

Youth Work in Essex

Essex Children's Services Authority Area

Age group: All

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Introduction

1. Youth work in Essex is provided through the Localities Services Division of the local authority's Schools, Children's and Families' Directorate. Two-thirds of provision is managed centrally by Integrated Youth Services with a third being managed in 29 recently formed local multi-disciplinary Teams around the School, Child and Community. The Connexions service was transferred into the local authority in April 2008. In June 2008, management arrangements were rationalised to reflect the integrated delivery of youth work and Connexions.

2. Integrated Youth Services is led by the Head of Service and managed by a County Manager, four Area Managers and 11 locally-based Integrated Youth Service Managers. Provision is primarily delivered from 35 youth centres, 12 Connexions one-stop shops, eight mobile units, six outdoor centres and through teams of detached workers. There are 250 full-time equivalent youth workers. The budget available for youth work in 2008/09 is around £9.98 million; in line with that of similar areas. There are 117,300 young people aged 13 to 19 in the county. Eight percent are from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds. The service claims to reach 32% of 13 to 19 year olds.

3. This inspection was carried out under section 136 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, which provides that the Chief Inspector may inspect particular local authority functions. The joint area review (JAR) was enhanced to enable coverage of youth work.

Part A: Summary of the report

Main findings

4. The quality of youth work provision in Essex is good. The local authority sufficiently secures the provision of youth work and provides good strategic direction and support. Young people achieve well and there are notable examples of outstanding achievement. The quality of youth work practice is good. Youth workers know the needs of the young people with whom they work and successfully engage them in interesting and challenging learning programmes. Accreditation is used to good effect in validating young people's learning. A good range of learning opportunities is supported by access to high quality resources such as outdoor education centres and mobile provision. Premises are welcoming and generally in good condition. Targeted youth work addresses social inclusion well. However, the promotion of equalities and diversity is inadequate with few examples of youth work programmes that extend young people's understanding of these issues. There are gaps in provision for gay, lesbian and bisexual young people and the growing population of young people of Black and minority ethnic heritage.

5. Leadership and management are good. Managers have maintained good staff morale and high quality youth work during a period of significant change. However, delivery plans are insufficiently specific and measurable. Management information systems do not support accurate assessments of performance against priorities. Safe recruitment practices have been insufficiently robust but the local authority is taking steps to remedy this. Young peoples' involvement in decision-making at all levels is outstanding. They are meaningfully involved in shaping services across the county.

Key aspect inspection grades

Key Aspect		Grade
1	Standards of young people's achievement	3
	Quality of youth work practice	3
2	Quality of curriculum and resources	3
3	Leadership and management	3

*Inspectors make judgements based on the following scale
4: excellent/outstanding; 3: good; 2: adequate/satisfactory; 1: inadequate*

Strengths

- Young people achieve high standards.
- Youth work practice is good.
- Young people's involvement in decision-making is outstanding and results in tangible change.
- Youth work targeted at vulnerable groups promotes social inclusion.
- The local authority provides good support for youth work.

Areas for development

- Improve the promotion of equality and diversity in youth work programmes.
- Develop management information systems that capture the impact of youth work.
- Ensure that all objectives in delivery plans are specific and measurable.

Part B: Commentary on the key aspects

Key Aspect 1: Standards of young people's achievements and the quality of youth work practice

6. Standards of achievement are good. Most young people achieve well and there are some notable examples of outstanding achievement. Many improve their confidence and develop skills in communication, team work and problem solving. Young people at U Project Presentation at Hadleigh developed their confidence through taking part in a challenging programme of activities during the summer. Their sense of achievement was evident in their presentations at a celebration event which they organised and hosted.

7. Young people participate enthusiastically in opportunities to learn about issues that affect their lives such as sex and relationships, smoking, alcohol and drug misuse. They also develop skills in specific subjects, for example, film making, graffiti art and music. A group at Hatfield Broad Oak produced a film that presents a positive profile of young people in the village. They are also learning skills in negotiation through setting up a formal committee and working together to establish a youth club in their village.

8. Young people's involvement in making decisions in their own youth groups and projects is good. Their participation in wider decision-making in local areas and at a county-wide level is outstanding and results in tangible change. Members of Young Essex Assembly, the county youth council, have developed a Green Pledge that includes the distribution of recycling bins to schools, colleges and youth centres. There are many examples of how members of District Youth Councils have worked with councillors and officers to improve local facilities. At West Horndon for example, a group worked with the Parish Council to choose the design of a youth shelter. Young people gain valuable skills from their involvement and taking responsibility as senior members of their youth groups. They are proud of their achievements and value the opportunity to have their learning accredited.

9. The quality of youth work practice is good. Most youth workers know the needs of the young people with whom they work and successfully motivate them to participate in learning programmes that provide a sense of achievement and fun. There is a strong focus on recording the achievements of individuals and groups of young people in most settings. In the best practice learning is well differentiated and there are good opportunities for progression. There are good examples of staff involving young people in planning and evaluating youth work programmes. For example, at Bradwell Outdoor Centre, staff skilfully led an evaluation of a raft building activity that enabled young people to assess their performance as members of a team. Accreditation is used to good effect to provide appropriate levels of challenge. It is well matched to young people's abilities and aspirations.

10. Relationships between staff and young people are good. Young people are involved with negotiating codes of conduct and generally adhere to them. Youth workers know about specialist sources of support such as drug and alcohol services and support young people in gaining access to them.

Key Aspect 2: Quality of curriculum and resources

11. The quality of the curriculum and resources is good overall. There is a good range of settings for delivering educational leisure time activities including provision in youth centres, in detached and mobile settings and in outdoor education centres. There is a sound rationale for allocating provision to districts based on local needs and the size of the youth population. Staff are well deployed and the majority are qualified for their roles. A recent survey of young people demonstrates that youth work is available at appropriate times and locations.

12. Social inclusion is addressed well through an emphasis on targeting specific groups of vulnerable young people; for example, those who are at risk of exclusion from school or not in education, employment or training, those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and young carers. However, the promotion of equalities and diversity is inadequate with limited evidence of these issues being raised or addressed in the curriculum. There are gaps in provision for gay, lesbian and bisexual young people and the growing Black and minority ethnic population. Data on the ethnicity of service users is poor with an unacceptably high level of registrations where ethnicity is unknown. This hampers assessments of how well youth work meets the needs different groups of young people across the county.

13. The curriculum document provides staff with a useful framework for delivering and evaluating informal education. It has been revised to incorporate *Every Child Matters* outcomes. However, planning and evaluation in relation to *Every Child Matters* is yet to be fully embedded in all youth work provision.

14. Premises are generally accessible and in good condition. Staff and young people have access to a good selection of resources to support a wide range of learning opportunities. High quality mobile units are used in partnership work to good effect in areas where there is no other provision. Six outdoor centres provide a valuable resource and staff deliver youth work of a high standard.

Key Aspect 3: Leadership and management

15. Leadership and management are good overall. The local authority provides strong strategic direction and support for the provision of educational leisure time activity. Elected members and senior managers are kept well informed of progress and quality. There is clarity about priority groups although inadequate data hampers evaluation of how well their needs are met. The objectives in the integrated youth service delivery plan are broad and success criteria are insufficiently measurable. There is insufficient focus on the opportunities and challenges in integrating youth work and Connexions.

16. Arrangements for the delivery of integrated youth support are in place and in the main, working well. Multi-disciplinary working in locality teams results in improving outcomes for young people. Personal and social development is an integral element of integrated youth support. The resources available for youth work are sufficient and deployed effectively to meet local needs. Budgets have been rising over the past two years and are broadly in line with those of similar areas. A good level of additional resources is secured through partnership work with District and Parish councils. These partnerships result in improved facilities for young people in local areas and greater flexibility in responding to local needs.

17. Management is good and has contributed to maintaining high morale in a period of significant change. Staff value supervision meetings and appraisal. The local authority makes adequate provision for ensuring the health and safety of staff and young people. However, systems for safe recruitment across the local authority have not been robust and the local authority is taking steps to remedy this.

18. Partnership working is good. Effective partnerships with voluntary organisations have resulted in increased voluntary sector provision in rural areas. Partnership work with the Permanency and Looked after Children's teams has secured the involvement of looked after children in shaping and evaluating the services they receive. Partnerships with teenage pregnancy and drug and alcohol services result in useful multi-agency training and joint work that enhances the curriculum and the range of services available to young people.

19. Good quality assurance arrangements provide accurate assessments of the overall quality of youth work and the results are used to secure improvement. However, a combination of poor data collection and inadequate management information systems mean that the impact of youth work is not accurately captured. This impairs the local authority's ability to assess its overall effectiveness.

20. Young people's involvement in planning, development and quality assurance is outstanding. They are involved in influencing the plans of the Integrated Youth Service and in decision-making in the Schools', Children's and Families Directorate and beyond. They participate in staff recruitment, are involved in reviewing the Children and Young Peoples' Plan and make presentations to the Children and Young Peoples' Strategic Partnership that are used to shape decisions.