learner and tutor handbooks.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

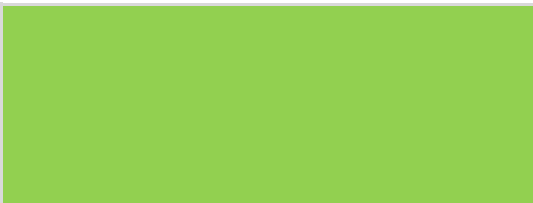
Suffolk County Council									
Inspection grades are based on a provider’s performance: 1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	Overall	14-16 Learning programmes	16-18 Learning programmes	19+ Learning programmes	Apprenticeships	Other work- based learning	Employability	Foundation Learning	Community learning
Outcomes for learners	3			3				3	
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	3			3				3	
The effectiveness of leadership and management	3			3				3	

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
ICT for users	2
Foundation English and mathematics	3
Foundation learning	3
Community Development	2

Provider details

Suffolk County Council	
Type of provider	Local authority
Age range of learners	19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	Full-time: 0
	Part-time: 6,597
Principal/CEO	Ms Deborah Cadman
Date of previous inspection	May 2011
Website address	www.suffolk.gov.uk

Provider information at the time of the inspection								
Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 and above	
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
Full-time	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Part-time	N/A	1,489	N/A	316	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A		
Number of learners aged 14-16	N/A							
Number of community learners	1,031							
Number of employability learners	1,286							
Funding received from	Skills Funding Agency (SFA)							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Realise Futures: Community Learning and Skills Development ■ St Johns Housing Trust ■ The Community Forum ■ CSV ■ Suffolk Acre ■ Suffolk Mind ■ The Yard Project ■ Pink Sky Cycling 							

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- The Street Forge
 - The Befriending Scheme.

Additional socio-economic information

In November 2012, Suffolk County Council divested the whole of its adult learning provision and established a subcontracting arrangement with Community Learning and Skills Development (CLSD), a division of a community interest company, Realise Futures. CLSD now directly delivers the whole of the Council's adult learning provision and subcontracts a small minority to other providers. Suffolk is a large county with a population of approximately 670,000. The county's three main towns are set within a large rural landscape and include some areas with the highest levels of deprivation in the East of England. The working population has relatively low skill levels. The county's minority ethnic population is relatively small at 2.8%.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Jai Sharda HMI

Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and four additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's director of learning as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors also used data on learners' achievements over the last two years to help them make judgements. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected throughout the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all of the provision at the provider. Inspectors looked at the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across all of the provision and graded the sector subject areas listed in the report above.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Handbook for the inspection of further education and skills 2012*, Part 2:

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/handbook-for-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-september-2012>

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