



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE



Office for Standards
in Education

Inspection report
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove
14 to 19 Area Inspection

Dates of inspection: 2–6 February and 1–5 March 2004

© Crown copyright 2004. This report may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that all extracts quoted are reproduced verbatim without adaptation and on condition that the source and date thereof are stated.

This inspection was carried out under Section 65 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000. It was a joint inspection by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) and the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI).

Inspection reports are available on the Ofsted web site (www.ofsted.gov.uk).

Reference:

Contents

Section	Page
Basic information about the area inspection	III
Introduction	3
Executive summary	3
Main findings	3
Features of the area and its context	3
The strategy for 14 to 19 education and training	3
Leadership and management	3
The curriculum and access to, and participation in, education and training	3
Guidance and support	3
The quality of 14 to 19 education and training	3

Basic information about the area inspection

Name of area:	East Sussex, Brighton and Hove
Reporting inspector:	Linda Harwood HMI
Dates of inspection:	2–6 February and 1–5 March 2004

Introduction

The Learning and Skills Act 2000, as amended by the Education Act 2002, gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) of Schools the power, working with the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI), to inspect the provision of 14 to 19 education and training in an area. The *Area Inspection Framework* sets out the principles that apply to the inspections of the provision of non-higher education and training made by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), local education authorities (LEAs) and their partners within an area. This inspection was carried out under section 65 of the Learning and Skills Act by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) and the ALI.

This inspection covered the areas of East Sussex and Brighton and Hove. Inspectors analysed statistical and documentary evidence, considered the views of providers and of learners, and interviewed: officers of the local LSC, LEAs, the Connexions partnership and local learning partnerships; senior staff in schools, colleges, and training providers; elected members of the councils; governors, parents and young people. Inspectors visited schools, colleges and training providers to evaluate the quality of provision for learners aged 14 to 19. Inspectors also took account of the evidence and findings of previous inspections of training providers, schools and colleges in the area.

Executive summary

Education and training across the area meet the needs of learners, employers and the community well. There are clear and coherent plans for raising the standards of, and for widening participation for young people aged 14 to 19 in, education and training. The local LSC and the two LEAs, working in partnership, are providing excellent leadership and acting as an effective catalyst for change. Plans of key partners are based on careful data analysis and detailed research. The results of these have been used well to bring about innovative thinking and well-considered strategies which are designed to generate long-term and sustainable improvements in provision. The majority of providers are enthusiastic about the opportunities the strategy offers to develop courses and progression routes that will meet the needs of all young people more effectively. The strategic partners have a clear understanding of the weaknesses in provision that require attention, and appropriate actions are being taken. Colleges have been merged and some of the less successful sixth forms have been closed or are no longer recruiting students and there are far-reaching proposals for the re-configuration of provision in Hastings and Rother.

Levels of attainment of learners at 16 and 19 are satisfactory overall and some are good. The proportion of pupils who achieve five or more A* to C grades at general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) is at the national average in East Sussex, but below in Brighton and Hove. In both LEAs, it has been improving at a rate above the national trend, and in the schools where performance is low, it is being addressed. Post-16 attainment is generally satisfactory or better. There are good achievements and positive value added scores

particularly at level 3 in the Brighton and Hove sixth form colleges. In school sixth forms, average points scores at advanced subsidiary level (AS level) and general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) are below national and statistical neighbour averages and below those of colleges in the area. Attainment is lower on level 2 courses than level 3 courses post-16, as is the proportion of young people who successfully complete modern apprenticeships. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall, as is the guidance and support available to young people in schools, colleges and in work-based learning provision.

Many schools have made progress in broadening the curriculum offered at Key Stage 4, including GCSEs in vocational subjects and general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs). However, a few schools have been slow to develop alternative courses to meet the needs of a wider range of pupils. There are good examples of effective collaboration to extend the range of opportunities available, both at Key Stage 4 and post-16. The successful Increased Flexibility Programme (IFP) and other Key Stage 4 link courses established between schools and colleges are leading to a curriculum offer that better meets the needs of learners in many areas. A range of targeted initiatives are having a positive impact on motivation and transition to education and training at 16, and work is progressing to improve the provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Learners aged over 16 studying at level 3 are well provided for by the range of programmes available. There is insufficient post-16 provision for learners who are best suited to courses below level 3 and there are too few vocational options in some areas, such as the Weald. Key partners across East Sussex and Brighton and Hove are fully aware of these weaknesses, and far-sighted actions are planned, or are being taken, to address them. The self-evaluation report produced in preparation for the inspection was thorough, accurate and self-critical.

The following grades were allocated:

Aspect	Grade
1. Strategy for 14 to 19 education and training	Good
2. Achievement	Satisfactory
3. Access to, and participation in, education and training	Satisfactory
4. Quality of 14 to 19 education and training	Good
5. Guidance and support	Good
6. Leadership and management	Outstanding
	Overall grade
How effective and efficient is the provision of education and training across the area in meeting the needs of learners, employers and the community?	Good

The grades are allocated according to the criteria contained in the area inspection framework and using the descriptors in the common inspection framework. And using the scale: outstanding, good, satisfactory, unsatisfactory and very weak.

Main findings

1. East Sussex and Brighton and Hove together have a population of around 750,000. With West Sussex, they form the sub-region covered by the local LSC. Whilst East Sussex is largely rural, it also has urban centres, for example, Hastings, Eastbourne, Bexhill and the county town of Lewes. Within the area, there is significant social and economic diversity and both LEAs have within them districts which experience marked social and economic disadvantage. In east Brighton and in Hastings and Rother, major regeneration initiatives have been established to address aspects of urban or rural deprivation. Many districts have a relatively elderly population profile, particularly Rother and the Weald, and they also have below average earnings. On the other hand, Brighton attracts young people into the city and has a much younger age profile. Whilst Brighton has good transport links to London and other parts of the South East, many parts of East Sussex are relatively isolated and transport links are poor. Following careful analysis of the social and economic features of the different travel-to-learn areas, the local LSC, working with each LEA, is developing local solutions designed to raise aspirations and improve participation and achievement for all young people in the area.

2. The level of achievement across the 14 to 19 age range in East Sussex, Brighton and Hove is satisfactory. There has been an upward trend in the proportion of pupils gaining five or more A* to C grades at GCSE. It is around the national average in East Sussex, but below in Brighton and Hove and although it has been improving in both authorities, it is below the target they had set for themselves. There are significant variations between schools and in different geographical areas. Across the area, there is evidence of good progress being made by groups of vulnerable young people. The pattern of post-16 achievement at level 3 is generally in line with national averages, but it is less satisfactory at level 2. In school sixth forms, average points scores are below national and statistical neighbour averages at AS level and GCE A level and below those of colleges in the area. Achievements in work-based learning are unsatisfactory overall. Participation in post-16 education and training, at 84.6% in 2003, is around the national average. The quality of teaching and learning across the area is generally good.

3. There are clear, coherent and well-considered strategies for raising the standards of 14 to 19 education and training across the area, and for widening participation. The local LSC, the two LEAs and the Connexions partnership are working together effectively and their plans complement each other well. They each clearly state the intention to match provision to the needs of learners, the community and employers. The LSC has sensibly adopted the strategy of building on existing partnerships and development groups where they are working well. The LSC has based its plans on systematic research and analysis of the needs of different areas within its boundaries. The long-term benefits of the strategies for 14 to 19 provision have yet to be realised, but key partners are working well together to implement them.

4. The quality of leadership to drive improvements is outstanding. The local LSC and

the two LEAs, working in partnership, provide clear-sighted leadership for strategy development and intervention in the area. Well in advance of the publication of 'Success For All', the local LSC conducted detailed area reviews that provided the impetus to taking developments forward. Partnership working is effective and there is a strong element of co-operation and trust between key partners and the majority of providers in the area. Both LEAs are working effectively to implement their strategies for school improvement. There is clear direction from senior managers and good structures are in place to bring about changes to improve the quality of provision and to better meet the needs of learners. The strategic partners have a clear understanding of the weaknesses in provision that require attention and appropriate actions are being taken. For example, the local LSC and East Sussex LEA have provided strong leadership in producing far-reaching proposals for re-organising 14 to 19 education in Hastings and Rother.

5. There are good examples of effective collaboration between schools, between colleges and between colleges and schools for both pre-16 and post-16 students which broaden the range of opportunities available to young people in the area. These include, in addition to the proposed re-organisation in Hastings and Rother; the establishment of an accord between the school sixth forms in Hove; the Brighton and Hove colleges' accord; collaboration between the schools in the Weald area supporting a jointly managed modern apprenticeship programme with training providers; and the operation of Federation Eastbourne. The breadth of the Key Stage 4 curriculum offered in many schools is good and includes effective links with employers and work-based learning providers. The majority of schools are offering applied GCSEs or GNVQs. A few schools have been slow to exploit the opportunities offered by a more flexible curriculum and their students have limited access to alternative courses. The success of the IFP has led to increased demand for out-of-school learning opportunities which providers do not currently have the capacity to meet. The needs of young people aged over 16 for academic level 3 courses are well met. However, there is insufficient post-16 provision at levels 1 and 2 and, in some parts, a shortfall in the availability of relevant vocational courses and modern apprenticeships. This leads to a significant minority of young people not having access to appropriate progression routes at age 16. The overall quality of guidance and support is good. Most schools, colleges and work-based learning providers have effective support structures and offer strong guidance and individual support to learners.

6. This report identifies strengths that should be built upon and weaknesses that need to be addressed if progress is to be made. To guide the local LSC, LEAs and their partners, recommendations are included following each section of the report. The local LSC, LEAs and partner organisations should consider these and incorporate suitable responses in the action plan for the further development of the 14 to 19 strategy for the area.

7. Strengths in the current provision, upon which improvement may be based, include:

- a clear and well-considered strategy and effective structures in place to raise standards and improve education and training for young people aged 14 to 19 across the area
-

-
- excellent, clear-sighted and determined leadership by the local LSC and the two LEAs that drives improvements
 - effective support for school improvement 14 to 16 provided by the two LEAs within the contexts of their respective areas, with a strong commitment to support vulnerable groups and promote inclusion
 - good partnership working between local LSC and LEAs and Connexions service, with strong elements of trust and co-operation
 - improving achievements at Key Stage 4
 - good or improving achievement rates in colleges and some good value added in sixth form colleges in the area
 - good collaboration to extend the range of courses available to young people both pre-16 and post-16, including for those who are vulnerable students
 - a broad curriculum for pupils aged 14 to 16 in many schools, including effective links with employers and work-based learning providers
 - much good teaching and learning in schools and colleges, enabling young people to make good progress
 - good guidance and support for individual learners and good personal support through transition for vulnerable young people.

8. The local LSC, the LEAs and their partners have some weaknesses to overcome. The most significant, requiring concerted and urgent action, are:

- insufficient involvement of employers in the groups which are developing strategies to improve provision for young people aged 14 to 19 in the area
 - insufficiently rigorous quality assurance procedures across school sixth forms and in work-based learning
 - low levels of achievement in a few schools at Key Stage 4 and also in a number of school sixth forms
 - poor achievements in work-based learning
 - too little provision available at entry level, level 1 and level 2 and on modern apprenticeship programmes for post-16 learners
 - insufficient data for tracking and monitoring students' progress at age 16 and beyond, and for demonstrating that students' access to appropriate provision is improving.
-

Features of the area and its context

9. East Sussex and Brighton and Hove are two of the three local authority areas covered by Sussex LSC. The social and economic diversity of the region is reflected both between and within the two areas of East Sussex and Brighton and Hove. East Sussex has a population of just under 500,000, which is about average for shire counties. It is largely rural, with the main populated areas along the coastal strip and in the market towns. Brighton and Hove was declared a city in 2000 and has a population of 250,000 people. Despite the significant differences between them, both of the local authority areas have within them communities which are affluent and prosperous, but other areas which experience marked economic and social disadvantage. Following an analysis of travel-to-learn patterns, the local LSC has designated three areas for planning purposes: Area D which covers Brighton and Hove, Area E which covers Eastbourne, Lewes and Wealden, and Area F which refers to Hastings and Rother. It has also conducted learning and skills reviews for each area. These reviews help to identify the social, economic and educational features which impact on the learning of young people.

10. Brighton and Hove (Area D) is located 50 miles from London and has good transport links into and out of the city. There is major employment in the financial and business services sector, hospitality and tourism, the new media sector and public services. It is an economically mixed area, with high levels of deprivation in the east of the city. In 2002, almost half of the council's 26 wards were amongst the 25% most deprived in the country. Within East Brighton, a regeneration partnership has been established, EB4U. Brighton and Hove has a young age profile compared to the rest of Sussex, with over a third of residents in the 20 to 39 age group. Of the school population, 8% are from minority ethnic backgrounds, compared with the national average of 12%. Area E, which includes Eastbourne, Lewes and Wealden, is largely rural with the main populated areas along the coast and in the county town, Lewes. It has a predominantly older population, with a percentage of residents over 60 that is 8% above the national average. The main employment in the area is in health services, construction, tourism and retail, and East Sussex County Council is a major employer. The area has below-average unemployment rates and below-average earnings. Hastings and Rother (Area F) is an area with an urban-rural divide. Hastings has a much higher population density than Rother, and half the population of Rother live in Bexhill. More than 34% of the resident population of Rother is over 60. Hastings has a younger age profile, similar to that of Sussex as a whole. The Hastings district has 11 wards in the top 20% most deprived wards in England. Hastings and Rother is the focus of a major regeneration programme. Unemployment is higher and wages are significantly lower than in Sussex and the South East. The main employment is to be found in health care, construction, general manufacturing, and hospitality and tourism. The proportion of minority ethnic pupils in schools in East Sussex is 2%; well below the national figure and below that in Brighton and Hove.

11. Within East Sussex, Brighton and Hove, there are 37 secondary schools, of which 21 are 11 to 16 schools and the rest are 11 to 18 schools; 18 special schools; and 7 colleges, of which 3 are sixth form colleges, 3 are general further education (FE) colleges and 1 is a land-

based specialist college. Of the ten secondary schools in Brighton and Hove, one is to be closed and, five of the remaining nine have specialist status. Four schools (all located in Hove) have sixth forms, and post-16 education is also provided in two sixth form colleges —, Brighton, Hove and Sussex Sixth Form College and Varndean College — and a general FE college, City College, Brighton and Hove. In East Sussex, 13 of the 27 secondary schools reported sixth form results in 2003, 4 of which operate as joint, paired sixth forms. One sixth form has closed (Newhaven) and one no longer recruits students (Rye). Hastings and the Weald area both have schools with sixth forms and most secondary schools in Lewes and Eastbourne are for the 11 to 16 age range. In addition, post-16 education and training are provided in Bexhill Sixth Form College and two FE colleges: Sussex Downs, which has campuses in Eastbourne, Lewes and Newhaven; and Hastings College of Arts and Technology. Plumpton College is a specialist land-based college and draws its students from a wide catchment area in East and West Sussex and Kent. The majority (more than 9,500) of the young people aged 16 to 18 who remained in education after age 16 attended colleges in the area and only about a quarter (fewer than 3,000) were in school sixth forms in 2001/02. The local LSC contracts with 12 work-based learning providers, 5 of which are colleges. Seven other providers, some of which are national, offer training places within the area. The local LSC has adopted a policy of working with the local consortium of work-based learning providers to increase collaborative contracting arrangements to bring together providers' strengths in order to raise standards and improve participation.. Currently there are approximately 3,200 trainees aged 16 to 18 on work-based learning programmes.

The strategy for 14 to 19 education and training

12. There are clear and well-considered strategies for raising the standards of 14 to 19 education and training across the area and for broadening opportunities at Key Stage 4 and at foundation and intermediate levels for post-16 students. The local LSC, the two LEAs and the Connexions partnership are working together effectively and have developed overarching strategies that relate specifically to East Sussex and Brighton and Hove. Local LSC and LEA plans clearly state their intent to match provision to the needs of learners, the community and employers. The LSC has sensibly adopted the strategy of building on existing strategic partnerships and development groups where they are working well. The four travel-to-learn groups in East Sussex established in 2003, for example, are based on previously existing associations. They share a clear vision of what needs to be achieved. The groups have representation from schools, colleges, work-based learning providers, employers through education business partnerships, the Connexions partnership, school improvement services, the local LSC and key partners from each area. The positive engagement of schools and colleges with the local vision and strategy for 14 to 19 provides support for the changes. However, the long-term benefits of these strategies have not yet had time to be realised.

13. The LSC's local strategic plan for 2002 to 2005 and its annual plan for 2003/04 have set clear objectives relating to improving levels of access to courses and to raising participation and attainment for young people. These aims correctly address: the needs of students at foundation and intermediate levels; adult literacy and numeracy levels; and local

employers' projected workforce training needs. The local LSC's strategic plan has been informed by an extensive consultation with partners and providers and a detailed needs analysis. Consultation with schools and colleges has been thorough. Reviews are being conducted to map the curriculum that will be offered for autumn 2004 and data, including value added data, are being used effectively to provide better information about cohorts of students and their education and training needs. Schools and colleges support the strategies developed by the local LSC and the majority of providers are enthusiastic about the opportunities the strategies offer to develop courses and progression routes that will meet the needs of all young people more effectively. More flexible learning programmes have been introduced successfully in a number of schools and there are plans in place for further expansion. Students have responded well to these new arrangements.

14. The education development plans for 2002–07 of both LEAs are complementary and are consistent with those of the local LSC. They set clear targets for improving the standards of 14 to 19 education which are linked to the local LSC's six objectives for this age group. Brighton and Hove LEA plans to provide additional post-16 opportunities within its existing schools and plans to expand provision in East Brighton. The local LSC and East Sussex LEA have consulted fully on the strategy for East Sussex. Self-review of sixth form provision is being introduced and timescales for implementing change have been identified. Systems are in place for tracking vulnerable groups of students and some of these groups, such as looked-after children, are performing well in Brighton & Hove.. Both LEAs recognise weaknesses in some pupils' achievements and set challenging targets for improvement at Key Stage 4 and post-16. The strategies for 14 to 19 are already having an impact on improving attainment. Standards of achievement at Key Stage 4 are rising at a faster rate than the national average and participation on foundation and intermediate courses is increasing.

15. Across both LEAs, schools and colleges have traditionally worked well together and supported each other. This is particularly the case in rural areas where schools have worked together to develop their sixth form provision. The local LSC and LEAs are encouraging and supporting collaboration where it leads to sharing of expertise and broadening of opportunities for students, as is the case with the Weald group of schools. In other areas, the local LSC and the LEA have taken the initiative to implement change through the radical review of provision, such as in Hastings and Rother. Schools and colleges have started to map their curriculum and are further aligning timetables across consortia. Both the local LSC and the LEAs recognise that this work is at an early stage of development but see the process as key to ensuring better coherence across institutions and to matching provision to needs.

16. Since the creation of the LSC, there has been systematic and robust mapping of the needs of post-16 learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to inform development. An effective strategy has been established, based on strong partnership working and the principle of the co-location of provision to facilitate progression. The creation of a pan-Sussex partnership, coupled with the development of specific plans and centres of excellence in each area, has resulted in the needs of all but a small minority of learners being met locally. Further work is underway to develop local provision for this minority of learners and to provide a residential experience within the area. Sharing good practice and the

commitment to partnership working have played key roles in making progress possible.

17. Employers are not sufficiently involved in developing the strategies for raising participation rates and are not sufficiently involved in promoting opportunities for training. This is partly due to the lack of capacity of the many small businesses in the area to provide sufficient training opportunities. The local LSC is addressing the issue and has adopted a strategy of developing networks of providers linked to the priority employment sector areas identified in the local LSC's strategic plan. In Hastings and Rother, there has been an increase in the number of students enrolling on construction courses as a direct response to the needs of local businesses in the area. The local LSC is actively promoting the development of Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) to reflect the training needs of the local area. Eight CoVEs are already in place in Sussex and a further five have been commissioned. Of the total, 11 have at least 1 partner in East Sussex or Brighton and Hove.

Recommendations

- a. The local LSC and LEAs should continue with their strategy to build on existing partnerships and development groups where they are working well, and further develop their capacity to identify and implement necessary changes and improvements.
- b. The role of employers in developing the strategies for raising participation and their involvement in promoting opportunities for training should be strengthened.

Leadership and management

18. Leadership and management are outstanding. The local LSC has a clear vision for developing education and training across the area and it provides decisive and far-sighted strategic leadership. The local LSC quickly established good working relationships with key partners and there is a high level of co-operation between it, the two LEAs and the Connexions partnership. Well in advance of the publication of 'Success for All', it conducted detailed area reviews that provided the impetus for taking developments forward. Partnership working and communication across the area are very effective, and reliable management information is used well. In both East Sussex and Brighton and Hove, the local LSC and the LEAs have supported the work of the learning partnerships and have been successful in fostering good working relationships, trust and the sharing of good practice between different institutions that provide education and training for young people aged 14 to 19. As the key partners for effecting change, the local LSC, LEAs and the Connexions partnership have established clearly stated and well-integrated strategies for developing 14 to 19 education and training across the area. They are providing effective leadership for strategy development and intervention to bring about improvements. The key strategic partners are committed to ensuring that individual pupils and students achieve their potential, and the majority of providers are positively engaged with the local vision.

19. The 14 to 19 strategies are being implemented through a wide range of networks and partnership groups and these are effective in identifying local answers to problems and in

fostering local ownership of change. They include travel-to-learn groups in East Sussex based on IFP consortia. In Brighton and Hove, a 14 to 19 curriculum group and subject groups are taking forward planned developments. Colleges are addressing strategic planning and staff development issues through the FE Sussex Forum, and Sussex Council for Training Providers Ltd acts as a forum for shared development activities between work-based learning providers. Sussex Downs College and 11 to 16 schools in the Eastbourne area have formed Federation Eastbourne to plan and improve the performance of the 14 to 19 curriculum. In Brighton, colleges have formed an accord to plan collaboratively and share good practice. Working links with a similar accord of Hove schools are being strengthened. A Place Planning Group, originally established to plan for projected growth is now being used to plan the post-16 curriculum across Brighton and Hove. Given the maturity of partnership working in the area, there is scope for rationalising partnership groups in order to sharpen and clarify responsibilities for taking these developments forward.

20. The local LSC and LEAs use consultants effectively to analyse needs and to provide advice but they are also careful to ensure that they build the capacity of their own organisations and staff. Senior managers are capable, knowledgeable about the 14 to 19 curriculum and know the area well. They have a detailed understanding of the performance of different providers of 14 to 19 education and training and the issues that have to be addressed across the area to bring about improvement. Areas of weakness and underachievement have been identified and the key partners are careful to build on strengths and existing initiatives when planning change. Tasks are well prioritised and key partners consult both the providers and the recipients of services to identify the best approaches to bringing about improvements. In Hastings and Rother, for example, the local LSC and East Sussex LEA have provided strong leadership in producing far-reaching proposals for re-organising 14 to 19 education, and have not wavered from their intent to implement changes designed to improve participation and raise achievement levels in the area. The local LSC is actively supporting college mergers in order to enable colleges to better meet local education and training needs and make more effective use of resources. Similarly, the local LSC is encouraging radical approaches to college governance in order to ensure accountability and effective planning of provision at a local level. The local LSC and LEAs were beginning to analyse the cost-effectiveness of post-16 provision at the time of the inspection.

21. Both LEAs provide good support for school improvement and are effective at removing schools from special measures. East Sussex LEA makes good use of external contractors to provide these services. Strategies for raising performance at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 are being well implemented across the area. Recent school inspection reports judged most schools in Brighton and Hove to be well led and managed although achievements at Key Stage 4 at East Brighton College of Media and Arts are low and declining and middle management was identified as in need of development. In the light of the failure of successive attempts to raise the performance of the school, the LEA has taken the difficult decision to close the school and disperse the pupils to other schools across the city. The management of colleges across the area is satisfactory or better and, where it is satisfactory, college managers and the local LSC are taking decisive action to bring about improvement. Both LEAs monitor the performance of schools carefully and set challenging

targets for improvement.

22. Colleges in the area have well-established quality assurance procedures that are effective in raising standards, but quality assurance mechanisms in schools sixth forms are not sufficiently rigorous. More effective self-evaluation procedures were being developed by both LEAs at the time of the inspection. Good use is made of value added data to drive up standards across the area. The local LSC and the LEAs are implementing procedures for determining the appropriateness and impact of the 14 to 19 curriculum across the area and the extent of over or under provision of courses at different levels as part of the process of ensuring that provision meets local needs. There are procedures in place for monitoring the performance of work-based learning providers and action is being taken by the local LSC to rationalise contracting arrangements to improve the quality of work-based learning. Quality assurance procedures, however, are not sufficiently robust and, as yet, there is insufficient sharing of good practice to achieve the rate of improvement required in the context of the mostly low levels of work-based achievements in the area.

23. There is a high level of commitment to inclusion and to supporting vulnerable groups across the area. The key strategic partners have clear policies relating to equality of opportunity and diversity and the performance of different groups, including vulnerable groups, is carefully monitored. Some well-considered initiatives are being implemented, such as policies of returning disruptive pupils to schools quickly in Brighton and Hove and support for engaging pupils who are at risk of not continuing with their education during holiday periods.

24. Project and short-term funding has been used well to improve opportunities for young people aged 14 to 19 and for demonstrating effective approaches to raising achievement levels. There is no firm strategy for embedding developments. The local LSC and the LEAs have started to address this concern and are reviewing options, such as common timetabling and the provision of more school-based courses for pupils aged 14 to 16, supported by colleges. Both the local LSC and the LEAs are making effective use of discretionary and capital funding to support developments and are looking for innovative approaches to co-locating provision so as to maximise the impact of college and school resources. The local LSC and the LEAs have started to analyse the relative costs and value for money provided by colleges and school sixth forms as part of the process of planning the post-16 curriculum and the configuration of institutions for providing it.

Recommendations

- c. Consideration should be given by local LSC, LEAs and their partners to the potential for rationalising partnership groups, given the maturity of working relationships.
- d. The local LSC, LEAs and their partners should work at developing more refined performance indicators to monitor the impact of strategy implementation systematically.

-
- e. The local LSC and providers should improve quality assurance arrangements for work-based learning provision, and ensure that they are implemented effectively.

The curriculum and access to, and participation in, education and training

25. The curriculum provided and the configuration of provision across the area are satisfactory. Strategic partners and providers have a clear understanding of the weaknesses that require attention and some appropriate action has already been taken, with further development planned for September 2004. This work is appropriately focused on filling gaps in provision and improving access. Opportunities for learners are improving but currently there is not equality of access to appropriate provision for all.

26. On an area basis, the strategic partners are carrying out an increasingly systematic analysis of need to inform development. The local LSC reviews in the three planning areas have identified issues for development linked to employment needs. The Place Planning exercise in Brighton and Hove has identified the extent to which the current configuration of providers can meet education and training needs and aspects that require development. The Eastbourne Federation has carried out a curriculum mapping exercise and is now working collaboratively to develop an appropriate pattern of provision across the area. The creation of travel-to-learn area groups in East Sussex is having a positive impact on the process of developing provision that reflects local needs. Although only recently established, these groups build on previous work and provide an effective forum for planning and the exchange of ideas. For a specialist college such as Plumpton College, they also provide a systematic way for communicating with all other partners.

27. The local LSC and East Sussex LEA have demonstrated strength of purpose in presenting proposals for the reconfiguration of the post-16 provision in Hastings and Rother. The changes are focused on closing a number of underperforming school sixth forms and establishing a collegiate college model in the area aimed at improving standards and increasing learners' access to a wider range of qualifications. Other positive actions have been the closure of two small sixth forms in East Sussex and the merger of three colleges to create Sussex Downs College.

28. The breadth of the Key Stage 4 curriculum offered in many schools is good and includes effective links with employers to help develop work-related learning. Work-related learning is also supported by effective education business link organisation arrangements. The majority of schools are offering vocational courses focused on applied GCSEs or GNVQs, with an emphasis on information and communication technology (ICT), leisure and tourism and health and social care. Many schools are effectively using the funding available from different initiatives to support their commitment to providing a more flexible 14 to 19 curriculum which better meets the needs of their students. For example, at Hailsham Community College, 78 students are on individual learning programmes managed through the inclusion unit and supported by staff funded from LSC level 2 and Engaging Young Learner projects. However, a minority of schools have been slow to exploit the opportunities offered by a more flexible curriculum and students have only limited access to alternative

courses.

29. The successful implementation of the IFP and other Key Stage 4 link courses, established between schools and colleges, has resulted in a curriculum offer that better meets the needs of learners in many areas. However, in the first year, inappropriate recruitment and induction procedures led to low retention rates. This was partly as a result of the short timescale for planning and introduction. Lessons were learned from this experience and the match of students to appropriate courses has been improved. Alignment of timetable arrangements — to ensure students attending a college course do not miss part of other Key Stage 4 teaching — and standardising costs are issues that require further action. Collaborative working between colleges is a particularly positive aspect of the development. For example, in the first year, Plumpton College ran a small land-based course for Sussex Downs College IFP students. In the second year, Plumpton College was funded to run its own programme and currently has 60 students, from 22 schools across the area, on national vocational qualification (NVQ) level 1 courses in agriculture, equine studies and land-based occupations. In addition, it continues to run a motor vehicle course for Sussex Downs College. Partly as the result of the success of the IFP, there is a lack of capacity across the area to meet the increasing demand for this type of out-of-school learning opportunity. A significant minority of students across the area is not able to access appropriate courses that would support their learning needs and progression opportunities.

30. There is a lack of appropriate post-16 programmes at entry level, level 1 and level 2 across the area: a weakness acknowledged by the key partners in their self-evaluation report. Many young people wishing to study courses at these levels have to travel significantly further than those wishing to study at level 3. The problem of access to appropriate provision is compounded in more rural areas, such as the Weald, where transport is more difficult to access. Some learners in these areas choose not to continue in education and training after age 16 because of the difficulties of access. Others are recruited onto inappropriate programmes at level 3 and drop out at the end of Year 12. To address this situation, colleges and schools are working individually and in partnership to increase the number of vocational courses available at all levels. The introduction of Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) first diplomas is a particular focus for development in several areas. For example, Sussex Downs College is providing support for schools in the area planning to introduce vocational courses into their sixth forms. At Hastings College of Arts and Technology, a major curriculum review has resulted in the courses offered being matched more closely to the needs of learners, particularly the large cohort of students who leave schools in the area at 16 with fewer than five grades A* to C at GCSE. This more inclusive curriculum has already contributed to a 28% increase in participation. Brighton, Hove and Sussex Sixth Form College has introduced level 2 vocational courses and student apprenticeships that allow learners to combine vocational courses with regular work experience.

31. There are gaps in the availability of work-based learning programmes, particularly modern apprenticeships, which result in some students, especially in more rural areas, being unable to access appropriate post-16 progression routes. In the Weald area, good

collaboration between the schools, and between the schools and colleges, is being used as the mechanism for improvement. Plans are under way to provide an increased range of vocational and occupational training locally through the establishment of a training centre in the area and the schools developing a jointly managed modern apprenticeship programme.

32. Through cross-agency working, including the involvement of EB4U, the Bridge to Employment project has successfully supported young people at severe risk of disengagement. The work-related learning project which offers long-term provision of one day a week placements in employment has been effective at supporting the development of an inclusive curriculum and enhancing students' motivation and progression. The Summer Sussex Uproject, managed by the Connexions partnership and the Youth Service, has had a positive impact on retention and has helped to reduce the number of young people classified as not in education, employment or training. The STEP programme at Hastings College has resulted in a revised curriculum model matched more closely to the needs of learners. In Brighton and Hove, some good support for teenage mothers is provided through the teenage pregnancy reintegration project. The entry to employment (E2E) programme across the area has been successfully implemented and further expansion is only limited by the availability of funding. Together, this range of programmes is having a demonstrable positive impact on the participation, retention and transition of vulnerable students.

Recommendations

- f. Partners should work together to increase the capacity to provide appropriate out-of-school learning opportunities for all Key Stage 4 students.
- g. Action should be taken to align timetable arrangements to ensure that students attending a college course integrate this programme more effectively with their school timetables.
- h. The local LSC and LEAs should work with providers to increase the range and accessibility of level 1 and level 2 provision and the range of vocational courses available to post-16 learners across the area.
- i. Action should be taken to increase and improve access to work-based learning opportunities in those parts of the area where demand is not being met, for example, in the Weald.
- j. Partners should develop further the work that has begun in some areas on curriculum mapping.

Guidance and support

33. The quality of guidance and support is good. Most schools, colleges, and work-based learning providers offer strong guidance and individual support to learners. They have effective support structures, including initial assessment, tutorial and monitoring systems.

There is focused support for vulnerable groups of learners. However, some colleges and work-based learning providers are less effective at monitoring learners' progress and there is some variation in the quality of pastoral support in school sixth forms. School pupils are generally well informed about post-16 opportunities.

34. Link course provision during Key Stage 4 often assists students in making informed choices and aids their transition into post-16 education or training. As an example, in one school visited, all students questioned were fully aware of the options open to them and presented a clear rationale for the decisions to stay in the sixth form, go to another college or move into employment with training. The local college was seen to be very supportive and offered the range of courses the students wanted to follow.

35. The Connexions partnership operates through sub-contracting elements of provision to Sussex Careers, local authority youth services and voluntary agencies to provide careers advice and support for vulnerable pupils and students. Connexions careers centres have been established in all schools and rural areas are served well. There are separate centres in the three largest towns in East Sussex and three centres in Brighton and Hove. The Connexions partnership has recruited 60 new personal advisors (PAs) across Brighton & Hove and East Sussex, which has made an impact across the area while enabling it to retain its careers advice and guidance provision. This partnership model is making a positive contribution to support and guidance in schools and colleges and in addressing the needs of vulnerable groups. Connexions PAs work well with staff in the institutions where they are based. They show high levels of commitment, and staff turnover within the service is low.

36. There is a range of published information relating to careers options and opportunities produced by Connexions, learning partnerships and providers. While some is well-written, accessible and objective, this is not always the case. Some school-produced and focused material lacks objectivity and some Connexions material is relatively inaccessible to its intended readership, as in publications aimed at parents about post-16 opportunities. The East Sussex Learning Partnership has produced informative and objective 'Moving on: moving up' booklets for areas of East Sussex. They are well presented and easy to read, offering details of school, FE and work-based learning providers and curricula. Sussex Council of Training Providers, funded by the LSC, is about to produce a searchable web-based directory of training opportunities and providers.

37. Sussex Careers provides good support to schools in their delivery of careers education and guidance programmes and they have developed useful curriculum materials for use at Key Stages 3 and 4. Connexions PAs specialising in careers guidance are linked to every secondary mainstream and special school, and students in Year 11 can have a careers interview on request. However, specialist advisers are not always able to commit sufficient time to meet individuals' needs, and though schools are generally appreciative of the service they receive, they have expressed concerns about the level and, occasionally, the quality of support available to them. Thus, the quality of careers advice and guidance given to individual young people is inconsistent. College-based advice and guidance processes are good, with strong support for learners needing additional help.

38. Schools, colleges and work-based learning providers offer strong and caring informal individual support to their learners. In East Sussex, most interventions are carried out in school, and there are indications that this is having a significant effect in preventing some young people from being excluded from school. In Brighton and Hove, the focus includes more community-based activity, with specialist PAs working with some high risk groups. There are good links to external statutory and voluntary agencies catering for the needs of young people. The needs of young people with statements of special educational needs are identified within the transition planning process and careful planning and transition support mean provision is matched to need.

39. The most vulnerable young people have good personal support through transition. Learners on E2E programmes continue to receive support from their PAs when they progress to college or in the workplace. In Brighton and Hove, there is an additional PA on the 'leaving care' team, to support looked-after children as they move towards independent living and learning. In East Sussex, there are measures in place to ensure that asylum seekers will be placed in a school within two weeks of arrival. Both LEAs are working to support and re-engage school-age mothers, with some innovative project work taking place in Brighton and Hove, where the teenage pregnancy rate is particularly high. Learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities also benefit from effective personal support as they transfer from school to college or employment. In Brighton and Hove, young people identified as being at risk of disengaging are well supported through transition at age 16 and there is specific support for learners between school and college in the form of summer schools and youth projects, and a popular breakfast club to encourage young people to find employment. The Connexions partnership has worked to reduce the numbers of young people not in education, employment or training and those whose destinations are unknown. At the time of inspection, the partnership was on course to meet its target to reduce this figure to 5.3% by November 2004. There has been considerable activity by PAs to reduce the 'unknown' group by encouraging young people to get in touch with Connexions.

40. Systems for monitoring all young people's progress at 16 and beyond are underdeveloped. Work has started on identifying a common minimum set of data to improve transition information, but it has not yet been possible to merge separate databases. There are no systems to track learners who drop out of provision after 16, for example, those who leave school during or after Year 12, or who leave college courses part way through, or the many learners on work-based learning programmes who do not complete their qualifications.

Recommendations

- k. The Connexions partnership should work with providers and other partners in the area to develop comprehensive, unbiased and up-to-date information about all post-16 provision, including work-based learning opportunities.
- l. The Connexions partnership/careers services should work with parents and staff in all schools to ensure information about the full range of progression opportunities is available to all learners.

-
- m. The local LSC should work with the LEAs, Connexions and providers to introduce appropriate systems to identify, track and support learners who do not complete their post-16 programmes.

The quality of 14 to 19 education and training

Achievement

41. The level of achievement across the 14 to 19 age range in East Sussex, Brighton and Hove is satisfactory. There has been an overall upward trend in the proportion of pupils gaining 5 or more A* to C grades at GCSE. In 2003, 48% of pupils in Brighton and Hove and 53% in East Sussex (which is at the national average) achieved five or more A* to C grades. In both authorities, this was below the target the LEAs had set for themselves. There are significant variations between schools and in different geographical areas. Schools in east Brighton and in Hastings and Rother generally perform below average for the area.

42. In East Sussex, the progress of pupils between Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 is broadly in line with average progress, whilst in Brighton and Hove it is above the average rate of progress. Overall, average points scores are broadly in line with national and statistical neighbour averages. However, the proportion of pupils gaining five or more A* to G grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, is slightly below the national average. The achievement gap between boys and girls remains an issue as nationally, but analysis by Brighton and Hove LEA of subject data indicates that here girls under-perform at GCSE.

43. Across the area, there is evidence of good progress being made by groups of vulnerable young people. Pupils with special educational needs and those receiving support for English as an additional language make good progress, and in Brighton and Hove in 2003 there was a significant increase in the proportion of looked-after children who achieved five or more A* to C grades at GCSE to 17%; 2% above the government's target of 15%. In East Sussex, the progress of travellers' children is carefully monitored and all complete their secondary education, whereas nationally only 5% do so. In Brighton and Hove, although numbers in individual groups are small, the attainment of the majority of minority ethnic pupils is above the national average. In East Sussex, only young travellers make well-below-average progress between Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4.

44. The pattern of post-16 achievement at level 3 is generally in line with national averages, but less satisfactory at level 2. Achievements at level 3, in terms of both pass rates and value added scores, are good in the sixth form colleges, but relatively low in some school sixth forms. Department for Education and Skills (DfES) figures for school and college performance by LEA indicate that the average points score per entry for GCE/vocational certificate of education (VCE) qualifications at A/AS level in 2003 was 78.9 in Brighton and Hove and 73.1 in East Sussex, compared with an England average of 76.9. In Brighton and Hove, data indicate that the lower performing pupils tend to remain at school while those who attain more highly opt for the sixth form colleges. In school sixth forms across the area average points scores are below national and statistical neighbour averages at AS level and

GCE A level and below colleges in the area. East Sussex sixth forms overall compare unfavourably with national averages. They are better in the Weald where performance is above the East Sussex average. However, in Hastings and Rother sixth forms, in particular, there are low GCE A-level average points scores and poor and declining value added. These schools are included in the Hastings and Rother review.

45. Students attending the seven FE colleges in the area generally achieve at least at a satisfactory level. Overall retention rates are above the national average and pass rates improved to around the national average in 2002. Most students in the sixth form colleges are studying at level 3, but the majority of students aged 16 to 18 in the general FE colleges are taking courses at levels 1 and 2. For example 50% of enrolments at City College, Brighton and Hove and 64% at Hastings College of Arts and Technology, are at levels 1 and 2. Across the area there has been a decline in the numbers of students progressing to school sixth forms, but a greater increase in those progressing to colleges of FE after age 16, where there are more vocational courses and more courses below level 3 which better meet students' needs. Colleges often provide good progression opportunities for students who may not have achieved highly at age 16. For example, many students who enter Plumpton College with low levels of prior achievement progress to higher level courses and to higher education (HE). At Bexhill College, students can progress through levels 1 to 2 to 3, and a high proportion progress to HE. At Sussex Downs College, there is good progression from entry level to FE or employment.

46. Achievements in work-based learning are unsatisfactory. Achievement varies between different areas of learning and also between providers. Although several providers are performing at the national average level, this is too low. Strategies to rationalise provision and to encourage collaborative contracting are being implemented, but, for the most part, it is not yet possible to identify the impact of these changes. There is evidence of improvement in the two largest providers — Sussex Downs College and Protocol Skills — and also at Plumpton College.

47. Participation and staying-on rates are satisfactory but almost half of the students leaving school at age 16 in East Sussex do not achieve the qualifications to progress to advanced level courses (the majority of courses on offer) and in Hastings and Rye, just under 7% leave school with no qualifications at all. The proposals for change in this area are designed to address these issues. Participation in post-16 education and training, at 84.6% in 2003, is around the national average, although a higher proportion of 16-year-olds progress to full-time education than nationally. More young people stay on in full-time education in the Weald area than elsewhere. At age 18/19, progression rates to HE are around the national average in East Sussex, but below in Brighton and Hove. However, in Brighton and Hove the participation of looked-after children in education or training at age 19 is above the national average, partly as a result of good transition arrangements and effective support.

Quality of education and training

48. Teaching and training meet the learning needs of most young people effectively

across the area. At Key Stage 4 in schools, teaching and learning are good. Recent inspection reports indicate that teaching was good or better in 72% of lessons observed at Key Stage 4; slightly above the national average of 68%. From a low level of attainment on entry to secondary education, pupils in schools make good progress through Key Stage 4. Despite the fact that neither authority in the area inspected has met its targets for achievement of GCSEs/GNVQs, there is a good level of challenge and monitoring and the quality of teaching and learning is consistently reviewed. This monitoring focuses well on aiming to increase the amount of very good teaching by reducing the number of lessons judged by Ofsted to be only satisfactory. Reviews also focus well on the need to improve the quality of teaching of numeracy and literacy across the area, which currently is too variable beyond Key Stage 3. In addition, teaching encourages good attendance in schools and colleges and generally motivates young people to behave and achieve as well as they are able. Where the average post-16 pass rates are below county and national levels and the value added to students' learning is below average, especially in Hastings and Rother, robust proposals have been developed to address the weaknesses. Tighter monitoring and review of post-16 performance in Brighton and Hove is beginning to have a positive impact on standards. In East Sussex self-review post-16 was underdeveloped in schools and new approaches are only recently beginning to have impact.

49. Inspection data demonstrate that the quality of teaching and learning in colleges is generally good and there is less unsatisfactory teaching than nationally. It is particularly good at Varndean College where almost four-fifths of lessons were good or better, and only 1% were unsatisfactory. The proportion of good or better teaching is also high at Brighton, Hove and Sussex Sixth Form College (72%) and Sussex Downs which, at 70%, is above the national average for similar colleges. In school sixth forms overall, in 76% of lessons, teaching was judged to be good or better. This is slightly lower than the national average for school sixth forms. In work-based learning, there is good development of practical skills and key skills by most providers, however, there is not sufficient teaching to meet framework requirements in some areas of learning.

50. Provision of the key skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT is good in colleges but weaker in school sixth forms. Support for ICT is good and there are clear links between area-wide strategic plans and individual school plans to improve provision and the quality of teaching and learning. Once again, the close monitoring of school inspection reports, good analysis of data and clear prioritising has resulted in a marked rise in standards. This has been supported by improvements to in-service training for teachers and better technical support. Further progress is required in developing the use of ICT across the curriculum in schools and for improving resources for disadvantaged groups and those with special educational needs. E2E schemes are beginning to have a very positive impact on the lives of those young people involved, building on learners' confidence and skills.

51. There are good procedures for assessing the learning and support needs of learners in schools and colleges and within some work-based learning provision. Individual learning programmes and alternative curriculum packages make a significant contribution to meeting the needs of individuals and groups for whom mainstream provision is not suitable. At the

same time, link course provision enables young people to taste and confirm or change their choice of post-16 learning programme and provider. Colleges generally have well-organised induction programmes involving the diagnosis of individual learning needs. Provision to meet this identified need is generally good. Initial assessments within work-based learning provision lead to individual learning plans which are reviewed on at least a quarterly basis. However, employers are not always involved in the review progress and not enough short-term targets are identified.

52. There is good support and data analysis relating to the education of minority ethnic pupils and traveller children who respond and perform well. Results at the higher levels in GCSE and GCE examinations increased in 2002, and this reflected the effective support that is provided in the area for the more able, gifted and talented young people. Good support is also provided for those young people with special educational needs, although expenditure on this aspect remains high. Inspection reports show that pupils with special educational needs, including those in specialist provision, make better progress than the average for all pupils. Pupils with English as an additional language also learn well and make good progress.

Resources

53. Resources and accommodation are adequate in supporting the teaching, training and learning of young people in the area. Recent inspection reports comment on the high proportion of qualified staff in colleges. There are few recruitment and retention issues for schools although the level of expertise required for expanding more flexible 14 to 19 curriculum programmes is insufficient in some establishments. Staff development opportunities are good both in schools and in colleges with strong support from LEAs and the colleges' consortium, FE Sussex.

54. Both authorities have succeeded in accessing funding streams, including European funding, to support them in addressing weaknesses in accommodation in some schools and colleges. The proposals for re-configuration of provision and developments such as IFP have helped the LEAs and the local LSC to set important targets to improve accommodation in the most needy schools and college sites. However, uncertainty about the sustainability of some of the funding streams has led to caution in planning and investment, especially at school level. Co-location of FE provision and special schools post-16 is a positive step forward and helps to improve access and provision for those with special educational needs. Access for those students with limited mobility remains inadequate on many college sites and in some schools. Where close links with employers have been established, learners have access to employers' resources, which are good.

Recommendations

- n. The LEAs and schools should continue to press forward with approaches to improve quality and standards in schools, especially those where achievements are below average for the area, including in some sixth forms.

- o. Action should be taken by post-16 providers to improve the achievement of qualifications at level 2 after age 16.
- p. The LSC and providers should address vigorously the low achievement in work-based learning.

Notes