

Inspection of Suffolk New College

Inspection dates: 15 to 18 November 2022

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Good
Education programmes for young people	Good
Adult learning programmes	Good
Apprenticeships	Good
Provision for learners with high needs	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Information about this provider

Suffolk New College is a medium sized general further education college based in Ipswich. Leaders have acquired a land-based site in Otley, which is now branded as Suffolk Rural. The college also has a site in Leiston and a skills centre in Halesworth, which are branded as On the Coast, and provide courses for rural young people who prefer to study locally.

At the time of the inspection, there were 2,691 learners aged 16 to 19, 1,259 adult learners and 790 apprentices. There were 278 learners in receipt of high needs funding. One hundred and eighty of these learners are taught within technical and vocational classes, and 90 learners are taught discretely. The college works with two subcontractors. One is a football academy, and the other subcontractor provides short courses for learners who require specific support.

The curriculum is broad, covering 14 of 15 subject sector areas, the largest being health and social care, digital, engineering, arts and media and construction. Courses are taught from level 1 to level 3. The proportion of learners with English and mathematics at grade 4 or above is below the average for the east of England.

What is it like to be a learner with this provider?

Most learners at Suffolk New College enjoy their time at the college and value the new skills and knowledge that they learn. They appreciate the support that they receive from tutors, learning support practitioners and industry experts.

Learners work in a calm environment in lessons and across the college campuses. Learners demonstrate high levels of tolerance and respect for tutors and for each other. They feel that they are learning in a mature learning environment and like being taught by specialist tutors, who have a good understanding of the employment opportunities that learners plan to move into. Learners at Suffolk Rural campus benefit from a positive learning environment. For example, those learners in receipt of high needs funding value the structure of their daily routines and, as a result, they feel safe, gain in confidence and become more independent. They improve their communication skills through activities outside the curriculum, such as visiting community groups and voluntary organisations.

Learners on apprenticeship programmes benefit from the training they receive from employers, and they enjoy learning from industry experts. As a result, they swiftly become valuable employees in the businesses where they work. Those learners on English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses gain useful experiences to improve their language skills. For example, learners volunteering in the community were more confident to communicate to the public and were also able to help to support their children with their education. Learners feel that they have a good understanding of life and culture in Britain.

Learners feel welcome and safe in the college. They enjoy their social interactions with other learners and the broad range of activities, trips and visits that they benefit from.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The college makes a reasonable contribution to meeting skills needs.

Senior leaders use relevant information and labour market intelligence skilfully to shape their strategy and to develop the curriculum in the priority sectors. These include areas in science, technology and mathematics, such as agri-tech, green technologies, health science and digital. Leaders work closely with stakeholders to identify industry developments so that they are prepared well to meet future skills needs, such as in the nuclear and engineering industries.

Governors have a good understanding of the local and regional skills needs. They provide support and guidance on the emerging new skills and the technical equipment that learners will need to use in their future careers. Senior leaders work effectively with stakeholders to understand and contribute to meeting the skills needs of the communities they serve. Learners and apprentices benefit from the strong relationships that are established - for example, the collaborative building

projects to meet skills needs in the health sector and a new digital tech centre to prepare learners for jobs in cyber security.

Leaders ensure that the curriculum they offer is inclusive, improves aspiration and increases social mobility. For example, they have developed projects to encourage young people in rural communities to move on to higher education.

Many employers participate effectively in and influence the design and the implementation of the curriculum. Employers have created video content to emphasise the importance of good mathematics skills to learners' careers. In early years, employers work with managers to review the inclusion and diversity module, to advise how this can be made relevant to the working environment. However, a significant minority of curriculum managers do not work effectively with employers to design, plan or teach the curriculum. In childcare, although employers have influenced the early teaching of the safeguarding module, they do not have further input into the way the curriculum is taught.

What does the provider do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders and managers have developed a curriculum that is ambitious and relevant to learners and employers in the local area. Leaders have clear strategic aims and values, which they share well with staff, and which are supported by governors. Most managers work successfully to ensure that learners understand important concepts early in their courses. In health and social care, learners are taught about dementia early in their courses, to meet a high need for understanding across the workplaces. A small minority of apprenticeship programmes are not tailored sufficiently to meet the needs of individual employers. For example, in electrical installation, employers do not inform the sequencing of topics taught. As a result, apprentices do not learn the most relevant knowledge and skills first.

Tutors plan units so that learners and apprentices gain skills and knowledge in a logical order and are able to build and develop on the basic knowledge that they gain at the start of their programmes. In level 2 professional cookery, learners start by gaining basic knife skills and making sauces and stocks. They then progress to following more intricate recipes. In ESOL courses, tutors identify clear linguistic objectives, and learners understand how to formulate more-complex questioning, having mastered simple techniques. ESOL tutors introduce skills that are relevant to life in Britain, such as imperial measurements, measuring road distances in miles or liquids in pints. As a result, learners can integrate effectively into their communities.

Employers very often take an active part in the teaching of the curriculum. In level 3 animal management, learners benefit from visiting speakers and project work, ensuring that the knowledge they gain is up to date and relevant. In level 2 professional cookery, employers oversee the kitchen at events so that learners understand the requirements of a professional kitchen environment. Learners experience a broad range of work experience opportunities across most curriculum

areas. However, managers and tutors on apprenticeship programmes do not routinely communicate with employers about the progress of apprentices. As a result, employers are not always able to support apprentices as effectively in their learning as they would wish.

Tutors encourage students to use technical and professional terminology competently. In level 1 animal management, learners use a terminology board to help them to learn complex terms, such as polysaccharides. In motor vehicle and heavy goods vehicle apprenticeships, apprentices use terms such as actuators and solenoids accurately. Tutors are experienced and highly qualified in the subject areas that they teach. They use their knowledge expertly to develop learners' and apprentices' skills and knowledge. In media level 3, most tutors work in the broadcasting and media sector, so they can provide learners with industry standard techniques.

Leaders have put in place a comprehensive staff development programme that is informed by quality assurance activities. Tutors have or are working towards teaching qualifications. Staff are supported appropriately to improve their personal ambitions through good links with a local university.

In most lessons, tutors present work clearly to learners and apprentices. In ESOL classes, tutors ask learners to repeat tasks back to them to check understanding. In online adult GCSE mathematics lessons, tutors present information clearly to learners, such as with visual demonstrations for fractions and ratios. Tutors recap learning frequently so that learners and apprentices retain new knowledge and can apply it to new situations. In motor vehicle and heavy vehicle apprenticeships, tutors use questioning skilfully to check apprentices understanding before they progress to the next topic. In a small proportion of level 3 childcare lessons, tutors do not routinely check learners' understanding before moving on to new topics. In too many face-to-face GCSE mathematics lessons, tutors do not provide clear instructions to learners or check that they have understood what they need to do before moving on to the next topic. As a result, these learners do not make good progress.

Tutors use assessment strategies effectively to provide detailed feedback to learners. In practical subjects such as professional cookery at level 2, learners could describe how they had learned from feedback they had received on how to cut onions and to use garnishes on dishes for fine dining. Where learners do not understand skills thoroughly, tutors ensure that learners practise them in the following lessons so that they learn to master them effectively. Tutors in health and social care use mock examinations to help learners understand how to improve their responses so that they can achieve high grades. As a result, a high proportion of learners achieve high grades in this subject.

Learners and apprentices learn substantial new skills and knowledge on their courses. Apprentices on electrical courses understand how to install consumer units with the appropriate-size circuit breakers, and adults on level 2 hairdressing swiftly learn how to cut and colour hair to industry standards. Learners produce written work of a high standard.

Most learners and apprentices make at least the progress expected of them and achieve on their courses. The proportion of apprentices who gain high grades is increasing overall but is still low on some programmes. Most learners and apprentices move on to positive destinations. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, too few apprentices achieve within the planned timescales. Too few learners on construction courses and on level 1 functional skills mathematics achieve their qualifications.

Learners improve their English and mathematics skills appropriately in vocational and technical lessons. In level 3 animal management, learners understand how to calculate medication for different-sized animals and to maintain animal diaries for legal purposes. In motor vehicle and heavy goods vehicle apprenticeships, tutors correct apprentices' written work thoroughly to help them to improve. However, in level 2 hairdressing, tutors do not routinely correct errors in learners' English in their written work.

Learners' and apprentices' attendance at vocational lessons is high. However, learners' attendance at English and mathematics classes is too low. Adult learners' attendance at online mathematics courses is high.

Tutors have established an exceptionally well-planned personal development curriculum that provides learners and apprentices with a broad range of opportunities to develop their skills beyond the requirements of the curriculum. A high proportion of learners take part in skills competitions, work with live briefs from employers and take part in a variety of sports at competitive levels. Adult learners value and participate in the activities that take place. Links with the local police benefit learners. They understand, for example, how to recognise signs of domestic abuse, how to maintain healthy relationships and the consequences of carrying knives. Apprentices are proud of the awards that they have achieved in regional and national competitions.

Learners and apprentices benefit from careers advice and guidance that helps them to gain good jobs. As a result, they have a comprehensive understanding of the options available to them when they complete their courses. Learners in hairdressing level 2 can select optional units to meet their career aims, such as barbering or pedicures. Level 3 agriculture students benefit from weekly farm forum presentations taught by employers. Learners on level 2 equine programmes have an industry mentor to support them to understand and achieve their next career steps.

Learners and apprentices benefit from a calm and well-ordered learning environment. Learners are keen to learn, and tutors help learners to develop the professional behaviours expected of them in the workplace. Tutors have high expectations of learners' behaviour in lessons and around the campuses.

Leaders assess the quality of the provision effectively. Governors and senior leaders have a good understanding of the main strengths and areas for development in the provision. Leaders manage the subcontracted provision closely, and learners on these courses achieve as well as their peers.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have established a strong culture of safeguarding across the college. They have put in place relevant policies and procedures that they use effectively to keep learners and apprentices safe. The designated safeguarding lead and other key safeguarding personnel across the college are trained appropriately to carry out their roles. Leaders ensure that staff receive comprehensive training related to safeguarding and 'Prevent' duty. They ensure that this is updated frequently so that staff understand current threats. Managers recognise the increase in well-being concerns that learners experience. They monitor learners' well-being thoroughly and provide them with high levels of support.

Leaders carry out thorough pre-employment checks to assure themselves that staff are suitable to work with young people and vulnerable adults.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Ensure that staff communicate effectively with employers throughout the apprenticeship programme so that they know the progress that apprentices are making and can support them to achieve within the planned timescales.
- Make sure that the quality of teaching in mathematics is of a consistently high standard so that the proportion of learners achieving their qualifications improves.
- Improve learners and apprentices' attendance in English and mathematics lessons in line with college expectations.
- Increase the contribution employers make to the planning, development and teaching of the curriculum, in particular in electrical installation and childcare programmes, so that the taught curriculum meets the specific needs of these sectors.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130820
Address	Rope Walk Ipswich Suffolk IP4 1LT
Contact number	01473382200
Website	www.suffolk.ac.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Viv Gillespie
Provider type	General Further Education College
Date of previous inspection	12 to 15 November 2019
Main subcontractors	Needham Market Football Club Inspire Suffolk Limited

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the deputy principal, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. The inspection was carried out using the [further education and skills inspection handbook](#) and took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence to inform judgements, including visiting learning sessions, scrutinising learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

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