

West Suffolk College

Inspection report

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Name of lead inspector: Ian Seath HMI

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Type of provider: General Further Education College

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Information about the provider

1. West Suffolk College is a medium-sized general further education college. The main campus is located in the market town of Bury St Edmunds in East Anglia and serves a large and rural catchment area. The college has six local learning centres in other towns and villages in the area. Many of the college's students live in rural locations with poor transport links. Student numbers have increased significantly since the last inspection, mainly within full-time vocational provision. The college has beacon status and is involved in three Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) in management, health and social care, and construction. It also holds the Training Quality Standard in 7 vocational areas. The college offers general and vocational training and education from foundation to higher education in all subject areas. Work-based learning provision is extensive, including around 3,500 Train to Gain (T2G) learners. This is complemented by a large 14 to16 programme offered in collaboration with several partner schools. The college currently offers a 14 -19 diploma in construction, and plans to expand this provision are well advanced.
2. In 2008/9, 35% of students were aged between 16 and 18. Of these, just over half were enrolled onto long courses. For students aged 19 and over, this proportion was around 70%. The largest category of provision for adults was foundation level, whereas for those aged 16-18 it was advanced level, including extensive National Diploma provision. Around 6% of the college's students classify themselves as non-white British.
3. The area served by the college has few large employers. It is not an area of extensive unemployment or deprivation, although there are pockets that are comparable with the most deprived in eastern England. The proportion of students gaining 5 or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C including English and mathematics within Suffolk is just below the national average for England. The college's mission statement is "to provide excellent education and training which develops skills that contribute to the success of the individual and the economy" All government funded provision was inspected and four subject areas were inspected in depth.

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2008/09
Provision for young learners: 14 to16	783 part-time learners
Further education (16 to18)	2,099 full-time learners 143 part-time learners
Foundation learning, including	591 full-time learners

Entry to Employment	91 full-time learners
Provision for adult learners: Further education (19+)	740 full-time learners 2,427 part-time learners
Employer provision: Train to Gain Apprenticeships	4,139 learners 1,119 apprentices

Summary report

Grades: 1 is outstanding; 2 is good; 3 is satisfactory; 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 2
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Capacity to improve	Grade 2
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	Grade
Outcomes for learners	2
Quality of provision	2
Leadership and management	2
Safeguarding	2
Equality and diversity	2

Subject areas	Grade
Health and social care	1
Construction	1
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	1
Visual arts and media	2

Overall effectiveness

4. The college's overall effectiveness is good. It has maintained its strong performance and is very well regarded amongst the communities that it serves. It has demonstrated a good capacity to improve since the last inspection through remedying the issues that were identified. However, some aspects judged outstanding at the last inspection are now good. Outcomes have remained high, but with a dip in 2008/09. Early indications are that this is once again improving in the current year.

5. Learners make overall good progress both in class and throughout their time at the college. They develop good vocational skills quickly and use them safely. Learners have a strong and confident voice within the college. Teaching and learning are good with effective planning of classes. However the results of learners' initial assessment of support needs are not always sufficiently detailed for them to be used effectively in class. The college's lesson observation system

is comprehensive but its outcomes are not used systematically to inform the planning of professional development. It pays insufficient attention to learning.

6. The college provides an exceptionally good range of courses so that progression routes are well developed. It responds to the needs and interests of learners and employers exceptionally well. In large part this is due to a number of satellite centres in other regional towns. A number of imaginative ventures encourage learners who may not otherwise achieve to do so, for example, through the college's innovative sports academy. The college attracts significant numbers of disadvantaged and difficult to reach learners because of its very effective presence in the local community and the good care, guidance and support it provides.
7. Leadership and management remain strong. A clear direction is provided by exceptional governance that challenges and supports the college effectively. The principal receives good support from capable and experienced managers at all levels. However, some aspects of planning lack precision.

Main findings

- The college has maintained high success rates since the last inspection. In 2008/09 they declined markedly but remained above national averages. For advanced courses, retention fell to just below national average for those aged 16 to 18. Success rates for apprenticeships are around the national average and for those on Train to Gain programmes they are high.
- Learners make progress that is just above national averages. In lessons, they acquire vocational skills quickly and are soon able to apply them well. Learners develop excellent economic and social well-being. Most choose to progress to higher education or to employment. They develop good skills of literacy and numeracy because of the effective support they receive in these areas.
- Well planned lessons engage and motivate learners through a wide range of resources and activities. Technology is used with increasing effectiveness to enhance learning, build confidence and create lively and enjoyable lessons.
- Learners develop good vocational skills through practical sessions. Interesting theory lessons and clear feedback mean that learners know how to improve. Resources to support learning are good and teachers are well qualified. However, initial assessment is not sufficiently detailed and limits teachers' ability to plan and assess for learning that meets individual learners' needs.
- The college makes insufficient use of the outcomes from the observation of teaching and learning to share good practice across curriculum areas and focus staff development on teaching strategies that are identified as areas for development.
- The wide range of provision covers most subjects from entry to advanced level and higher education, with a particular emphasis on vocational education. The college responds quickly and flexibly to employer requests. The enrichment

programme engages learners in a wide range of activities that further develop the learner's vocational and personal knowledge.

- Partnership arrangements are highly effective. The partnership with local schools has very successfully developed a wider curriculum for local learners. Learners benefit greatly from employer partnership arrangements. The very close links with community groups widen the accessibility of provision to learners across the county including those who might not normally take part in education or training.
- Initial advice is good so that almost all learners remain on their first choice of course. Support needs are evaluated well and put into place promptly. Induction arrangements enable learners to settle in quickly. The monitoring of the effectiveness of support is not always systematic. Learners benefit from a comprehensive range of support resources and expertise.
- Leadership and management are good. Strategic planning is comprehensive and aligns well to local and regional priorities. The college's values of respect, support, value, praise and pride (RSVP&P) contribute to a supportive and open culture that promotes high standards. Curriculum management is strong. The exceptionally high outcomes achieved in previous years were not sustained in 2008/09.
- Governance is outstanding. Governors are highly supportive and provide good levels of challenge to senior managers. They are proactive in gaining understanding of students' educational experience through productive faculty links. Governors monitoring of the college's academic performance and finances is highly effective. Financial management remains excellent. Resources are deployed exceptionally well, contributing to outstanding overall value for money.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The achievement gap between different groups is negligible. Promotion through the curriculum is good and improving. Action plans to monitor the promotion of equality and diversity are reviewed frequently although not all timescales and targets are sufficiently precise to enable the college to measure the impact of its actions effectively.
- Quality improvement arrangements and self-assessment are good. At curriculum level, they are used effectively to monitor course performance closely. The whole college self-assessment is broadly accurate but not all judgments are sharp enough and a few strengths are overstated. The college's quality improvement plan is monitored frequently; however, not all targets have clear success criteria.

What does name of West Suffolk College need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that indications of improving retention rates are sustained and consolidated into improving success rates.
- Improve initial assessment practices to enable teachers to plan and assess for learning that meets individual learners' needs.

- Focus the observation of teaching and learning on learning, and analyse the outcomes to better inform the sharing of good practice and training in teaching and learning strategies.
- Ensure that all relevant targets or success criteria include precise timescales that enable the college to measure the impact of all its actions more effectively; make sure judgments, strengths and areas for improvement in the whole college self-assessment are more precise.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- the good teaching and learning
- the college campus
- the friendly and welcoming atmosphere
- teachers who are knowledgeable, approachable and supportive
- being treated fairly and with respect
- the good support and encouragement given by all staff.

What learners would like to see improved:

- the range and quality of the food served in the canteen and the prices
- the lack of sufficient parking and the cost of it
- the lack of seating in social areas.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- that the college meets employers' training needs
- very good communication with employers
- flexible and accommodating to meet the needs of the employer
- good involvement in reviewing learner progress.

What employers would like to see improved:

- more regular updates on students' progress for a few employers
- too much paperwork on enrolment and procedures for receiving and returning assignments.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 2

8. Capacity to improve is good. The principal and governors set a clear direction for the college. An open and positive culture exists that embraces the college's core values around respect and high expectations. Staff are very committed to the college and its students. Success rates have remained consistently high over time, despite a marked dip in 2008/09. Many strengths identified at the last inspection have been maintained and good progress has been made in rectifying areas for improvement. However, not all aspects found outstanding at the previous inspection have been sustained at the same high standard.
9. Quality improvement arrangements are effective although target setting sometimes lacks precision. The process of self assessment is well structured and is very effective at course and curriculum level. The college's overall self-assessment is largely accurate but overplays some strengths and underplays others such as sustainability. The college is responsive to the views of employers and learners to help secure improvement. Resources are exceptionally well managed and financial management continues to be outstanding. Governance is strong and governors provide high levels of challenge and encouragement and know what the college need to do to improve.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 2

10. The college has consistently maintained overall success rates above national averages for many years although significant declines in long course success rates were evident in 2008/09. Whilst most success rates remained above national averages, the gap was reduced to mostly single figures for those aged 16 to 18. Retention for these learners declined to just below national average for advanced level courses. Overall success rates for learners aged 19+ declined in 2008/09, though to a lesser extent than for other learners because their retention was better. The large number of pupils aged 14 to 16 on vocational provision demonstrate high rates of progression to post-16 education or training.
11. Learners on employer responsive provision in apprenticeships demonstrate an overall success rate close to national average, although much variation exists between subject areas. This is due in part to the significant numbers who have become unemployed due to the current recession. Those on Train to Gain provision achieve high success rates and most complete their qualifications on time. Differences in the success rates of males and females or between those of different ethnic heritage are minimal.
12. Despite the decline in achievements and standards in 2008/09, there are encouraging early signs of improvement. College data show overall in-year retention has improved in 2010, and early indications are that success rates will

improve as a result. Attendance, which has always been high, has improved further. Since the last inspection the college has made good progress in the development of a system to monitor the progress made by learners. Throughout the college, those at risk of underachieving are identified quickly so that appropriate action can be taken.

13. Where it can be measured, the college's data indicate that learners make progress that is just above national averages overall though it is very variable between subjects and curriculum areas. The majority of learners make good progress in class. In practical and vocational sessions they acquire skills quickly and soon become proficient in applying them. Learners' development of economic and social well-being is excellent. They develop the skills necessary for employment well. A high majority proceed either to higher education or employment. They develop good skills of literacy and numeracy because of the good support that they receive in these areas. Success rates for key skills are well above national averages.
14. Learners are vocal and confident. They feel safe in the college and instances of bullying, harassment or discrimination are almost non-existent. Learners adopt safe working practices well. Achievements are celebrated widely, for example with numerous prize giving events and awards and through many displays of work projects throughout the college. Learners' progression between different courses and levels of study is good because of the wide range available and the good guidance they receive. Learners are well provided with information to make sensible choices about healthy lifestyles through whole college or group events, and through the tutorial system. Most choose healthy eating options, although only a minority choose to participate in the many organised games and sports that the college offers. Learners make good contributions to the community. They frequently participate in charity and fundraising events. The college is at the centre of the community it serves and is held in high regard locally.

The quality of provision

Grade 2

15. Teaching and learning are good. Most lessons are planned well to meet the needs of learners through a range of resources and a variety of activities. They are appropriately challenging, well paced and motivate students to learn. Technology is used frequently to enhance lessons, and to encourage participation. In the better lessons, learners gain skills and confidence to communicate their learning in an enjoyable, interactive way. Teachers are well qualified and take part in regular professional development. However, observations of teaching and learning are focused too much on teaching and classroom management rather than the learning that takes place. Outcomes of observations are not analysed effectively. The college cannot therefore identify and share good practice across schools, or plan training to meet the most frequent areas for development. Assessment meets fully the requirements of the awarding body.

16. Vocational skills are developed well. Learners receive much useful feedback which helps them to pass assignments and improve their grades. Key and functional skills are well taught and relevant to learners' main subject areas. However poor spelling or grammar is not corrected sufficiently well. Learners, especially at the higher levels, receive too little written feedback on how to improve their study and communication skills. Support for learning is plentiful and is of high quality.
17. Teachers willingly give time to help learners achieve well. Following initial screening to assess numeracy and literacy levels, support for learners identified with specific needs is offered quickly. Other learners are assessed more informally through assignments and during induction. Well qualified teaching and learning assistants support learners well. However, most learners do not have a detailed diagnosis of their individual literacy and numeracy needs which limits the extent to which teachers can plan to develop their skills and measure their progress. Equality and diversity are well promoted in most lessons, and learners and teachers treat each other with care and respect.
18. The college offers a wide range of courses covering most subjects from entry to advanced level with a particular emphasis on vocational education. A suitable range of provision is also offered from four further centres throughout the county. A large number of community venues provide a suitable range of mainly leisure and recreational courses. The college's sports academy supports able sports people to successfully achieve academic qualifications. The large 14 to 16 provision includes a substantial number of young apprentices. The large apprenticeship and train to gain provision covers a wide range of vocational areas. Many learners progress successfully on to further education or training. Employer requests are responded to quickly and flexibly especially from small and medium size companies. The college increasingly works on employer's premises to deliver bespoke provision. The enrichment programme engages learners in a very wide range of activities that further develop the learners' vocational and personal knowledge. Learners' attendance on enrichment activities is high for those who choose to participate.
19. Links with partner organisations are outstanding. The college is a leading member of many local and regional partnership groups involving major public bodies, employers, training providers and community groups. The 14-19 Western Area schools partnership has very successfully developed a wider curriculum for local learners. It has arranged for college staff to teach in local schools, set up school vocational skills centres, provided access to mainstream courses for learners with additional needs and made available the college employer database to help schools widen work experience opportunities. The college works very closely with a large number of employers to the benefit of learners. Regular forums discuss local and national initiatives to ensure the college provision meets employer needs including a large apprenticeship and train to gain provision. Through the partnership arrangements, apprentices have been given financial support to start or to remain on their apprenticeships. Learners benefit greatly from the links with employers through the use of guest speakers, assignments

designed using work place information, substantial work experience, the development of school skills centres and the use of employers premises to enhance the learners experience.

20. Care, guidance and support are good for all learners, including those on work-based programmes, enabling many who would not otherwise do so, to achieve. Most learners receive accurate and prompt guidance on application so that they choose which course is right for them. Because of this guidance, the proportion who subsequently change to another programme is low. Transition arrangements from local schools are excellent, especially for those who have already been attending the college on 14 to16 provision. The college has close working arrangements with the Connexions service. Care, guidance and support for learners on apprenticeship programmes are good.
21. Induction arrangements are good, enabling learners to settle quickly into the college. Trust between learners and college staff is established quickly. All full time 16 to18 year old learners and others who disclose specific needs are given an initial screening to determine their additional support needs. This is put in place promptly. The college provides for a wide range of support needs effectively. In addition, specialist staff are trained in supporting specific needs, for example the needs of those with dyslexia or autistic spectrum disorders. Learners benefit from the good links that the college has with external support agencies. As a result, the college offers good support for learners' welfare, financial and personal needs. Services are sensitive to issues of cultural and linguistic diversity and they promote equality of opportunity well.
22. Students value their weekly one-to-one tutorials. Although the college does not have a formal group tutorial programme, college development days and events are comprehensive and many learners choose to attend them. Examples include road safety, sexual health and alcohol awareness. In addition, certain topics are covered in tutorials and checks are made that this is the case.
23. Learners can access support for literacy, numeracy or other learning needs in a number of ways. Open access centres are available across the college, and those in vocational areas are well-focused to the specific vocational needs of learners. The identification of literacy or numeracy support needs is largely carried out by teachers after learners have joined learning programmes. In many instances the support needed is provided by these same staff. The college has good evidence that this support is effective in raising achievement. However, the monitoring of learners' progress against support needs is not always systematic. Individual learning plans (ILPs) do not always have a clear focus on specific needs or aspects of learning that need to be developed. The college recognises that the results of the initial screening and other assessments are not yet well linked to the electronic ILP process that has been introduced recently. Some students report that their use of this system is hindered by lack of access to computer systems.

Leadership and management

Grade 2

24. Leadership and management are good. The principal, senior managers and governors set a very clear direction and vision for the college. Strategic planning processes align with and support local and regional priorities well. The college's values of respect, support, value, praise and pride permeate the whole organisation. The principal has championed successfully a supportive and open culture that promotes high expectations and raises aspirations. Success rates have remained consistently high at all levels and for all ages over time, although they fell notably at all levels and for all ages in 2008/09. College in-year retention data indicate an improvement. Overall, management of most areas of the curriculum is at least good.
25. Governance is outstanding. Governors are very supportive of the college's work and bring much experience to their role. They monitor the financial and academic performance of the college very well and provide high levels of challenge and encouragement to senior managers. Governors are particularly active in gaining a broader understanding of the learners' experience through well-established and productive faculty links.
26. Arrangements to safeguard all learners, including vulnerable adults, are good. All staff receive relevant training with around two thirds trained to level 2. Appropriate checks are made and recorded on a single central register. The management of health and safety across the college is good. Incidents of bullying and harassment are rare. The dangers of cyber-bullying and internet safety are promoted well. A dedicated website on safeguarding on the college intranet is providing an accessible and useful resource for raising awareness of a wide range of safeguarding themes. The college is preparing appropriately for the forthcoming vetting and barring legislation.
27. The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The analysis of the performance of different groups of learners is detailed. The outcomes of vulnerable groups, including looked after children and travellers, are tracked well. Staff training in equality and diversity is good and the college intranet is beginning to grow an effective central resource with some innovative approaches, such as the use of linked video clips to help plan for and promote equality themes in lessons. Promotion through the curriculum is good and improving. Focus groups to promote the wider equality themes such as sexual orientation, religion and age have been introduced this academic year.
28. The college analyses the views of most groups of learners and has recently commissioned research to better understand the experiences of some minority ethnic groups to meet their needs more effectively. The college has a clear single equality scheme and subsequent actions to promote equality and diversity are monitored frequently. However, not all timescales and targets are sufficiently precise to enable the college to measure the impact of its actions effectively. Equality impact assessments are undertaken for policies and services but not all

are comprehensive. The college is active in marketing and promoting equality of opportunity to improve the recruitment of traditionally under-represented groups.

29. The college responds to the views of users very well. Strategies to seek the views of learners is good and improving, with learners' feedback sought often through council meetings, surveys and forums and has led to a range of changes such as increased recycling initiatives as well as improvements to course planning. Learners' contribution into more strategic decision-making is increasing. Engagement with employers is excellent and the arrangements for gaining feedback from employers through surveys and breakfast meetings to help plan and effect improvement are highly effective. Opportunities to involve employers and other stakeholders directly in self-assessment are not currently maximised however.
30. Quality improvement arrangements are good. At curriculum level, close monitoring of course and individual learners' performance is leading to improvements in both learners' outcomes and their wider educational experience. Self-assessment processes are well established, inclusive and uses data well. At department and course level, they identify strengths and areas for improvement precisely. The whole college self-assessment is broadly accurate in its evaluation; however, several strengths are overstated and not all areas for development are focused sharply or prioritised. The college's quality improvement plan is monitored frequently, although not all targets have clear success criteria by which to measure the progress made. The college recognises its system for monitoring the quality of its teaching and learning resulted in over generous grading of lessons. At the last inspection, achievements and standards were judged outstanding and at this inspection outcomes are deemed good.
31. The college provides outstanding value for money. Resources are deployed exceptionally well. The college makes very good use of its existing accommodation and equipment to provide a good quality and welcoming learning environment. Clear plans are in place to support further significant refurbishment and building over the next two years. The college's investment in staff development and training and its approach to workforce reforms is excellent. The college has a strong commitment to promoting sustainability. Its management of resources to limit their impact on the environment is well established. Financial management remains very strong.

Subject areas

Health and social care

Grade 1

Context

32. Around 1,000 learners study courses in health and social care; two thirds are on employer responsive provision that is split, with half at advanced level, 10% in higher education and the remainder at intermediate level. The majority of learner responsive provision is at advanced level. Just over half of learners are adults. Most learners are female. A further 111 learners aged 14 to 16 study health and social care.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are outstanding. For the last three years all learners who have completed their courses have passed, many with high grades. Success rates are generally high, and in employer responsive provision overall and timely success rates are high and well above national averages. With some variation, retention is generally good and improving.
- Learners make good progress, often attaining higher standards than predicted by their entry qualifications. Many achieve high grades. Progression from intermediate to advanced level provision and from advanced level to higher education (HE) is good because the range of programmes suits learner's needs well.
- The quality of provision good with some outstanding features. Teaching, learning and assessment are solidly good. Learners enjoy and participate enthusiastically in well planned lessons. Learners develop good vocational skills. However, in a few lessons learners are not given the opportunity to develop their knowledge and understanding through effective questioning. Computers used in some rooms are unreliable.
- Provision to meet the needs and interests of learners both in college and the work place is outstanding. The curriculum for adult learners is planned carefully to fit in with work and shift patterns. The range of courses and pathways is good. An extensive programme of trips and visits and programme of visiting speakers enriches learners' experience at college.
- Partnerships with employers are outstanding. Learners benefit from exceptionally productive links in a range of health and social care settings, including hospitals, care homes, secure accommodation, the Primary Care Trust and Suffolk County Council social services.
- Care, guidance and support for learners are good. Learners know their targets, although they are not always clear about precisely what they need to do to improve. Their progress is monitored thoroughly. If they fall behind, or miss a deadline they are challenged quickly. Learners are well supported in their

aspirations to achieve and progress to university. Additional learning support is very effective, particularly in class.

- Leadership and management is outstanding. Managers at all levels are focused strongly on learners' achievement and welfare. Staff feel well supported in their work. The self assessment process is rigorous and is self-critical with accurate judgments on the quality of provision.
- Equality and diversity is outstanding. Opportunities to promote them and tackle discrimination are frequently taken in lessons by both learners and teachers. Opportunities to broaden learners' horizons and to experience other cultures are very well developed.

What does West Suffolk College need to do to improve further?

- Further improve retention in those few courses where it is low
- Improve the quality of computers in some classrooms to further support
- Improve the involvement of learners in setting and monitoring precise targets to inform progress.

Construction

Grade 1

Context

33. The college offers a range of part-time and full-time foundation, intermediate and advanced level courses for craft, services and technician learners. These include trowel occupations, wood occupations, painting and decorating, plumbing, electrical installation and technician studies. There are 249 learners on foundation courses, 154 on intermediate courses and 63 on advanced level courses.

Key findings

- Learners make outstanding progress. Success rates are outstanding for most learners. Apprentice success rates dipped to satisfactory in 2008/9 but have improved again in 2010 and are now good. All learners develop good or better practical skills. Learners make good or better progress in the development of their literacy, language and numeracy skills.
- Learners understand their rights and responsibilities at work and the need to be both qualified and skilled to ensure their economic well-being. Learners' progression is outstanding. Many learners progress from entry level to craft programmes and from higher level programmes to higher education. Progression from full-time programmes to apprenticeships is good.
- Learners feel safe and have a good understanding of health and well-being issues. Most follow safe working practices at the provider's premises which are satisfactorily secure. Pastoral support for learners and apprentices effectively enhances their understanding of health and well being.
- Learners participate in a wide range of community projects, local demonstrations and shows that include the opportunity to demonstrate and develop their skills and benefit their local communities.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are good. Teachers use a range of good resources that develop learners' skills well. However, the most able learners are not always challenged sufficiently. Very high quality resources are available to learners through the college's virtual learning environment (VLE) but computers are not used to enhance learning for electrical, craft and plumbing learners. Assessment enables learners to understand what they have achieved and what they need to do to improve well.
- The range of provision is outstanding. Employers' and learners' views inform curriculum design that meets their needs exceptionally well. The good range of enrichment activities includes those from many employers. Progression is available for learners aged 14 to 16 and from entry level to HE programmes.
- The engagement of employers and the community through partnership working is outstanding. This engagement informs and enhances teaching, ensures that the curriculum matches both learners' and employers' needs and contributes to

the development of learners' skills. Provision for learners aged 14 to 16 is enhanced through partnership work with local schools.

- Support for learners is outstanding. Teachers, managers and support workers provide high levels of support so that learners achieve who might otherwise not have done so. Most learners receiving support achieve their intended learning outcome. The tracking of learners' progress is good and the tutorial process enables learners to determine what they have achieved and what they need to do to improve.
- The management of the learner responsive provision is outstanding. The college has a clear strategy for improvement and managers continue to build on their existing success. Continuity of leadership has provided a very effective succession plan for the area.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The college has increased the recruitment of female learners on technician courses over a three year period and has also successfully engaged with the traveller community. The respect and support given to individual learners is valued highly by them. However, the college does not set targets or analyse the recruitment of different groups of learners.
- The self assessment process is rigorous, robust and judgements are accurate. The process involves staff from all levels of the organisation and clearly identifies strengths and areas for improvement. The detailed management of this process through individual course directors is outstanding.
- The management of resources to ensure value for money is outstanding. Resources are managed exceptionally well to ensure learners progress, develop skills, and attain their learning goals.

What does name West Suffolk College need to do to improve further?

- Ensure the best practice shown in use of ILT in technician courses is shared across the department in order to.
- Improve the level of challenge provided to more able learners.

Hairdressing and beauty therapy

Grade 1

Context

34. Currently, 451 learners are enrolled on hairdressing, beauty and holistic therapy courses at NVQ levels 1 to 3. Of these, most are female and under 19 years of age. Some 3% are from ethnic minority backgrounds and 10% of learners have additional learning needs. In addition, 71 pupils from 14 local schools are on NVQ level 1 courses in hairdressing and beauty therapy and 89 learners are on apprenticeships in hairdressing.

Key findings

- Success rates for learner responsive courses are outstanding and have consistently exceeded national averages over the last three years. Overall success rates for work based learning are satisfactory and around national averages in 2008/09. Timely success rates are 11 percentage points above national averages in 2008/09. College data show current retention for employer responsive courses is satisfactory and good for learners completing their programmes in 2010/11.
- Standards of learners' work are very high. Learners at all levels are challenged to perform treatments usually associated with higher level services. Consequently they develop very good standards of professional and commercial skills. Learners' knowledge and understanding are good and learners display a strong ability to relate theory to practical activities.
- Learners enjoy their learning, display good levels of interest and make very good progress in meeting the targets set at the beginning of the lesson. They take an active part in both theory and practical sessions. Learners express high levels of satisfaction with their courses and the progress they have made over the year.
- Activities to improve learners' economic and social well-being and increase employability are outstanding. Links with employers are used effectively to provide learners with well-planned and worthwhile work experience. Good use is made of vocationally relevant enrichment including seminars provided by visiting employers and nationally recognised stylists and therapists.
- The promotion of safe and healthy environments is good. All learners interviewed say they feel safe. Training sessions emphasise health and safety issues relating to the unit or treatments being covered in theory and these are reinforced during practical lessons.
- Teaching and learning are outstanding. In almost all lessons, planning effectively takes account of learners' ability, needs and progress to create individualised and challenging targets. Activities are allocated to provide challenge for more able learners and encourage independent learning. Learners have a wide range of clients with whom they work. Good links are made between theory and practice to set learning in the context of work.
- The assessment of learners' performance is good and fully meets awarding body requirements. Learners are encouraged to set challenging targets for themselves.

Internal verifiers and assessors monitor and track progress closely through systems that identify learners who might be at risk of falling behind. Many assessment opportunities are provided for apprentices both in the workplace and at college.

- Provision to meet the needs and interests of learners is good. Enrichment opportunities are vocationally relevant. Progression rates are high. Almost all NVQ level 1 learners progressed to level 2. Most NVQ level 2 learners progressed to level 3. However, the college recognises the need to further develop progression routes.
- Care, guidance and support are good. Good levels of one to-one and individual support for all learners are provided. Initial assessment is used well to plan support and further develop learners in reviews and tutorials. Learners refer to very supportive, caring and interested teachers. Overall success rates for learners with additional needs matches those for other learners.
- Leadership and management are outstanding. The college maintains outstanding partnerships that benefit learners. Commitment to continuous improvement is high. Monitoring of progress is robust. Quality systems are well embedded. Teachers and governors are actively involved in evaluating the effectiveness of courses. The self-assessment report is broadly accurate. Weaknesses identified have been dealt with.
- Promotion of equality and diversity is good and developed effectively in lessons. Learners are able to explain how they would adapt treatments to assist clients with mobility impairment or when treating women from different minority ethnic heritages. Imagery used in lessons and marketing has been chosen to reflect different ethnic and gender backgrounds.

What does name of West Suffolk College need to do to improve further?

- Review the choice of courses available in hairdressing and beauty therapy to provide a wider range of entry points.

Art, design and media

Grade 2

Context

35. Approximately 700 learners are enrolled on a range of mainly full time vocational courses in art and design, performing arts and media from intermediate to advanced level. The majority of learners are aged 16 to 18 with around three quarters studying on visual arts courses.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are good overall with some outstanding features. Learners have achieved consistently high success rates on the majority of courses but particularly on GCSE photography, foundation art and design and national diploma media. Success rates on the intermediate level art and design course are outstanding.
- Success rates on the first diploma music and the national diploma music technology are low and have declined to below the national rate over the last three years. Success rates on the national diploma music also declined in 2008/9 to around the national rate. Learners leaving before the end of the course have caused this decline.
- Standards of learners work are high, particularly so in photography where it is outstanding. Learners are able to use research to inform their creative work and effectively use a wide range of skills and techniques to express their ideas creatively and thoughtfully.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are good. Learners are suitably challenged in lessons that are well planned and interesting. Learners develop independent learning skills and meet robust targets. Learners know what they have to do to improve their practice. In a minority of lessons target setting is poor and the start and end of lessons are not sharply focused.
- Resources for learning are good. Staff are well qualified with many being practicing artists. Learners benefit from the excellent industry knowledge and skills of their teachers. The majority of learners have good access to computers and most rooms are well equipped. Some studios are cramped when accommodating large groups. Performing arts and music learners have limited access to rehearsal space on site.
- The provision is good at meeting the needs and interests of learners. The college offers a wide range of courses. Managers are active in extending the curriculum to include foundation degrees and the new diploma. The art and design department offer an excellent range of additional qualifications that improve learners' personal and professional development.
- Learners participate in and benefit from the outstanding programme of curriculum enrichment. A very high proportion of learners participate in local,

national and international trips and visits closely linked to the development of professional practice, personal development, equality and diversity, contribution to the community and employability skills.

- Support for learners is good. Tutorials are well organised and taught with skill and sensitivity. Feedback to learners is clear and detailed enabling them to make choices and well informed decisions. Learners with additional learning needs are supported effectively in lessons by well qualified learning support assistants. Learners receive very helpful, detailed individual support from their teachers.
- Initial advice and guidance is generally good after recent improvements. The majority of learners now have an audition, provide portfolio work or undertake holiday work to ensure that they are well equipped to start the course. Some improvements in the recruitment, induction and support of music learners is still required to remedy poor retention.
- Leadership and management are good. The enthusiastic team are focused on the success of individual learners, and the skills they need to become effective practitioners. Staff feel well supported and valued by their managers. However, managers have only recently taken action to improve the long standing issue of falling retention on the music technology course. Procedures for the sharing of good practice are underdeveloped.
- The promotion of equality and diversity through the curriculum is good. Teachers identify approaches to equality and diversity on their lesson plans. In their schemes of work teachers' do not always make clear how cultural aspects are to be promoted and used as a starting point for creative work. Learners treat each other with respect and value individual differences.
- The self assessment process is inclusive and broadly accurate in its assessment of strengths and areas for improvement.

What does name West Suffolk College need to do to improve further?

- Raise success rates on all music courses by improving the robustness of the recruitment, initial assessment, selection and induction processes and providing more effective support for course directors.
- Improve the effectiveness of teaching and learning by identifying good practice and planning how it can be shared effectively.

Information about the inspection

36. Three of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and 6 additional inspectors, assisted by the college's vice principal quality and curriculum as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) the previous inspection report, reports from the inspectorate's quality monitoring inspection, and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
37. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails. They looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed on behalf of the college. They also observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in each of the subject areas the provider/college offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

West Suffolk College

Learning types: 14 – 16: Young apprenticeships; Diplomas; 16-18 Learner responsive: FE full- and part-time courses, Foundation learning tier, including Entry to Employment; 19+ responsive: FE full- and part-time courses; Employer responsive: Train to Gain, apprenticeships

Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall	14-16	16-18 Learner responsive	19+ Learner responsive	Employer responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners					
Full-time learners	0	0	2099	740	0
Part-time learners	143	783	143	2427	5258
Overall effectiveness	2	1	2	2	2
Capacity to improve	2				
Outcomes for learners	2	1	2	2	2
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	2				
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	2				
How well do learners progress?	2				
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	1				
How safe do learners feel?	1				
Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*	2				
How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*	1				
Quality of provision	2	1	2	2	2
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	2				
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	1				
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	1				
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	2				
Leadership and management	2	1	2	2	2
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	1				
How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*	1				
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	2				
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	2				
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	2				
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	2				
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	1				

*where applicable to the type of provision

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