

INSPECTION REPORT

Thurrock LEA

18 June 2004



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Grading

Inspectors use a seven-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of learning sessions. The descriptors for the seven grades are:

- *grade 1 - excellent*
- *grade 2 - very good*
- *grade 3 - good*
- *grade 4 - satisfactory*
- *grade 5 - unsatisfactory*
- *grade 6 - poor*
- *grade 7 - very poor.*

Inspectors use a five-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of provision in occupational/curriculum areas and Jobcentre Plus programmes. The same scale is used to describe the quality of leadership and management, which includes quality assurance and equality of opportunity. The descriptors for the five grades are:

- *grade 1 - outstanding*
- *grade 2 - good*
- *grade 3 - satisfactory*
- *grade 4 - unsatisfactory*
- *grade 5 - very weak.*

The two grading scales relate to each other as follows:

SEVEN-POINT SCALE	FIVE-POINT SCALE
grade 1	grade 1
grade 2	
grade 3	grade 2
grade 4	grade 3
grade 5	grade 4
grade 6	grade 5
grade 7	

Adult Learning Inspectorate

The Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) was established under the provisions of the *Learning and Skills Act 2000* to bring the inspection of all aspects of adult learning and work-based learning within the remit of a single inspectorate. The ALI is responsible for inspecting a wide range of government-funded learning, including:

- work-based learning for all people over 16
- provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- **learndirect** provision
- Adult and Community Learning
- training funded by Jobcentre Plus
- education and training in prisons, at the invitation of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons.

Inspections are carried out in accordance with the *Common Inspection Framework* by teams of full-time inspectors and part-time associate inspectors who have knowledge of, and experience in, the work which they inspect. All providers are invited to nominate a senior member of their staff to participate in the inspection as a team member.

Overall judgement

Where the overall judgement is that the provision is adequate, only those aspects of the provision which are less than satisfactory will be reinspected.

Provision will normally be deemed to be inadequate where:

- more than one third of published grades for occupational/curriculum areas, **or**
- leadership and management are judged to be less than satisfactory.

This provision will be subject to a full reinspection.

The final decision as to whether the provision is inadequate rests with the Chief Inspector of Adult Learning. A statement as to whether the provision is adequate or not is included in the summary section of the inspection report.

INSPECTION REPORT

Thurrock LEA

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INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. In April 1998 Thurrock became a unitary borough and, therefore, a Local Education Authority (LEA). Thurrock Council offered the governors of Thurrock Adult Community College a scheme of delegation to run the adult education provision on behalf of the LEA. Thurrock Adult Community College is the generic title given to the council's adult and community learning provision which is delivered at four main adult education centres: Grays Adult Education Centre, South Ockendon Adult Education Centre, Stanford le Hope Adult Education Centre and Chafford Hundred Campus, as well as at a range of community venues throughout the borough of Thurrock. Grays Adult Education Centre is the largest and most established centre, which also serves as the headquarters of the adult education service.

2. The principal of Thurrock Adult Community College is the head of adult and community learning and is responsible to the director of education. She is seconded to the LEA for a proportion of her working time and is a member of the LEA's management team. She also reports to Thurrock Adult Community College's governing body, which is comprised of representatives from the LEA, the community, learners and staff members. The principal is supported in her work by a vice principal, three assistant principals, a head of support services, curriculum team leaders across the areas of learning, and over a hundred part-time tutors.

3. Thurrock Adult and Community College has contracts with Essex Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to provide courses in 12 of the 14 areas of learning and family learning. In 2002-03, there were 3,361 learners. Information and communications technology (ICT), foundation, and visual and performing arts and media courses, account for over 60 per cent of the learners. Five areas of learning and family learning were inspected and graded.

SCOPE OF PROVISION

Information & communications technology

4. For the period 2003-04 to date, 655 learners are enrolled on ICT courses. During the inspection, 163 learners were on ICT courses. Seventy-seven per cent of learners are women and 23 per cent are men. Seven per cent are from minority ethnic backgrounds, 2 per cent have a disability and 25 per cent are aged 60 or over. ICT courses are provided at the three main adult education centres, a school-based college centre and several other community venues. A small range of short, non-accredited courses of between three and 12 weeks provide learners with their first introduction to computers, or to particular applications such as desktop publishing, presentation software, digital photography or the internet. A series of 'happy hour' courses are offered on a Saturday, for example on the use of the internet and e-mail. Accredited courses are available from entry level to level 3. At entry level, complete beginners can gain a certificate by completing their course work. At level 1 and 2, learners can study qualification modules

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from nationally and internationally recognised computer courses. At level 3, modules from the advanced nationally recognised course are available.

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel

5. For the period 2003-04 to date, 560 learners are enrolled on 41 courses in hospitality, sport and leisure courses. Twenty-six of these are exercise classes and 15 are cookery classes. Seventy-nine per cent of enrolments are in exercise-related classes and 21 per cent of enrolments are in cookery. During the inspection, there were 147 learners on courses. Eighty-seven per cent of learners are women and 13 per cent of learners are men. Three per cent of learners are from minority ethnic groups. Courses include keep fit, yoga, tai chi, badminton and cookery. Most courses run on a termly basis and last for an average of 10 weeks. Courses take place on weekdays and at weekends, during the day and in the evening. Lessons last from one to two hours and take place in a range of venues, including four main adult education centres and other outreach centres such as church and village halls and schools. Most classes are for mixed-ability learners, but some classes are available for intermediate and advanced learners. Ten part-time tutors are managed by a curriculum leader. Six of the tutors are exercise specialists and four of the tutors are specialists in cookery-related subjects.

Visual & performing arts & media

6. Six hundred and forty-one learners have enrolled on 71 courses in visual and performing arts and media during the period of 2003-04. At the time of the inspection 312 learners were enrolled for courses on three main sites: Grays Adult Education Centre, Stanford le Hope Adult Education Centre and South Ockendon Adult Education Centre. Very little performing arts provision is offered at any site. Ninety-five per cent of learners are women and 5 per cent are men in the crafts provision, with 42 per cent of learners over 60 years of age. In visual and performing arts, 76 per cent of learners are women and 24 per cent of learners are men, with 31 per cent of learners over 60 years of age. Very few learners are from minority ethnic groups. All courses are non-accredited. Most courses are of two or three hours duration and are available during the day and in the evenings.

English, languages & communications

7. Thurrock LEA has 478 learners enrolled on 74 courses in English, British Sign Language (BSL) and modern foreign languages for 2003-04. During the inspection 209 learners were on courses. Sixty-eight per cent of learners are women and 32 per cent are male. Eleven per cent of learners are over 60 years of age and 7 per cent of learners are from minority ethnic groups. Courses are held at Grays Adult Education Centre, South Ockendon Adult Education Centre, Stanford le Hope Adult Education Centre and Chafford Hundred Campus. There are general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) courses in English and at AS level in English literature. Courses in BSL are available at level 1 and 2. French, German, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish are available at beginner level, and near beginner level, and there are intermediate level French, Spanish and Mandarin Chinese courses. French is available at advanced level. Classes take place during the day and evenings. Courses range from 10 to 35 weeks. Most learning sessions are of two hours' duration. Ninety-two per cent of courses lead to an accredited qualification. The 13 tutors, who all work on a part-time basis, are managed by a full-time curriculum team leader.

Foundation programmes

8. Seven hundred and ten learners are enrolled on literacy, numeracy or language programmes. Seventy-eight are enrolled on programmes for people with learning difficulties. The numbers attending programmes at the time of inspection were 380 and 49 respectively. Most of the foundation provision is at Grays Adult Education Centre and some programmes are delivered in three other adult education centres. The provision includes sessions for literacy, numeracy and language skills. Some programmes are specifically for women returning to education. There is also a discrete provision for learners with learning difficulties. Courses are held mornings, afternoons and evenings and most classes are of two hours' duration. Learners on literacy, numeracy or English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) programmes have the opportunity to work towards external accreditation. There are no arrangements for learners with learning difficulties to gain externally accredited qualifications. Courses for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities include ICT, communication through art; tennis and badminton. A curriculum team leader manages the skills for life provision and another curriculum team leader manages the provision for learners with learning difficulties. Two full-time tutors and 31 part-time tutors teach the courses.

Family learning

9. During 2003-04 to date, 323 learners have enrolled on 58 courses. Ninety-four per cent of learners are women and 6 per cent are men. The courses are mainly of two hours and between three and six weeks in duration, but there is also a longer 15-week family learning course. Courses operate throughout the year, mainly during school term time, although times vary during the day to meet learners' needs. Family learning provision is targeted at the most disadvantaged and hard to reach in the community and those with few, or no qualifications. Most courses are held in schools and community centres, with some outreach provision at a traveller's site. Provision includes family activity days, workshops and short taster courses to raise awareness of family learning, pre-school projects, after-school courses and 'keep up with your children' courses. Most of these courses are non-accredited, although learners are able to take national literacy and numeracy accreditation, as appropriate. A family learning curriculum team leader manages family learning, assisted by five staff on fractional contracts and two part-time learning support assistants.

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

Number of inspectors	11
Number of inspection days	53
Number of learner interviews	278
Number of staff interviews	114
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	30
Number of partner/external agency interviews	15

OVERALL JUDGEMENT

10. The quality of provision is adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. More specifically, Thurrock LEA's leadership and management and approach to equality of opportunity are satisfactory. Its arrangements for quality assurance are unsatisfactory. The quality of programmes in visual and performing arts and media, and family learning is good. It is satisfactory in ICT, hospitality, sport and leisure, and English and modern foreign languages. However the quality of foundation programmes is unsatisfactory.

GRADES

grade 1 = outstanding, grade 2 = good, grade 3 = satisfactory, grade 4 = unsatisfactory, grade 5 = very weak

Leadership and management	3
Contributory grades:	
Equality of opportunity	3
Quality assurance	4

Information & communications technology	3
Contributory grades:	
Adult and community learning	3

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel	3
Contributory grades:	
Adult and community learning	3

Visual & performing arts & media	2
Contributory grades:	
Adult and community learning	2

English, languages & communications	3
Contributory grades:	
Adult and community learning	3

Foundation programmes	4
Contributory grades:	
Adult and community learning	4

Family learning	2
Contributory grades:	
Adult and community learning	2

KEY FINDINGS

Achievement and standards

11. The provision has some good levels of achievement and attainment. **Pass rates are very good on most accredited courses in ICT and modern foreign languages. Hospitality, sport and leisure courses, develop learners' knowledge and skills effectively**, with learners working to very good standards in sugarcraft, cake decorating, cookery, tai chi and yoga. **Learners in visual and performing arts and media achieve good development and application of skills** which they are able to apply in their daily lives. The standard of work, particularly in craft subjects, is good. **Learners on family learning programmes to a large extent achieve personal goals.** Many parents now play a greater part in their children's learning and in school activities. In some classes the standard of project work is exceptional. **Achievement rates are low only in foundation programmes, with few learners taking externally accredited qualifications.**

12. Learners in visual and performing arts and media, foundation, and family learning, achieve a wide range of personal and social benefits. They develop skills, knowledge and understanding beyond their main learning goals. They gain in self-confidence and many learners achieve good health benefits and improved mental well-being. In family learning, learners gain a better understanding of their own and their children's learning needs.

13. Retention rates are good in ICT, visual and performing arts and media, modern foreign languages and family learning. On non-accredited courses, the retention rate for ICT learners has been more than 95 per cent. For the current year, retention has improved to 91 per cent on accredited courses. In visual and performing arts and media, the average retention rate is 92 per cent. In modern foreign languages, there has been a rising trend in retention rates, from 74 per cent in 2000-01 to 83 per cent in 2002-03. The retention rate for learners on family learning courses in 2003-04, is 99 per cent. **Retention rates are low on foundation literacy, numeracy and ESOL programmes.** On numeracy programmes, retention is particularly low. In 2002-03, only 43 per cent of learners were retained on the 'improve your mathematics' programmes and 40 per cent were retained on the 'prepare for GCSE mathematics' programme. Retention rates are satisfactory in hospitality, sport and leisure, and English.

Quality of education and training

14. Of the 69 learning sessions observed, 86 per cent were satisfactory, or better.

15. Standards of teaching and learning are good in cookery, visual and performing arts and media, English and family learning. In cookery classes, tutors use a good range of teaching methods and work effectively with the whole group, sub-groups and individual learners. There is also a lot of effective, independent learning activity. In visual and performing arts and media, tutors prepare well, have a coherent overview of what they want to achieve with learners, and recognize differing abilities. In many classes they provide expert demonstrations. Learners are able to work independently and use materials and specialist equipment with confidence. In English, lessons are well planned and structured, with a good variety of exercises and a clear focus on the end assessment. In family learning, tutors use a good range of imaginative and well-planned teaching and learning activities, which successfully engage and meet the needs of learners and children.

16. Some of the teaching and learning is unsatisfactory. The range of teaching styles is narrow in ICT. Learners are not sufficiently involved and their understanding is not checked sufficiently. **In exercise classes, there is too much whole-group teaching and not enough focus on individual learners' needs. In many lessons in modern foreign languages, tutors do not routinely use the taught language in the classroom and do not encourage learners to use it sufficiently.**

17. **Thirty-six per cent of the lessons observed in the foundation programmes were graded unsatisfactory or poor.** Learners' individual needs are not taken into account sufficiently when planning learning. Tutors do not use stimulating teaching methods or activities to encourage learner participation and maintain their interest; paper-based resources are used too much and are dull and uninspiring.
18. Accommodation is satisfactory and generally suitable **although some of the accommodation in many exercise classes is inadequate**, with noise from adjoining rooms, dirty floors and very high temperatures in warm weather. ICT resources are satisfactory. Staff are suitably qualified and experienced and develop good working relationships with learners, which learners value highly.
19. **Learners' progress is not monitored sufficiently in several curriculum areas. In ICT, learners complete a self-assessment of their computer skills**, which is a paper-based exercise rather than a practical audit of skills. **The information is not used in course delivery. In visual and performing arts and media, learners' individual needs, or learning outcomes are not identified, or recorded sufficiently.** Although learners receive a good deal of informal feedback about their progress, this is not usually recorded in any significant way and is not used in curriculum planning. In hospitality, sport and leisure and family learning, assessment is satisfactory.
20. **Individual learning plans are used poorly in foundation.** Diagnostic assessments are not used sufficiently to plan learning goals and targets and learners' progress is not monitored sufficiently. Learners who attend for more than one session each week often have several individual learning plans with different targets, and do not understand the connection between the sessions. **In family learning, there is insufficient monitoring and recording of learners' short-term learning goals.**
21. **Monitoring and recording of progress is good in English and modern foreign languages.** In GCSE English, each learner's written work is assessed and referenced against the GCSE criteria and tutors complete a weekly progress review to support the learner's development. Marking is detailed, with thorough and helpful comments for learners. In modern foreign languages, a good assessment framework and consistent approach is used by tutors to record learners' progress. There is not enough initial assessment of learners' skills.
22. The range of courses offered varies according to the area of learning. **ICT provision in the community is good.** The adult education and outreach centres provide good geographical coverage and convenient local access for large numbers of learners. Courses are offered at times that enable learners to attend without compromising family or work commitments. Crèche facilities provide childcare for parents wishing to participate in learning. **The range of exercise programme is good**, with a significant number of courses at beginner and intermediate level. There are more advanced classes in yoga and badminton and also a provision for the over 50s.
23. **The range of provision in visual and performing arts and media is limited, with virtually no dance, drama or music classes.** None of the programmes are accredited and

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there are few formal opportunities for progression. **In modern foreign languages, progression opportunities are also limited.** Courses are mainly at beginner or near-beginner level, with only one course each in Mandarin Chinese and Spanish at intermediate level and one French course at advanced level. Family learning courses are all non-accredited, with an emphasis on taster and short courses. There is no accredited provision for learners who wish to progress to a more challenging family learning course.

24. **Thurrock LEA has very effective initiatives to engage learners who are disadvantaged and have low levels of previous attainment.** Information, advice and guidance is satisfactory across all the areas of learning and adult education centres. News of courses spreads by word of mouth, as well as through published materials, but there are few targeted marketing campaigns.

25. Learners on literacy, numeracy and language courses are able to describe their learning outcomes and their progress. They develop self-confidence in their ability to use numbers, in their literacy skills and in speaking English. However, few learners take courses towards accredited qualifications. Significant proportion of the teaching and learning observed was unsatisfactory.

Leadership and management

26. The ongoing strategic development and planning of adult and community learning in Thurrock LEA is supported by **very productive partnerships and extensive networking with organisations in the voluntary and statutory sectors.** The partners work closely together to exchange ideas and avoid duplication and to explore areas for common development. Several key partners are also members of Thurrock Adult Community College's governing body.

27. **Thurrock Adult Community College takes effective action to reach under-represented groups.** In ICT, the adult education and outreach centres are conveniently placed to allow local access for large numbers of learners. Courses are offered at times that enable learners to attend without compromising family or work commitments. Crèche facilities are available. In foundation, the new directions for women programme has been successful in encouraging women to return to learning, where they develop confidence and new skills. A partnership project with the primary care trust has successfully enabled women to develop their understanding of health matters and at the same time to develop literacy and numeracy skills. Family learning provision is carefully directed at specific areas of social disadvantage within Thurrock.

28. **The family learning area has good curriculum management.** Managers have a good knowledge of the local communities and the provider has effective partnerships with community, schools and other organisations to enhance family learning opportunities. Curriculum management is satisfactory in ICT, visual and performing arts and media, and English and modern foreign languages. Quality assurance arrangements are not effective in foundation and do not promote continuous improvement. In hospitality, sports and leisure, the monitoring of quality assurance arrangements is inadequate.

29. **Data is not sufficient analysed or used for planning and target-setting by staff and governors.** There is insufficient analysis of achievements and no targets for improvements. Governors are not sufficiently aware of the quality of Thurrock Adult Community College's provision. In ICT, management information is not used effectively to support continuous improvement.

30. Equality of opportunity arrangements are satisfactory, although inspectors did not see many examples of the promotion of equality of opportunity in lessons. Only in family learning is diversity strongly celebrated on taster days and in workshops, with families introduced to the cultures of many different countries. A number of valuable staff development sessions about aspects of equality of opportunity are provided, but there is no overall staff development programme for equality of opportunity.

31. **Quality assurance arrangements are not having sufficient effect** on the provision, particularly with regard to improving the quality of teaching and learning. Thurrock Adult Community College has developed satisfactory quality assurance paperwork, which it also shares with its partners on community-based projects. However, the self-assessment report is not sufficiently critical to accurately identify the strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning. The development plans for the programme areas do not include any actions to build on their strengths and do not resolve all the weaknesses that have been identified. Not all staff have been fully involved in the self-assessment process. The observation of teaching and learning is not sufficient enough. There is little discussion of the quality of teaching and learning at key meetings. The provider has no internal verification strategy and insufficient standardisation of processes and sharing of good assessment practices. **Quality assurance monitoring arrangements for hospitality are inadequate.** Inspectors found many of the weaknesses that the college had identified in the self-assessment report for 2002-03 unresolved. During the inspection, specific key weaknesses were identified in the quality assurance of ICT; hospitality sport and leisure; visual and performing arts, and foundation and family learning.

32. Learners' feedback is used satisfactorily. Learners have many opportunities to give feedback, including the completion of evaluation forms, questionnaires, comments boxes and consultation days. Thurrock Adult Community College makes improvements as a result of this feedback. For example, in ICT, course start times have been changed. In cookery, dressmaking, and art, extra resources have been purchased as a direct result of learners' comments.

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Leadership and management

Strengths

- very productive partnerships
- successful initiatives to promote social inclusion and educational opportunities for under-represented groups

Weaknesses

- insufficient use of data, targets and performance indicators
- ineffective quality assurance arrangements

Information & communications technology

Strengths

- good retention rates on non-accredited courses
- very good pass rates on many accredited courses
- good provision in the community

Weaknesses

- limited range of teaching styles
- incomplete assessment practices
- insufficient use of management information for continuous improvement

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel

Strengths

- effective development of knowledge and skills
- good standard of teaching and learning in cookery classes
- good range of exercise programmes

Weaknesses

- insufficient attention to individual learners' needs in exercise classes
- inadequate accommodation in many exercise classes
- inadequate monitoring of quality assurance arrangements

Visual & performing arts & media

Strengths

- good retention and attendance rates
- good standards of practical work
- good standards of teaching and learning

Weaknesses

- limited range of provision
- inadequate monitoring and recording of learners' progress

English, languages & communications

Strengths

- good retention and achievement rates in modern foreign languages
- good standards of teaching and learning in English
- effective monitoring of learners' progress in English and modern foreign languages

Weaknesses

- limited progression opportunities in modern foreign languages
- poor teaching strategies to develop speaking skills in modern foreign languages

Foundation programmes

Strengths

- good development of learners' confidence and self-esteem
- effective initiatives to engage hard-to-reach learners

Weaknesses

- poor retention rates
- insufficient learners taking accredited qualifications
- significant levels of unsatisfactory teaching and learning
- poor use of individual learning plans
- ineffective quality assurance

Family learning

Strengths

- good retention rates and achievement
- good and very imaginative standards of teaching and learning
- effective curriculum management

Weaknesses

- insufficient monitoring and recording of short-term learning goals
- insufficient accreditation opportunities

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT THURROCK LEA:

- the convenient locations
- the convenient times of the classes
- the friendly, approachable tutors and administrative staff
- opportunities to learn new skills
- going out and meeting new people
- the relevancy of the topics studied
- the sense of achievement that comes from overcoming challenges
- the increased confidence that comes from learning new things
- 'being able to give presents to loved ones as a result of new skills'
- 'questions are never ignored'
- 'the way it helped me get back on track'
- 'the way it helps me with my kids'

WHAT LEARNERS THINK THURROCK LEA COULD IMPROVE:

- the length of courses and classes - both could be longer
- the range of programmes needs to be wider
- the curriculum - provide pre-GCSE classes
- the enrolment situation - restrict multiple enrolments for classes
- the policy on cancelling classes when numbers fall during the year
- the consistency in the quality of handouts
- the number of car parking spaces
- wheelchair access to the garden

KEY CHALLENGES FOR THURROCK LEA:

- ensure a greater focus on improving standards of teaching and learning
- make better use of management information, data and target-setting to support continuous improvement
- further develop and improve the effect of quality assurance arrangements
- improve the quality of provision in the foundation area of learning
- improve the assessment and recording of learners' progress
- make better use of individual learning plans

Language of the Adult and Community Learning Sector

Terminology varies across the range of education and training settings covered by the *Common Inspection Framework*. The table below indicates the terms appropriate to Adult and Community Learning

Single term used in the framework	Relating the term to Adult and Community Learning	
Provider	Provider	Any organisation providing opportunities for adults to meet personal or collective goals through the experience of learning. Providers include local authorities, specialist designated institutions, voluntary and community sector organisations, regeneration partnerships and further education colleges
Learner	Learner	Includes those learning by participating in community projects, as well as those on courses. Learning, however, will be planned, with intended outcomes.
Teacher / trainer	Tutor	Person teaching adult learners or guiding or facilitating their learning.
	Mentor	Person providing individual, additional support, guidance and advice to learners to help them achieve their learning goals.
Learning goals	Main learning goals	Intended gains in skills, knowledge or understanding. Gains may be reflected in the achievement of nationally recognised qualifications. Or they may be reflected in the ability of learners to apply learning in contexts outside the learning situation, e.g. in the family, community, or workplace. Learners' main goal/s should be recorded on an individual or, in some cases, group learning plan. Plans should be revised as progress is made and new goals emerge.
	Secondary learning goals	These may include planned-for gains in self-confidence, and inter-personal skills. These should also be included in learning plans where appropriate.
Personal and learning skills	Personal and learning skills	These include being able to study independently, willingness to collaborate with others, and readiness to take up another opportunity for education or training.

Other terms used in Adult and Community Learning

	Relating the term to Adult and Community Learning
Unanticipated, or unintended learning outcome	Adults often experience unanticipated gains as a result of being involved in learning. These include improved self-esteem, greater self-confidence and a growing sense of belonging to a community. Gains of this kind should be acknowledged and recorded in any record of achievement.
Subject-based programme	A programme organised around a body of knowledge, e.g. the structure and usage of the French language or ceramic glazing techniques. Students could be expected to progress from one aspect of the subject to another, to grasp increasingly complex concepts or analyses or to develop greater levels of skill or to apply skills to a new area of work.
Issue-based programme	A programme that is based on the concerns, interests and aspirations of particular groups, for example members of a Sikh Gurdwara wanting to address inter-faith relations in their town, or parents worried about the incidence of drug abuse in their locality. Issue-based learning tends to be associated with geographically defined communities, but the increasing use of electronic means of communication means that this need no longer be the case. Progress is defined in terms of the group's increasing ability to analyse its situation, to access new information and skills which will help it resolve its difficulties and generate solutions and its growing confidence in dealing with others to implement those solutions.
Outreach provision	Provision established in a community setting in addition to provision made at an organisation's main site(s). Outreach programmes may be similar to courses at the main site(s) or be designed to meet the specific requirements of that community.
Neighbourhood-based work	The provider's staff have a long-term presence in a local community with a specific remit to understand the concerns of the local residents and develop learning activities to meet local needs and interests.
Community regeneration	The process of improving the quality of life in communities by investing in their infrastructure and facilities, creating opportunities for training and employment and tackling poor health and educational under-achievement. Community regeneration requires the active participation of local residents in decision-making. Changes and improvements are often achieved either directly or indirectly as a result of the adult learning activities which arise from this.

Relating the term to Adult and Community Learning	
Community capacity building	The process of enabling local people to develop the knowledge, skills and confidence to take advantage of opportunities for employment, training and further education and to become selfmanaging, sustainable communities.
Active citizenship	The process whereby people recognise the power they have to improve the quality of life for others and make a conscious effort to do so: the process whereby people recognise the power of organisations and institutions to act in the interests of the common good and exercise their influence to ensure that they do so. Adult learning contributes to active citizenship.

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 3

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- very productive partnerships
- successful initiatives to promote social inclusion and educational opportunities for under-represented groups

Weaknesses

- insufficient use of data, targets and performance indicators
- ineffective quality assurance arrangements

33. Thurrock Adult Community College's strategic plan for 2004-07 is clearly linked to other organisation's plans for the locality. It sets out the local context and highlights the low levels of attainment in the area. Thurrock Adult Community College has developed very productive partnerships with an extensive network of organisations within the voluntary and statutory sectors. These provide significant support for the ongoing strategic development of adult and community provision in Thurrock. Several key partners are also members of the college's governing body. Joint strategic planning with the local college of further education helps to develop the provision of courses and avoid any duplication. The development of free, short-duration courses, is one example of Thurrock Adult Community College's links with the many local interest groups and associations. The college also works with the local primary care trust to encourage parents with young children to join literacy, numeracy, or family learning courses.

34. There is a close working relationship within the council, between Thurrock Adult Community College and the LEA. Thurrock Adult Community College's principal is also a member of the LEA's management team, working closely with other principal officers. This enables useful links to be forged between the school sector and adult education. For example, primary and junior schools are successfully used as community venues for adults taking information technology (IT) courses. The development of the family learning provision also directly benefits from these close links. A co-operative effort with the council's neighbourhood services department was designed to raise the literacy and numeracy levels of over 100 employees, some of whom have since progressed to vocational courses.

35. The college's management was restructured in 2003. There is now a strategic leadership team of six, supported by eight curriculum team leaders. The quality of curriculum management is variable throughout the areas of learning. It is good in family learning, with particularly good promotion of the programme to widen participation. In ICT, visual and performing arts and media, and English and modern foreign languages,

curriculum management is satisfactory. For hospitality, sports and leisure, the management and implementation of quality assurance arrangements is unsatisfactory. The curriculum management of foundation programmes is inadequate, with insufficient focus on the quality of teaching and learning. Communications are satisfactory, but attendance at some meetings is poor. All staff have mailboxes and they receive the organisation's newsletters. There are plans to make greater use of e-mail communication.

36. Resources within the areas of learning are satisfactory. Thurrock Adult Community College has made significant improvements to its accommodation, particularly at the Grays Adult Education Centre. Arrangements for the appraisal of support staff and managers are satisfactory. Staff are appraised annually. Progress in achieving objectives and fulfilling personal development plans is reviewed after six months. The process of recording the outcomes of appraisal discussions is not fully effective; records vary in quality.

37. Data is not analysed and used sufficiently for planning and target-setting, either by staff or governors. This weakness was identified in the self-assessment report. There are plans to improve the management information system. At present, senior managers monitor recruitment, retention and attendance data, but there is insufficient analysis of achievements and no targets for improvement. Governors are not sufficiently aware of the quality of Thurrock Adult Community College's provision. They do monitor the extent to which it is meeting its enrolment and income targets, but very little consideration is given to students' achievements or the quality of teaching and learning. Governors have, in their self-assessment report, identified a need to be more aware of issues concerning learners. Within the current year they have established a curriculum and quality assurance committee. The committee has met twice, but it is too soon to judge how effective it may be.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

38. Thurrock Adult Community College uses Thurrock Council's comprehensive equal opportunities policies and procedures, which are amended to suit the context of adult and community learning, including the equal opportunities policy for learners. Staff are fully aware of these policies. They understand their responsibilities and contribute fully to the college's promotion of an ethos of respect and care for learners. Learners receive satisfactory levels of information about the college's policies and procedures. Key information is in the learners' guide, which includes extracts from policies and summary information for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The learners' complaints procedure is clear, well publicised and used effectively to resolve learners' concerns and grievances. There is an up-to-date disability statement and a widely available guide for learners with disabilities. In discussions with inspectors, learners showed a genuine understanding of, and appreciation for, the values of mutual respect and equality of opportunity promoted by the college. A wide range of initiatives and projects is usefully discussed by management, but there is no clear overall strategy to monitor the implementation of equality of opportunity policies and procedures.

39. Equality of opportunity is satisfactorily developed in each of the curriculum areas

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inspected, although inspectors noted few examples of the promotion of equality of opportunity in lessons. At one family learning day, diversity was strongly celebrated, as families were introduced to the cultures of many different countries. A number of valuable staff development sessions discuss aspects of equality of opportunity. For example, the continuing dyslexia awareness programme for tutors, support staff and volunteers provides valuable insight for these groups. However, there is no overall programme of staff development for equality of opportunity.

40. Thurrock Adult Community College has introduced successful initiatives to promote social inclusion and educational opportunities for under-represented groups. Particular emphasis is placed on providing new learning opportunities in the community for adults who would otherwise be excluded from education. Learners talk positively about their re-introduction to formal study, in a welcoming and non-threatening environment. Thurrock Adult Community College has trained a group of community mothers, enabling them to give health, literacy and numeracy support within the home on an individual basis. Programmes designed for women provide a good opportunity for them to build their confidence, develop new skills and progress to further learning opportunities. In family learning, outreach provision is actively promoted and targeted on areas of particular deprivation. Outreach work is also flexibly located; for example, at a traveller site because learners were reluctant to attend a local community venue. In many classes away from the main college venues, parents are provided with childcare support. Crèche facilities are also available at Grays Adult Education Centre.

41. The provider's response to changes in equality of opportunity legislation is satisfactory. The college is in compliance with its duties under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. Good progress has been made in the implementation of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001. A prompt audit of college premises has led to quick action to implement the improvements necessary to comply with the Act. An audit of equipment has been carried out and additional resources, including a good range of adaptive technology for students with learning disabilities, have been purchased.

42. With the exception of enrolment procedures, there is not enough collection and effective use of equality of opportunity-related data. Learners' retention and achievement data, based on ethnic background, gender and age, are not analysed or reported on. The college has started to work towards setting equality of opportunity targets, as part of the equality and diversity impact measures required by the LSC. At the moment, the only a target is to increase the enrolment of minority ethnic learners. The use and review of targets are not established elements in the work of curriculum teams. This weakness is recognised in the provider's self-assessment report.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 4

43. Thurrock Adult Community College has developed satisfactory quality assurance paperwork, which it also shares with its partners in community-based projects. The paperwork is suitably amended for specific groups of learners and reflects the nature and content of some of the community-based provision. A procedures manual details clearly

how to use each document, in terms of scope, timescales and staff responsibilities. Paperwork is closely linked to the learners' progress through their courses. The curriculum and quality assurance working group now reviews and updates this paperwork as a result of feedback from tutors. Examples include the working group's adaptation of a number of forms for use by learners with learning difficulties and disabilities. Tutors receive specific notes about forms that have been amended. The range of documents includes course outlines and learning outcomes, standard lesson plans and schemes of work. Learners complete evaluation forms at regular stages during their courses. The end-of-course evaluations enable tutors to review the strengths and weaknesses of their courses, including retention and achievements. Some curriculum team leaders make good use of these reviews in the self-assessment process. The quality assurance group has sampled the use of quality assurance paperwork within the last 12 months. In many cases, a number of forms have not been completed.

44. Learners' feedback is used satisfactorily. Learners have many opportunities to give feedback, including the completion of evaluation forms, questionnaires, comments boxes and during consultation days. Thurrock Adult Community College makes improvements as a result of this feedback. For example, in ICT, the course start times have been changed. In cookery, and dress-making and art, extra resources have been purchased as a direct result of learners' comments.

45. Quality assurance arrangements have not had sufficient effect on the programme. The self-assessment report is not sufficiently judgmental to identify accurately the strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning. For example, in some programme areas, the weaknesses that have been described are ambiguous and have not been quantified. A number of action points in the development plan are unclear. The development plans for the programme areas do not include actions to build on the strengths and do not resolve all the weaknesses that have been identified. English language and literature courses have not been included in the self-assessment process. The overall college development plan does rectify many of the weaknesses identified in the programme areas, but a number of inconsistencies exist between the college's development plan and the programme area development plans. The development plans do not prioritise improvement activities. Not all staff have been fully involved in the self-assessment process.

46. The observation of teaching and learning is not thorough enough to make improvements to the programme. The timescale for conducting observations is unclear to many managers, ranging from one annual observation to one observation every three years. Some tutors have not been observed. Tutors are not observed across the range of subjects they teach, or at the different centres in which they teach. There is a disproportionate number of observations at the Grays Adult Education Centre compared with the other centres. In 2003-04, 21 lessons were observed at Grays and only two in the Stanford le Hope area.

47. The grade profile given for the observation of teaching and learning is over generous. For example, many lessons have been graded good, or very good where learning outcomes and the content have not been clear, where learners have not

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received adequate support or been challenged appropriately, and where the teaching style has been judged unsuitable for the level and range of learners. In 2002-03, 28 lessons were observed, and of these, 86 per cent were graded good or better. The grade profile of the inspection was 53 per cent of lessons graded good or better. The action plans that follow observations are unsatisfactory; these plans are not always followed through and often contain no dates. Some action plans are unsigned and contain no progress reviews.

48. Thurrock Adult Community College arranges a number of meetings to monitor quality assurance arrangements. These meetings do not concentrate specifically on resolving the weaknesses identified through self-assessment, or effectively review progress. Meetings focus mainly on improving the quality assurance paperwork. At programme area level, most of the meetings do not consider quality improvement issues; there is insufficient discussion of the quality of teaching and learning. The provider has no internal verification strategy and does not standardise processes and sharing of good assessment practice sufficiently. Managers do not set targets for quality improvements. Inspectors found that many of the weaknesses identified by the college in the self-assessment report for 2002-03 still exist. Examples include poor assessment planning in ICT and arts, ineffective use of data in sport and leisure, ineffective use of individual learning plans in foundation and insufficient recording of progress in family learning. During the inspection, specific key weaknesses were identified in quality assurance in ICT, hospitality sport and leisure, visual and performing arts, foundation and family learning.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Information & communications technology

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Adult and community learning	655	3

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- good retention rates on non-accredited courses
- very good pass rates on many accredited courses
- good provision in the community

Weaknesses

- limited range of teaching styles
- incomplete assessment practices
- insufficient use of management information for continuous improvement

Achievement and standards

49. Retention rates are good on non-accredited courses. Since 2000-01, the retention rate for courses has been at least 95 per cent. Retention rose to 100 per cent for 2002-03, but total learner numbers were small. For the current year, 97 per cent of the 155 learners on non-accredited courses have been retained. For accredited courses, overall retention fell from 85 per cent in 2001-02 to 72 per cent last year. For the current year, retention has improved to 91 per cent.

50. Pass rates are very good on most accredited courses. In 2002-03, nearly 75 per cent of learners starting the 30-hour introductory computing course at Thurrock Adult Community College's main learning centres gained a certificate. Other learners who attended the same course at one of the nine outreach centres, as part of the college's widening participation strategy, were equally successful. Seventy-five per cent of learners on the computing qualification course passed all course modules. Learners taking individually accredited modules also did well; 94 per cent were successful. Only 30 per cent learners on the nationally recognised computer course achieved a full certificate, but a further 42 per cent achieved a partial pass.

51. Learners' practical computing skills are satisfactory overall. On the 'getting started' courses, learners have gained the ability to combine text with pictures, and to process and present data in graphic form. Many have overcome an initial hesitancy to use computers and are already choosing their next computer course. More experienced learners demonstrate advanced computer skills, such as the preparation of detailed slide presentations, or the use of database techniques to organise and interrogate complex

data.

Quality of education and training

52. ICT provision in the community is good. The adult education and outreach centres provide good geographical coverage and convenient local access for large numbers of learners. Courses are offered at times that enable learners to attend without compromising family or work commitments. Crèche facilities provide childcare for parents wishing to participate in learning. The 'IT in Schools' project has successfully widened participation in many areas, by contacting the parents and guardians of pupils in junior and primary schools. Courses are offered using the school's own resources in school time. At some outreach centres the college provides laptop computers for learners. The curriculum, while not particularly broad-based, is designed to encourage new learners to try computing through taster and short courses and to progress to accredited courses. Significant numbers of the current learners on courses at level 2 have progressed in this way: some to improve their employment prospects and others to help other family members, or make a contribution to their club or society.

53. The standards of teaching and learning in ICT are generally satisfactory. More teaching sessions were graded satisfactory than were graded good or better. There were no outstanding classes. Only one session was unsatisfactory. During the inspection, the average attendance was 83 per cent and the average class size was seven learners.

54. ICT resources are satisfactory. There are computer suites at each centre, with two at the main site at Grays Adult Education Centre. The latter has air-conditioning, but at the other two adult education centres, rooms become uncomfortably hot in warm weather. Interactive teaching equipment is available in only one computer room at the main college site. Software is industry standard. In one school outreach centre, the chairs are unsuitable for adults and cannot be adjusted to ensure the correct posture for computer users. The computers do not have desktop publishing software, placing some limitations on learners' experience with a range of computer applications. One full-time and 12 part-time tutors support the IT team leader. Staff have appropriate vocational experience and academic qualifications. Eleven staff have, or are working towards, a teaching qualification.

55. Learners value the friendly atmosphere in classes, the helpful staff and the challenge that new learning has brought them. All of those interviewed would recommend the college to others. Learners receive effective guidance and support from qualified staff. The team leader interviews prospective learners on request. Course induction presents a clear introduction to course content, as well as covering the associated health and safety issues. Learners can change course or receive a refund if they feel they are on the wrong course.

56. The range of teaching styles is limited. In most classes, learners work through good-quality study materials with tutor support. Tutors respond quickly to learners' requests for help, but tend to solve learners' problems by providing the solution or demonstrating

it by taking over learners' computers. Learners are not sufficiently involved and their understanding or their ability to apply given solutions to different problems are not checked. In a small number of classes, groups of learners are brought together for a change of activity, for example to revise a topic in preparation for an examination. This works well, but there is not always enough individual questioning. Tutors do not have sufficient access to interactive teaching equipment. However, in one digital photography class good use was made of data projection to demonstrate retouch techniques. Learners then practised on different photographs.

57. The quality of lesson plans is inconsistent. Some do not accurately reflect the activities taking place, others concentrate on the topics to be delivered, rather than identifying what learners should achieve. Few lesson plans successfully reflect the activities of students in the same group working on different modules. Many classes are unstructured. Learners do not often discuss work to be covered at the beginning of sessions and at the end there is often no recap on the progress made.

58. Assessment practices are incomplete. Initial assessments are not applied consistently to courses. On some courses, new learners complete a self-assessment of their computer skills. This is a paper-based exercise rather than a practical audit of skills. The information does not contribute to course delivery. One learner, whose self-assessment showed no previous experience with computers, was allowed to continue on an unsuitable course and made little progress. Learners' work is carefully marked and promptly returned, but does not have sufficient written comment to allow improvement. Learners' progress through their qualification is monitored, but the monitoring systems do not record the learners' levels of competence, relying instead on a tick or a date for the start and completion of each task. There is needless repetition in some monitoring paperwork with some tutors using different forms to record the same information.

59. There is no standard form for learners' individual learning plans. The staff do not understand the use of the plans very well and they are used in different ways by different tutors. Learners do not always keep their individual learning plans or have a copy. The individual learning plan is sometimes used as another way of monitoring progress, rather than planning learners' progress. Internal verification is satisfactory. The curriculum team leader carries out some sampling of assessments. This is done to awarding body standards.

60. Learners' literacy and numeracy skills are not checked systematically. Additional learning support is available and can be requested by the learners themselves or by their tutors. This support is effective and includes access to specialist hardware and software for those with learning difficulties, or physical impairments to learning. Good use is made of volunteers in some classes. These are experienced computer users who help the tutor provide a timely response to learners' requests for help.

Leadership and management

61. Curriculum management in ICT is satisfactory. Communication with tutors is generally effective, although attendance at termly staff meetings is fairly low. Meeting notes are distributed to all staff, but these do not always identify specific actions and completion times in response to issues arising. Attendance at the annual staff conference, for which part-time staff receive payment, is satisfactory. Tutors are encouraged to gain relevant professional training. The college provides financial support for this, in proportion to tutors' teaching hours.

62. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory. Learners are fully aware of their rights and responsibilities and how to make a complaint if they wish to do so. Equal opportunities is not overtly promoted and equal opportunities data is not analysed sufficiently to inform planning and improvements.

63. Management information is not used sufficiently for continuous improvement. A lot of information is collected from students, but not enough is systematically analysed. Progression data is not available and the results of mid- and end-of-course questionnaires are not systematically analysed. Achievements on non-accredited courses are not measured sufficiently. Target-setting is at an early stage of development and insufficient use is made of course-level retention and achievement data in the self-assessment process. The self-assessment report has no evaluation of teaching and learning, but identifies some strengths of the provision in terms of overall retention and student satisfaction. Performance objectives are not set for individual courses or tutors. Observations of teaching staff provide information about the quality of learning sessions, but this does not contribute to formal action-planning to drive improvements.

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel**Grade 3**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Adult and community learning	560	3

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- effective development of knowledge and skills
- good standard of teaching and learning in cookery classes
- good range of exercise programmes

Weaknesses

- insufficient attention to individual learners' needs in exercise classes
- inadequate accommodation in many exercise classes
- inadequate monitoring of quality assurance arrangements

Achievement and standards

64. Learners' knowledge and skills are developed effectively. In sugarcraft classes, their demonstration of moulding, brushing and cutting techniques is good. Learners understand how techniques can be modified to take account of the way warm weather affects food. Learners produce orchids, roses and sprays of flowers to a very good standard. Well-developed skills in Indian cookery classes enable learners to extend their understanding of the techniques required to produce a variety of Indian dishes. A learner in a cake decorating class explained how she had used the techniques and skills she had learnt in class to produce five wonderful 'D-Day' cakes for the residents in the care home in which she worked.

65. In tai chi classes learners demonstrate very effectively the form and skills of tai chi. Their timing of movements and co-ordination are very good. Learners are able to remember long sequences of movements. During yoga classes learners use breathing techniques effectively during concentration and relaxation. Learners in the class described how they use their skills at home.

Quality of education and training

66. Teaching and learning is good in cookery classes. Teachers use a wide range of teaching methods and work effectively with the whole group, sub groups and individual learners. This allows tasks to be well structured and helps facilitate effective learning. Activities are well presented. Effective, individual support for learners is a particularly strong feature of the cookery classes. Frequently tutors negotiate the curriculum with the learners to meet their needs more effectively. There is a lot of effective, independent

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learning. All learners co-operate well, offering useful advice to each other on how to improve the tastes of recipes. During the inspection, the overall grades awarded for the hospitality, sport and leisure sessions were 67 per cent good or better, 22 per cent satisfactory and 11 per cent unsatisfactory.

67. The range of the exercise programme is good, determined by the amount of courses on offer, the good selection of venues used and the varying levels of courses offered. Thirty-nine classes ran in 2001-02, 34 classes in 2002-03 and to date, 41 classes have been delivered in 2003-04. Yoga represents 31 per cent of the exercise provision, tai chi 38 per cent, and fitness and games 31 per cent. Although 58 per cent of the exercise provision is at beginner level, there is also a significant number of courses at intermediate level. There are more advanced classes in yoga and badminton. Learners aged over 50 also have access to a good range of provision.

68. Standards of teaching and learning on the exercise programme is generally satisfactory. However, in some classes tutors do not focus on the development of learners' individual needs. A lot of the teaching is to whole groups with limited use of alternative exercises. Learners unable to perform at the required level are often not offered an alternative. Some planning for teaching and learning does not take sufficient account of the varying ability levels in groups. New learners find it difficult to join in the learning activity when planning does not adequately accommodate them.

69. Assessment are generally satisfactory. Assessment reports about learners' skill levels are compiled, together with group and individual learning outcomes. However, these are not always used sufficiently to plan lessons or to individualise learning programmes. Reports about learners' progress are not sufficiently detailed. Teachers simply tick off learning outcomes when they have been achieved. Often, this is for the whole group at the beginning, middle and end of the programme. Group learning outcomes are routinely sent to the curriculum leader, but there is little evidence of how these outcomes are used in action-planning and the improvement cycle.

70. Accommodation is inadequate in many exercise classes. In 33 per cent of the exercise classes observed, accommodation was unsatisfactory. These classes are often disturbed by noise from adjoining rooms, have dirty floors and very high temperatures in warm weather. One class was delayed because a key was not available to open windows to cool the room. In another class, the relaxation part of the lesson was disrupted because the lights could not be turned off. A number of rooms have inadequate blinds and very high temperatures and glare on sunny days.

71. Information, advice and guidance for the programme is satisfactory.

Leadership and management

72. Learners' feedback is used satisfactorily. Learners have many opportunities to give feedback and there are examples of how improvements have been made as a result.

73. Communication with tutors is satisfactory and they receive satisfactory support.

Tutors are suitably qualified and experienced. Staff development opportunities are available for them. An annual conference is held which tutors find useful, although attendance is variable.

74. Staff awareness of equality of opportunity issues is satisfactory, although they do not receive enough training in equality of opportunity issues. Learners understand their rights and are aware how to make a complaint should the need arise. There is little evidence that equality of opportunity is actively promoted. For example, curriculum area course outlines which are routinely sent to learners do not promote equal opportunities sufficiently. The outlines are not available in languages other than English and few illustrations of learners with particular needs, or from under-represented groups.

75. Observations of teaching and learning do take place, but the observation scheme is not thorough enough. The commentary on feedback forms is often a narrative, with insufficient key judgements. Action plans proposed for staff as a result of the observations have insufficient detail and are often not signed or dated. Judgements about the quality of teaching and learning in the exercise classes are over generous. The self-assessment report does not adequately identify key strengths and weaknesses. Management information and achievement data is not used sufficiently in the improvement cycle.

76. This area of learning has a wide range of quality assurance paperwork procedures which are being implemented by managers and tutors. However the monitoring of these arrangements is often inadequate and is not thorough enough. For example, although safe working practices are risk-assessed across the area of learning, the procedures are not monitored sufficiently in exercise classes. Fourteen per cent of the exercise classes have no health screening. In many classes tutors are using their own forms to screen learners before exercise begins. Some forms are undated, unsigned and lack the necessary detail to demonstrate fully that risks have been adequately assessed. Also, risk assessments are not updated as conditions change. For example, rooms with very poor ventilation in hot weather have not been assessed for this risk. In cookery classes, risk assessment and monitoring is satisfactory.

Visual & performing arts & media**Grade 2**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Adult and community learning	641	2

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- good retention and attendance rates
- good standards of practical work
- good standards of teaching and learning

Weaknesses

- limited range of provision
- inadequate monitoring and recording of learners' progress

Achievement and standards

77. Retention rates are good on most courses, with an average retention rate of 92 per cent. Attendance is also good and during the inspection was 83 per cent.

78. Learners on art and craft courses achieve a good standard of practical work. They benefit significantly from acquiring and developing a good range of new skills and make good use of these skills for the benefit of their family and friends. One learner was able to make good-quality curtains for her daughter's home, as a result of attending a soft-furnishing class. In a mixed craft class, learners produce well-made cards and boxes. Learners are enthusiastic about the progress they make and their growing self-confidence, they gain good personal and social benefits from the classes. Many learners are elderly and are experiencing difficulties with retirement, illness and bereavement. They greatly value the contact they have with other learners and speak highly of the therapeutic value of being able to get out of their homes, meet similar people and learn new skills. Learners often arrive early for classes and are reluctant to leave.

Quality of education and training

79. Standards of teaching and learning are good. Inspectors graded 70 per cent of the teaching sessions observed as good or better and 30 per cent as satisfactory, with no unsatisfactory teaching observed. Tutors prepare well and have a good, coherent overview of what they want to achieve with learners. They also plan well for learners with different abilities. Tutors have good working relationships with learners, which adds significantly to the learning experience. In many classes tutors provide expert demonstrations, which are well supported with informative handouts which enable learners to complete projects at home. Learning activities are usually demanding and

fully engage the learners. In one watercolour class, learners were delighted to discover how shaving pastels onto wet surfaces gives texture to paintings. Learners benefit a great deal from the individual attention given to them. They are also able to work independently and use materials and specialist equipment with confidence. Significant progress is made by new learners and there are good opportunities for more experienced learners to extend and develop their skills and knowledge. Where opportunities arise, learners enjoy sharing their progress and achievements with their peers. All tutors are experienced and demonstrate great enthusiasm for their subjects.

80. Most of the accommodation and resources are satisfactory. Rooms at the Grays Adult Education Centre site are pleasant and well maintained, with up-to-date specialist equipment, particularly for soft furnishing and dressmaking classes. At the Stanford le Hope site, the dedicated room for watercolour painting is too small for the number of learners attending. The dedicated art room at South Ockendon is uncomfortable on a hot day and there have been problems in having the kiln serviced. Venues are clearly sign posted and access for learners with disabilities is generally good. Many of the tutors do not have advanced qualifications in their subjects, many having become tutors as a result of attending classes similar to those attended by learners. However, this does not disadvantage the learners. Nearly all tutors have initial teacher training qualifications.

81. Support for learners is satisfactory. Hearing loops are available for hearing impaired learners and tutors are sensitive to the importance of being able to lip-read where learners do not wish to use the technology. Recently acquired magnifiers support learning in embroidery and other classes that require close and detailed work. Special paintbrush holders are available, as are variable height ironing boards. Learners are advised not to purchase specific, and sometimes expensive, materials and tools until they have decided that they wish to continue with the class. Most of the course information is appropriate. The provision for literacy, numeracy and language support is satisfactory.

82. The range of the provision is largely historical and is currently limited. Although there is a good range of art classes, there are virtually no dance, drama or music classes. None of the programmes are accredited, so there are no opportunities to formally recognise achievements. Formal opportunities for progression are also limited. In some classes learners annually re-enrol and access for some new learners is restricted. Learners expressed resentment at absentee learners being enrolled for classes by their friends, especially where the number of places is restricted.

83. The monitoring of learners' progress is inadequate. Learners' needs or learning outcomes are not formally identified or recorded. Although learners receive a lot of informal feedback about their progress, this is not usually recorded in any significant way and is not used sufficiently in curriculum planning. A lot of the learners' work is photographed but little use is made of this photographic evidence. Assessment records are often descriptive and not sufficiently evaluative.

Leadership and management

84. Two managers have recently been appointed, one of whom is responsible for the craft provision, the other for visual and performing arts. Both have additional responsibilities for managing other areas of learning. Communications are good between managers and tutors. Effective initiatives have been introduced to share good practice by establishing curriculum quality circle groups, which tutors find useful. Part-time staff are paid to attend such meetings. Complaints by learners are effectively investigated and resolved. Quality assurance systems are being implemented and are generally satisfactory. Teaching and learning observations take place regularly but subsequent action-planning is often not precise enough. The self-assessment report is not evaluative enough, although the weaknesses identified by inspectors were identified.

85. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory. Learners clearly understand their rights and responsibilities. They are fully aware of the complaints procedure. None of the classes reflect the ethnic diversity in the area and most of the learners are women.

English, languages & communications**Grade 3**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Adult and community learning	478	3

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- good retention and achievement rates in modern foreign languages
- good standards of teaching and learning in English
- effective monitoring of learners' progress in English and modern foreign languages

Weaknesses

- limited progression opportunities in modern foreign languages
- poor teaching strategies to develop speaking skills in modern foreign languages

Achievement and standards

86. Retention and achievement rates are good in modern foreign languages. This is identified as a strength in the self-assessment report. Retention rates have been rising on modern foreign language courses. In 2000-01, 74 per cent of learners completed their courses. This increased to 78 per cent in 2001-02 and to 83 per cent in 2002-03. Achievement rates are good and improving, with 67 per cent of learners achieving an external qualification in 2002-03, a rise of 26 per cent from 2000-01. Retention, achievement and attendance for English courses are satisfactory. Attendance for modern foreign language courses at the time of inspection was low, at 64 per cent.

Quality of education and training

87. Standards of teaching and learning in English are good. Tutors show a high level of competence in the subject and a clear understanding of the requirements of the GCSE examination. Lessons are well planned and structured with a good variety of exercises and a clear focus on the final assessment. Resources are used well to interest learners and to help prepare them for the examination. However, some of the learning materials are not modified sufficiently to ensure that they meet the needs of all learners. Regular and effective checking of learning and clear and helpful responses to learners' questions extend their understanding and learning. All learners are consistently and fully engaged in the tasks set and clearly enjoy learning. They are working at, or above, the required standard. For example, they are able to give a clear analysis and explanation of poetry extracts, demonstrating a good understanding and use of technical terms and structures.

88. A good assessment framework is in place for modern foreign languages matched with the assessment criteria for the OCN qualifications. It is used consistently by tutors

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to record learners' progress towards achievement of each credit. A cohesive approach to assessment has been adopted, with all courses at the same level using the same modules; there is a move to greater consistency with the gradual standardisation of tasks across languages and levels. Tasks are carefully selected to enable learners to meet the assessment criteria for each module and are well matched with the criteria. However, there is not enough formal, initial assessment of learners' skills before entry to courses.

89. Resources in the centres visited are generally satisfactory. Classrooms are clean and well decorated and in one centre there are displays of foreign language materials in the classroom. Tutors in English and modern foreign languages have easy access to whiteboards, overhead projectors, tape and video cassette recorders. There is a resource bank of materials for use with the open college network (OCN) accreditation scheme in foreign languages. IT is not used sufficiently as a teaching tool. Fifty-six per cent of tutors in modern foreign languages and all English tutors have a teaching qualification. Tutors in English have attended a useful training session offered by the examination board, but do not have sufficient opportunities to update their teaching skills.

90. Learners' progress in English and modern foreign languages is monitored effectively. Initial and diagnostic assessments are available for English courses, although some learners have elected to enter GCSE classes without being previously assessed. In GCSE English, each learner's written work is assessed and referenced against the GCSE criteria. Tutors complete a weekly progress review and use it to enhance the learners' self-development. Assignments show enthusiasm and engagement with the topics. Marking is detailed, with thorough and helpful comments for learners. Assignments are followed up on an individual basis and learners report that this greatly helps their progress.

91. The range of courses is satisfactory. Seventy-four courses were provided in 2003-04, in French, German, Italian, Mandarin Chinese, Portuguese and Spanish. Good opportunities exist to take external accreditation, with 92 per cent of these courses leading to qualifications. However, they are mainly at beginner or near beginner level, with only one course each in Mandarin Chinese and Spanish at intermediate level, and one French course at advanced level.

92. Support for learners is satisfactory. Learners are well supported individually in lessons and staff routinely contact absentees. Learners are able to identify any additional learning needs on the enrolment form and on the individual learners' profile which they complete at the beginning of their learning programmes. Pre-course information is comprehensive with a clear description of the content and level of skill required. In modern foreign languages it is standardised for each language and level. The information in the course directory is sufficiently detailed to allow learners to self-select their course. Senior members of staff are available on a regular basis to advise learners about courses.

93. Teaching strategies to extend learners' speaking skills in modern foreign languages are poor. In many lessons, tutors do not routinely use the taught language in the classroom and do not encourage learners sufficiently to use it. There is an over-reliance on the use of English and a reluctance to use the foreign language spontaneously as the language of the classroom for simple oral exchanges between the tutor and other

learners. Pair and small group work are not used enough to enable learners to practise their speaking skills. Learners are hesitant in speaking a recently learnt language and in some cases are only able to respond to questions using words and phrases, not full sentences. However, in the better lessons, learners are able to converse in simple, accurate language. For example, in one lesson learners were able to accurately reproduce the phrases needed to give directions and talk about the weather. The development of learners' listening, reading and writing skills is satisfactory.

Leadership and management

94. Curriculum management is generally satisfactory. Tutors are generally well supported and managers and staff communicate regularly either by e-mail, by telephone, personal contact or register folders. Meetings during each term enable tutors to discuss quality issues and share good practice. These are well attended by tutors in modern foreign languages. An annual staff conference is useful to tutors and is used for generic staff training purposes. There have been some difficulties in the management of the English programmes. Since September 2003, English GCSE has been managed within the foundation area of learning and AS English literature has been managed within the humanities area of learning.

95. Staff awareness of equality of opportunity issues is satisfactory. In the classroom, hearing loops are made available for learners with hearing impairments. Learners with mobility problems speak well of the efforts made by staff to ensure their full integration into the learning process. Staff do not receive enough equal opportunities training.

96. A number of procedures assure the quality of the area of learning and these are applied consistently. Learners' views are systematically gathered both mid-term and at the end of term. Tutors conduct a paper-based review of the languages programme, but there is only limited evidence that changes take place as a result, although one class is being relocated to another centre because of tutor and learner feedback. This year there have been only six observations of teaching and learning in this area of learning, of which three were graded. Areas for improvement are identified on the action plan with a review date specified. However, there is no staff training to address the development issues and no languages-specific training to improve the quality of teaching and learning. No targets are set for retention or achievement. The self-assessment report does not include any information about BSL, or English. Tutors do not have sufficient involvement in the production of the report.

Foundation programmes

Grade 4

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Adult and community learning	429	4

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- good development of learners’ confidence and self-esteem
- effective initiatives to engage hard-to-reach learners

Weaknesses

- poor retention rates
- insufficient learners taking accredited qualifications
- significant levels of unsatisfactory teaching and learning
- poor use of individual learning plans
- ineffective quality assurance

Achievement and standards

97. The programme allows good development of learners’ confidence and self-esteem. Learners are able to clearly describe their learning outcomes and the progress they are making towards their goals. They develop self-confidence in their ability to use numbers, in their literacy skills and in speaking English. They produce good standards of work. For example, in a numeracy lesson learners worked confidently as a group when reviewing their errors in a practise test paper. In a good ESOL lesson, learners spoke confidently when reading aloud to the group. As learners’ skills improve, their self-esteem increases. On the ‘new directions for women’ programme, learners are actively engaged in their sessions and the very good standard of work they produce helps them to develop a positive self-image. They develop the confidence to move to further education and training.

98. Retention rates are poor, particularly on numeracy and ESOL programmes. On numeracy programmes in 2002-03, only 43 per cent of learners were retained on the ‘improve your mathematics’ programme and 40 per cent were retained on the ‘prepare for GCSE mathematics’ programme. Retention rates are also poor for ESOL programmes and decreasing, at 57 per cent in 2000-01, 52 per cent in 2001-02 and 50 per cent in 2002-03. For literacy and numeracy programmes overall retention is 70 per cent for 2000-01, 63 per cent in 2001-02 and 70 per cent in 2002-03. In the current year retention and attendance rates are poor.

99. Few learners gain externally accredited qualifications. Of the 164 learners who started an ESOL programme in 2001-02, only 12 per cent gained a qualification, and of the 238 learners who were on programmes in 2002-03, 16 per cent gained a

qualification. In 2001-02, 9 per cent of the 212 learners on literacy or numeracy programmes gained a qualification. This increased slightly in 2002-03 to 15 per cent. The provider has been slow to introduce the national tests in literacy and numeracy. Some tutors do not prepare learners for qualifications sufficiently. Learners with learning difficulties do not have the opportunity to gain nationally recognised qualifications.

Quality of education and training

100. Initiatives to engage disadvantaged learners are very effective. The 'new directions for women' programme has been successful in informing and encouraging women to return to learning, enabling them to develop confidence and new skills. In partnership with the primary care trust the 'community mums' programme has successfully targeted women to develop their understanding of health matters and at the same time to develop literacy and numeracy skills. Nine women progressed to programmes at Thurrock Adult and Community College and gained qualifications in literacy. A further six women are now taking level 3 basic skills teaching programmes at the local college of further education. They receive particularly good support and mentoring.

101. Overall support for learners is satisfactory. Learners are screened for dyslexia if appropriate and detailed support plans are developed. Some tutors do not plan sufficiently for the use of volunteers or support staff in sessions for learners with learning difficulties.

102. A significant proportion of teaching and learning is unsatisfactory, with 36 per cent of the lessons observed graded unsatisfactory or poor. In sessions that were less than satisfactory, learners' individual needs were not taken into account sufficiently when planning the lesson. Tutors do not place sufficient emphasis on the development of skills, and give poor explanations of salient points. In these sessions tutors do not use stimulating teaching methods or activities to encourage learners' participation and maintain their interest. Many sessions use dull and uninspiring paper-based resources. In one unsatisfactory ESOL lesson teaching was dull, and learners did not practise their speaking skills sufficiently. In a literacy session, the tutor did not plan adequately for all the learners who attended the session, and gave them very poor and inappropriate worksheets to complete. One gapped exercise given to learners was on a quarter of an A4 page torn from a photocopied sheet. Learners' work was inadequately corrected and learning standards were poor. Not enough staff have level 4 teaching qualifications or appropriate specialist qualifications, and skills to teach literacy, numeracy, ESOL or students with learning difficulties. Only six tutors have received external skills for life training.

103. The use of individual learning plans is poor. Diagnostic assessments are not used sufficiently to plan learning goals and targets. In many learning plans, the evaluation of individual learning goals is poor and the amendments to individual learning plans set inappropriate targets for some learners. Although activities are recorded, learners' progress is not monitored enough. The evaluation and co-ordination of learning is poor for some of the learners who attend multiple sessions. Tutors do not work together well

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enough to ensure that levels of learning are adequately evaluated. Learners who attend for more than one session each week have several individual learning plans with different targets and the evaluation of learning is not co-ordinated sufficiently. Learners do not understand the learning links between the sessions.

Leadership and management

104. The promotion and monitoring of equality of opportunity is satisfactory. A range of physical resources have been purchased for learners with sensory impairments, or physical disabilities. Examples include a loop system for learners with hearing impairments; screen readers for learners with visual impairments and adjustable height tables for wheelchair users. Staff have been offered training in awareness of dyslexia.

105. The quality assurance arrangements are ineffective and have not resulted in continuous improvement in standards of teaching and learning. The lesson observation system is not thorough enough and some sessions are graded too high. Insufficient action is taken on issues identified in observations. Tutors are not observed throughout the range of subjects and settings they teach in and recently appointed tutors and many tutors on the learning difficulties programme have not been formally observed. Course reviews and satisfaction surveys are not used effectively to improve the provision. The self-assessment report is detailed and identifies many of the weaknesses found by inspectors, but the development plan has not adequately identified actions to rectify serious weaknesses. Internal verification procedures are incomplete. There are no arrangements for internal verifiers to observe the assessment of speaking and reading, and arrangements for the assessment of non-accredited courses are weak. Target-setting is not systematic and the data produced is not used adequately to improve retention and achievement rates. Progression data is not routinely collated or analysed.

106. Thurrock LEA has no clear policy or strategy statement for the development of literacy and numeracy skills throughout the provision. Communication are satisfactory and curriculum quality meetings are used to share information and good practice. However, attendance at team meetings is low and there has been only one meeting of the learning difficulty team, when no more than 50 per cent of staff attended. Minutes of meetings do not contain sufficiently specific and attributable actions for staff and managers.

Family learning**Grade 2**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Adult and community learning	323	2

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- good retention rates and achievement
- good and very imaginative standards of teaching and learning
- effective curriculum management

Weaknesses

- insufficient monitoring and recording of short-term learning goals
- insufficient accreditation opportunities

Achievement and standards

107. Retention rates and achievement are good on family learning courses. The retention for the 28 courses provided in 2003-04 is 99 per cent. Family learning programmes enable good achievement levels for learners' personal goals. Many learners who have had little formal contact with education, speak of their increased confidence in their own learning skills. As well as developing a more positive attitude to learning, many parents now play a greater part in their children's learning and in school activities. In some classes the standard of project work is exceptional. In one family literacy class, a learner produced a story box and board game for her children, which was of outstanding quality. Another had produced an excellent story box, made entirely of glazed confectionery. Other learners in craft sessions produce high-quality learning materials for their families and speak of their sense of achievement when using them with their children. Progression from family learning programmes is good. Learners enrol on further family learning courses and on other courses such as pre-GCSE English, 'improve your mathematics' and a range of ICT courses. Other learners have progressed to become school governors and school helpers.

Quality of education and training

108. Standards of teaching and learning on family learning courses are good and teaching is very imaginative. Seventy-three per cent of lessons observed were good, or better and there was no unsatisfactory teaching. Tutors are enthusiastic and create a positive learning environment. Lessons are very well prepared. Tutors liaise with school teaching staff to ensure that the family learning programmes meet the needs of adult learners and children. Tutors prepare stimulating learning activities that successfully engage parents and children in learning. For example, in a one-day course at a primary

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school, tutors successfully introduced the topic of 'working with your children' to 48 learners, using imaginative and relevant tasks for parents and children. In many lessons there is good contextual learning and in the best sessions tutors give carefully planned differentiated tasks to learners. For example, in a short course, 'designing your child's bedroom', all learners were introduced to design and numeracy tasks in a highly imaginative manner, with activities at an appropriate range of levels. Head teachers in schools where family learning courses are established, speak very positively of the benefits from involvement in the school.

109. Resources are generally satisfactory. In craft sessions there are adequate supplies of consumable resources and learners are given the necessary equipment and materials to enable them to complete their assignments. In some learning centres there are crèche facilities, which enable learners with pre-school children to attend courses. The family learning accommodation at Grays Adult Education Centre has been re-developed and refurbished to a very good standard and the resources provided are also good. However, some accommodation is unsatisfactory and cramped and in some schools the furniture is unsuitable for adult learners. Staff are well qualified and experienced and have been recruited from a wide variety of backgrounds, which enables a variety of approaches to the teaching of family learning.

110. Guidance and support for learners is satisfactory. Tutors give effective academic and personal support to learners. Although the short courses do not have any established additional learning support, learners with language, literacy and other support needs are referred to specialist services or other relevant provision.

111. Short-term learning goals are not monitored sufficiently. Although group objectives are monitored and recorded, insufficient attention is given to the monitoring and recording of learners' short-term learning goals. Where these goals are recognised, they are not always adequately recorded. Some learners' progress is recorded using recently introduced quality assurance procedures, but there are inconsistencies in understanding and using them. In some lessons tutors use the forms to give detailed records of learners' progress, while in others the information is too brief.

112. Family learning courses are non accredited and most are short-term. Currently there are not enough opportunities for learners who wish to progress to longer, accredited courses in family learning.

Leadership and management

113. The family learning curriculum is effectively managed. Managers have a strong commitment to the promotion of family learning and a good knowledge of local communities. They are fully aware of the needs of learners, most whom are returning to learning for the first time and have no previous qualifications. The family learning team effectively targets disadvantaged and hard-to-reach learners. In 2002-03, 142 learners were on 33 courses and currently, in 2003-04, 323 learners are on 58 mainly short-term courses; these include family activity days and workshops, short taster sessions, pre-school projects and after-school projects. Managers have very effective partnerships with

schools and other community organisations. Family learning is provided at a good range of schools and other community venues. The family learning activity days are very well organised and particularly successful in attracting new learners. One activity day observed by inspectors, attracted over 35 learners and their children.

114. Managers are very flexible in their approach. As an example, when a group of learners was unable to attend a local community venue, managers moved the course to a travellers' site and adjusted the teaching methods to ensure that learners could participate. Another very successful course was held in a part of Thurrock which traditionally has little adult education provision and where learners are very reluctant to attend any courses. Communications with staff are good and there are regular meetings to discuss curriculum issues and to share good practice. There are good opportunities for staff development and all staff are encouraged in further professional development.

115. Quality assurance is satisfactory. The quality assurance paperwork is comprehensive and thorough, although there are some inconsistencies in the way forms are completed. In a few cases it is not clear how the end course reviews of short courses are used for curriculum planning. The observation of teaching and learning scheme is satisfactory, feedback to tutors is effective and contributes towards developmental strategies. All new tutors are observed within the first term and managers provide good support to them.

116. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory. In all classes tutors demonstrate a good awareness of equality of opportunity by their inclusive teaching styles, and all staff have a strong commitment to widen participation by their communities. In craft and ICT classes, modified equipment is available for learners with motor and other physical disabilities. Although cultural diversity is well celebrated in the family action days, currently there is little overt promotion of equal opportunities in the curriculum. Most learners are aware of their rights and responsibilities and the complaints procedure in family learning is effective. Not many men or people from minority ethnic groups take part in family learning programmes but managers and staff are developing strategies to attract these groups.