

# Education, skills, and training

## State of Children in Suffolk

Autumn 2024



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# Introduction

The provision of good quality education for all and the development of skills, alongside appropriate and widespread training, are essential for improving the health and prosperity of people in Suffolk.

Education has a positive impact on both general health and wider health behaviours such as smoking, drinking, physical activity. It has consistently been identified as the key mechanism for overcoming the never-ending cycle of disadvantage and poverty which follows and blights the lives of so many from generation to generation. (Department of Health & Social Care – DHSC, [Education, schooling and health summary](#), 2021)

The negative impacts of disadvantage are seen, felt, and experienced early in life, with differences in educational outcomes between children emerging even before going to school, and widening throughout childhood. (UK Parliament, [Improving education outcomes for disadvantaged children](#), 2024)

Receiving a good education, developing skills, and being trained provides the opportunities for gaining the qualifications which can make a real difference to life outcomes. Young people with few or no qualifications are three to four times more likely not be in education, employment or training (NEET) compared to those with higher level qualifications. They are also more likely, in the longer term, to be in poorer quality, less skilled jobs, and to earn lower wages than their more highly skilled peers.

## Impact of COVID-19

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in the UK are likely to affect people's lives both in the short, medium, and long term. Due to the three national lockdowns introduced during in two academic years – 2019/20 and 2020/21 – the majority of children in Suffolk were educated virtually and at home, with schools delivering face to face teaching to vulnerable and key worker children only. As a consequence of these lockdowns, national testing, and examinations for pupils in primary school (Key Stage 2), secondary school (Key Stage 4) and sixth form and college students (Key Stage 5) were cancelled.

# Education types

## Schools

There are 323 state-funded schools in Suffolk, with an additional 34 independent schools. A summary of the school profile across Suffolk is shown in Table 1. Most of these schools (226, 63.1%) are academies, statistically significantly higher than England (43.5%). The percentage of independent schools is statistically similar in Suffolk (9.5%) and England (9.9%). There is a statistically significantly lower percentage of Local Authority (LA) maintained schools in Suffolk (27.4%) than England (46.6%) ([DfE school characteristics statistics](#), 2024).

The 46 secondary schools include Abbeygate in Bury St Edmunds and Suffolk One in Ipswich, two specialist sixth form colleges which account for 3,325 pupils.

[Lowestoft sixth form college](#) is part of East Coast College. There are three further education colleges: Suffolk New College (Ipswich) which includes Suffolk Rural (which was Otley College), East Coast College (Lowestoft), and West Suffolk College (Bury St Edmunds).

The University of Suffolk (based in Ipswich) was awarded university status in 2016.

Pupil numbers only include full time pupils; in Suffolk’s primary schools in 2023/24, there were an additional 1,400 part time pupils, mostly in nursery classes. There is also one nursery school recorded in the county, which had 103 pupils.

**Table 1: Number of schools and pupils in Suffolk (2023/24)**

Type of school	Schools	Full-time pupils
<b>State-funded primary</b>	253	55,249
<b>State-funded secondary</b>	46	45,849
<b>State-funded special school</b>	14	1,614
<b>Alternative Provision / Pupil referral unit</b>	10	21
<b>Total state-funded</b>	<b>323</b>	<b>102,733</b>
<b>Independent school</b>	34	7,759

Source: [Department for Education \(2024\)](#)

From September 2024, Ofsted no longer makes an overall effectiveness judgement in inspections of state-funded schools. The latest (December 2024) percentage figures (Table 2), are statistically similar to England – except for the percentage of schools which are outstanding, which is statistically significantly lower than England.

**Table 2: School overall effectiveness (where recorded), Suffolk and England, December 2024**

Judgement	Suffolk count	Suffolk (%)	England (%)
<b>Outstanding</b>	25	8.2%	13.2%
<b>Good</b>	245	80.3%	76.3%
<b>Requires improvement</b>	34	11.2%	9.3%
<b>Inadequate</b>	1	0.3%	1.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>305</b>		<b>22,478</b>

Source: Ofsted, [Inspection report database](#), 2024.

## Attendance and absenteeism

Parents are responsible for making sure that their children of compulsory school age receive a suitable full-time education. This can be by regular attendance at school, at alternative provision, or otherwise (e.g. the parent can choose to educate their child at home). Improving attendance in schools is crucial to the Government’s commitment to increase social mobility and ensure every child meets their potential. (DfE, [Working together to improve school attendance](#), 2024) .

In 2022/23, 15.9% of primary school pupils (7,893) and 28.0% of secondary school pupils (11,290) were identified as persistent absentees in Suffolk schools (OHID, [child & maternal health](#), fingertips). This means these pupils missed 10% or more of the possible sessions in the academic year.

In 2022/23, the overall absence rate for Suffolk was 7.7% (England 7.4%, significance not calculated). The Suffolk illness rate was 4.1%, compared to 3.7% for England (DfE, [absence by geographic level](#), 2022/23).

National data indicates that persistent absenteeism is higher for those eligible for free school meals and those on Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans or requiring Special Educational Needs (SEN) support, which could also be contributory factors to Suffolk's overall rate of persistent absence. Individuals from White backgrounds are more likely to miss school sessions and receive suspensions (previously known as fixed-term exclusions). They are also over-represented amongst those who have Special Educational Needs and those with an Education, Health & Care Plan (Suffolk Office of Data and Analytics 2023). This suggests that socioeconomic factors and additional educational needs may play a significant role in attendance patterns, highlighting the need for targeted support and interventions for these vulnerable groups ([Department for Education](#) 2024).

Analysis of absence reasons over the last three autumn terms (2021/22, 2022/23, and 2023/24) shows that illness consistently accounts for the largest proportion of absences in both Suffolk and England. In the most recent autumn term (2023/24), Suffolk's illness absence rate was 3.8% compared to England's 3.5%. Unauthorised absences due to reasons other than holidays or lateness were also notable, with Suffolk at 1.4% and England at 1.5%. It is important to note that while these figures provide insight into absence patterns, the data has not been statistically tested for significance between Suffolk and England values. Therefore, caution should be exercised when drawing direct comparisons or conclusions about the relative performance of Suffolk compared to the national average, and further analysis is required ([Department for Education](#) 2024).

## Electively home educated (EHE) children

The Education Act 1996 places a responsibility on parents to make sure that children receive a full-time education (cited in Department for Education, [EHE](#), 2019), and many parents do this by sending their child to school. Other parents may decide to educate at home. Home education can be a positive choice when it accounts for the needs and wellbeing of the child. Local authorities have a responsibility to “find out so far as possible whether home educated children are receiving suitable full-time education” (Department for Education, [EHE](#), 2019).

There has been an increase in children and families electing, or choosing, to home educate. Department for Education (DfE) official statistics in development on elective home education (EHE) estimate an increase of almost a quarter (23.4%) in the number of EHE children at any point in the academic year 2023/24 (Suffolk 25.8% increase, 2,460 children in total) compared to 2022/23. However, DfE note “As this is a relatively new data collection, which first became mandatory in autumn 2024, increases are likely to be in part due to improvements in data quality” (DfE, [Elective home education statistics](#), Autumn term 2024/25).

As of autumn term 2023/24, there were 1,410 children in Suffolk in elective home education (1.4% of the entire school-age population), higher than the England rate of 1.1% for the same period ([Department for Education](#) 2024).

In Autumn 2024/25, 500 Suffolk children that were in EHE on the census date had a specific reason for EHE recorded. Only one reason could be given. Over 1,600 children had a reason recorded, although “unknown” (890) was most commonly recorded (210 had “other” or “no reason given”) and low numbers were suppressed (including for permanent exclusion, health covid, and “did not get school preference”). Of those that had a **specific** reason recorded, mental health (220 children) was the most common **specific** reason, followed by school

dissatisfaction (150 children) (DfE, [Reason - elective home education statistics](#), Autumn term 2024/25).

Once a child or young person has been taken out of a school to be home educated, they are no longer surrounded by some of the protective factors of school.

Currently, the local authority has no legal basis for carrying out checks on the child, unless they believe there is a safeguarding concern. Whilst elective home education will be the right education setting for a number of children, it can be difficult for the local authority to ascertain if the child would benefit from any additional support. There is no requirement for electively home educated children to sit exams. Parents need to find a school or exam centre who is willing to let them take any examinations, such as GCSEs, if this is part of the parents' plan of education (Suffolk County Council, [EHE FAQs](#)). This may disadvantage some families.

## Child development

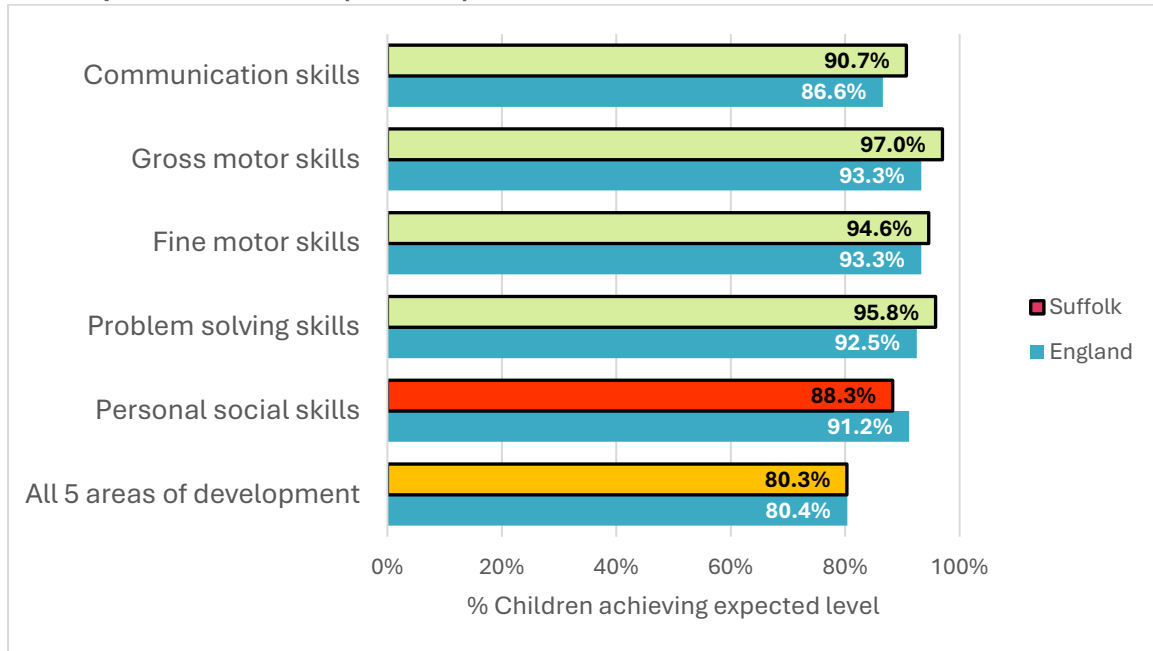
The foundations of human development are established in early childhood. The [Marmot Review 10 years on](#) (Institute of Health Equity, 2020)<sup>10</sup> explains how early childhood experiences shape later life outcomes, such as educational attainment, social and emotional development, work outcomes and income, long-term health and life expectancy.

By the second year of life, differences in child development are evident and will impact children by the time they enter school. If left unsupported, some children are more likely to fail to achieve their full potential. The Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) provides a measure of development and allows comparisons to be made between children who are and who are not developing as expected.

In 2023/24, nine in every ten children aged 2 - 2½ years old in Suffolk achieved their expected level of development on four of the five individual measures of the ASQ, with statistically significantly higher scores than England (Figure 1). However, only 88.3% achieved the expected level in personal social skills, significantly lower (worse) than England (91.2%). When the five measures are combined, 80.3% of children in Suffolk achieved the expected level of development, statistically similar to 80.4% in England. Suffolk trends for each indicator except gross motor skills are “decreasing and getting worse.”

This means around 1,110 local children aged 2 - 2½ (out of 5,636) did not achieve a good level of development, and therefore remain at risk of potentially not performing as well as other children once they start primary school.

**Figure 1: Percentage of children aged 2 - 2½ who achieve the expected level of development in Suffolk (2023/24)**



Colours on Suffolk bars (outlined in black) show if the difference compared to England is significant. Green – Suffolk is better (95%), yellow – Suffolk is similar, red – Suffolk is worse 95%  
 Source: OHID, [child & maternal health](#), fingertips.

In England, lower levels of child development – or inequalities – are seen among many different groups, including (Public Health England, [Inequalities in child development](#), 2021):

- Asian and Black children
- children living in more deprived areas
- looked-after children / Children in Care
- children with a known disability
- children who have ever been vulnerable
- children who have ever had a child protection plan
- children who would prefer a language other than English
- children who have moved twice or more

Across Suffolk, there are likely to be many young children who fall into one or more of these groups, and are likely to require additional support, both within and outside of the home. It is important to ensure their levels of development are encouraged, supported, and promoted as much as possible.

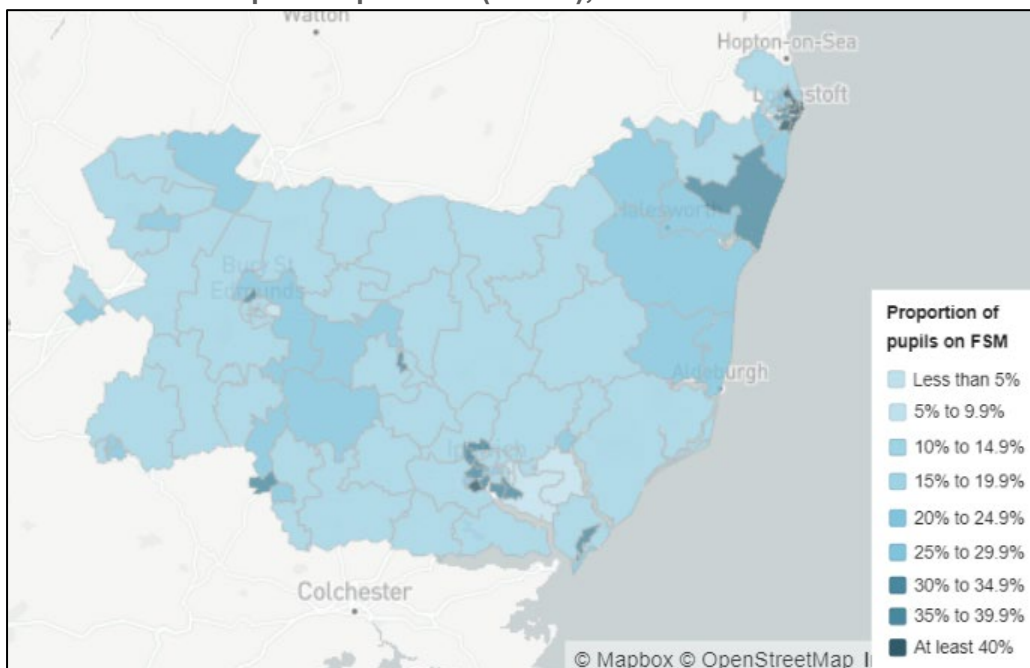
## Free school meals

Families experiencing financial hardship, such as those on low incomes or in receipt of certain welfare benefits, can apply for their children to receive free school meals. School meals, health and learning are strongly connected. Children growing up in lower income families have poorer educational outcomes than their wealthier peers. Providing healthy food – which can improve educational outcomes – could help close this attainment gap. (UK Parliament, [Child food insecurity and Free School Meals](#), 2023)

The proportion of pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals in Suffolk (21.0%) is significantly lower than the England average (23.8%). In 2022/23, 21.0% (21,898) of pupils in Suffolk’s state-funded nursery, primary, secondary or special schools claimed free school meals (Office for Health Improvement and Disparities OHID, [Free school meals % eligible](#) 2023). The proportion of Suffolk children eligible for free school meals has almost doubled in the five years from 2017/18 (10.8%) to 2022/23. Latest internal data for Suffolk (which has not been statistically tested and compared to the England average) indicates in April 2024 there were 27,631 children currently eligible for free school meals (note this does not mean that they all take up the offer of a free school meal) (Suffolk County Council 2024).

While the Suffolk proportion of children eligible for free school meals is statistically significantly lower than the England average, there is significant variation across the county (Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Percentage of pupils eligible for Free School Meal (FSM) entitlement by Suffolk Middle Super Output Area (MSOA), October 2023**



Source: [Suffolk Cost of Living Dashboard](#)

In Suffolk there are five MSOAs where over 40% of the pupils were eligible for free school meals: Gunton West, Lowestoft Central, Lowestoft Harbour & Kirkley, Pakefield North (all East Suffolk), and Stoke Park (Ipswich) ([Suffolk Cost of Living Dashboard](#) 2024).

## School readiness

Children are considered ready for school if, by the end of Reception (their first year of primary school), they achieve a good level of development. This means they have achieved the expected levels of learning in personal, social, and emotional development, physical development, communication and language, mathematics, and literacy.

In 2022/23, 66.2% (4,975) of children in Suffolk were achieving a good level of development at the end of Reception (5 yrs), statistically similar to England (67.2%). This means 2,544 children were not ready for school. Boys in Suffolk were statistically significantly less likely to be ready



than girls – two out of five (41.1%) were not ready for school compared with one in four girls (26.4%).

# Primary school

## Progress between Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2

The progress pupils make across a range of subjects is measured between the end of Key Stage 1 (Year 2, age seven) and the end of primary school (Key Stage 2, Year 6, age 11). These measures are used for holding schools accountable, with progress for individual pupils being used to calculate the schools overall progress scores. A score below zero indicates worse progress than England, and a higher score indicates better progress.

Since 2016, progress scores for pupils in Suffolk between Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 have remained below the average for all state-funded pupils in England (set to 0). In 2023, it was ([Local authority interactive tool \(LAIT\)](#), HM Government, accessed November 2024):

- -0.04 for reading. This is an improvement on 2022 (-0.49). Suffolk performs better than the statistical neighbours (-0.25) and the East of England (-0.06), although statistical significance is not tested.
- -0.21 for writing. This is an improvement on 2022 (-0.34). Suffolk performs better than the statistical neighbours (-0.58) and the East of England (-0.35), although statistical significance is not tested.
- -0.23 for maths. This is an improvement on 2022 (-0.62). Suffolk performs better than the declining statistical neighbours (-0.91) but not the East of England (-0.19), although statistical significance is not tested.

## Attainment at end of Key Stage 2

Key Stage 2 covers four years of education in primary school – Years, 3, 4, 5 and 6 – with children typically aged 7-11 years old. At the end of Key Stage 2, pupils take national curriculum assessments (more commonly known as SATs) in reading, spelling, punctuation, grammar, and maths. Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, SATS in 2019/20 and 2020/21 were cancelled and replaced with teacher assessment grades. As these grades are not comparable with other years, they have not been reported here.

The proportion of pupils achieving the expected standards in reading, writing and maths in Suffolk in 2023/24 was 58.2%, statistically significantly lower than England 61.1% and similar to the East of England (59.3%). This means that, of the 8,131 pupils who finished primary school in Suffolk that year, 4,731 met the expected standards across all three subjects, whilst 3,400 did not.

## Differences in Key Stage 2 attainment

Differences in educational outcomes – or inequalities – persist across groups in Suffolk (Table 3). For instance, under half (42.6%) of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds achieved the expected standard in reading, writing and maths, compared with 58.2% of all pupils. Across all the selected groups, levels of attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 were poorer in Suffolk compared with England.

Unless these differential outcomes are addressed, it is likely that large numbers of pupils in Suffolk will enter secondary schools without the necessary skills and abilities to achieve their full potential.

**Table 3: Percentage of Key Stage 2 pupils meeting the expected standard in reading, writing and maths by selected groups in Suffolk (2023/24)**

Characteristic	Suffolk count	Suffolk (%)	England (%)	Statistical significance (CI)**
<b>All SEND*</b>	318	18.9%	21.5%	Suffolk is lower
<b>SEND with EHC plan</b>	33	8.0%	8.7%	Suffolk is <b>similar</b>
<b>SEND support</b>	285	22.5%	25.7%	Suffolk is lower
<b>“Disadvantaged”</b>	926	42.6%	45.8%	Suffolk is lower
<b>FSM eligible</b>	883	42.6%	45.7%	Suffolk is lower
<b>First language Known or believed to be other than English</b>	515	58.1%	64.4%	Suffolk is lower
<b>All boys</b>	2,223	54.4%	57.6%	Suffolk is lower
<b>All girls</b>	2,508	62.0%	64.8%	Suffolk is lower
<b>Total</b>	4,731	58.2%	61.1%	Suffolk is lower

\* SEN = special educational needs and disabilities

\*\* 95% Confidence Interval, comparing Suffolk to England for statistical significance

Source: DfE. [Key Stage 2 Statistics by pupil characteristic](#), 2023-24

## Secondary school

### Progress between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4

Between the end of Key Stage 2 (last year in primary school – Year 6) and the end of secondary school (Key Stage 4 – Year 11), the progress pupils make across eight key subjects is measured. The Progress 8 score shows whether pupils have performed to expectation (based on a measure using Key Stage 2 English and maths as a baseline). This gives an indication of whether pupils in a school have made above or below progress compared to similar pupils in other schools. A Progress 8 score of 1.0 means pupils make on average a grade more progress than the national average of pupils with similar KS2 prior attainment in mainstream schools.

The Progress 8 score for pupils in Suffolk in 2023/24 was -0.16. This indicates that local pupils were making less progress than similar pupils across England, where the national average Progress 8 score was -0.03. In Suffolk, boys’ progress 8 score was significantly lower than girls (-0.25 compared to -0.05. Compared with 152 local authorities in England (where one is best), Suffolk was ranked 91th on their Progress 8 score ([Local authority interactive tool \(LAIT\)](#), HM Government, accessed November 2024).

### Attainment at Key Stage 4

Key Stage 4 covers two years of education in secondary school – Years 10 and 11 – with children typically aged 14-16 years old. At the end of Key Stage 4, pupils sit their GCSE examinations. Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, GCSE exams were cancelled in 2019/20 and 2020/21, when they were replaced with a combination of centre and teacher assessment grades.

The main measure of attainment used nationally is the percentage of pupils achieving a grade 5-9 in English and maths, known as a ‘good pass’. Other attainment measures include the percentage of pupils achieving a grade 4-9 in English and maths, known as a ‘standard pass’, and a summary measure of attainment across eight subjects known as Attainment 8.

In 2023/24, the Key Stage 4 attainment scores in Suffolk were lower (statistical significance not tested) than the England averages for all three measures of attainment (Table 4). Around 4 out of 10 pupils (39.9%) achieved a good pass in English and maths locally, whilst 6 out of 10 (62.8%) achieved a standard pass. Within Suffolk, this means that around 4,851 pupils achieved a standard pass in these two subjects (a standard pass of 4-9 is broadly equivalent to the old \*A-C GCSE), whilst 2,556 did not. An attainment gap persisted between Suffolk and England across all three measures.

**Table 4: Measures of attainment for Key Stage 4 pupils in Suffolk and England (2023/24)**

Measure	Suffolk count	Suffolk	England	Statistical significance (CI)**
<b>Pupils achieving grades 5 or above in English and mathematics GCSEs</b>	3,081	39.9%	46.2%	Suffolk is significantly lower
<b>Pupils achieving grades 4 or above in English and mathematics GCSEs</b>	4,851	62.8%	65.4%	Suffolk is significantly lower
<b>Average Attainment 8 score</b>		43.2	46.1	

\*\* 95% Confidence Interval, comparing Suffolk to England for statistical significance

Source: DfE, [Key Stage 4 Performance](#), 2023/24

## Differences in Key Stage 4 attainment

The inequalities in educational outcomes seen at the end of Key Stage 2 are evident at the end of Key Stage 4 (Table 5). For instance, around 1 in 5 local pupils (20.8%) from disadvantaged backgrounds achieved a good pass in English and maths, compared with 2 in 5 (39.9%) of all pupils. Across most of the selected groups, levels of attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 appeared poorer in Suffolk compared with England (statistical significance not calculated). Suffolk had a higher (better) percentage of pupils with an EHC plan that attained nine GCSEs at grade 4 or above (14.1% compared to 13.0% England) – the average Attainment 8 score for this group was 14.2 in Suffolk and England.

**Table 5: Measures of attainment (percentage of eligible pupils achieving) for Key Stage 4 pupils by selected groups in Suffolk (2023/24)**

Characteristic	GCSE 9-5 (%)	GCSE 9-4 (%)	Attainment 8 (%)
<b>Any SEN</b>	14.1	27.5	25.4
<b>SEN state EHC</b>	5.9	14.1	14.2
<b>SEN support</b>	17.8	33.6	30.5
<b>Disadvantaged</b>	20.8	41.3	32.3
<b>FSM eligible</b>	20.6	41.2	32.2
<b>First language Known or believed to be other than English</b>	41.9	63.8	45.2
<b>All boys</b>	36.9	60.0	41.3
<b>All girls</b>	43.0	65.7	45.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>39.9</b>	<b>62.8</b>	<b>43.2</b>

\* SEND = special educational needs and disabilities

\*\* EHC plan = education, health and care plan (an EHC plan sets out the education, healthcare and social care needs of a child or young person for whom extra support is needed in school, beyond which the school can provide)

Source: Department for Education. [Key Stage 4 performance by pupil characteristics](#), 2023/24

## Exclusions from school

Pupils may be excluded (suspended) from their school’s premises temporarily (fixed-period or fixed-term) or permanently - expelled from school (DfE, [A guide for parents on school behaviour and exclusion](#), 2023). Being excluded from school, even briefly, can have a detrimental impact on a pupil’s educational attainment and can affect their future opportunities in life.

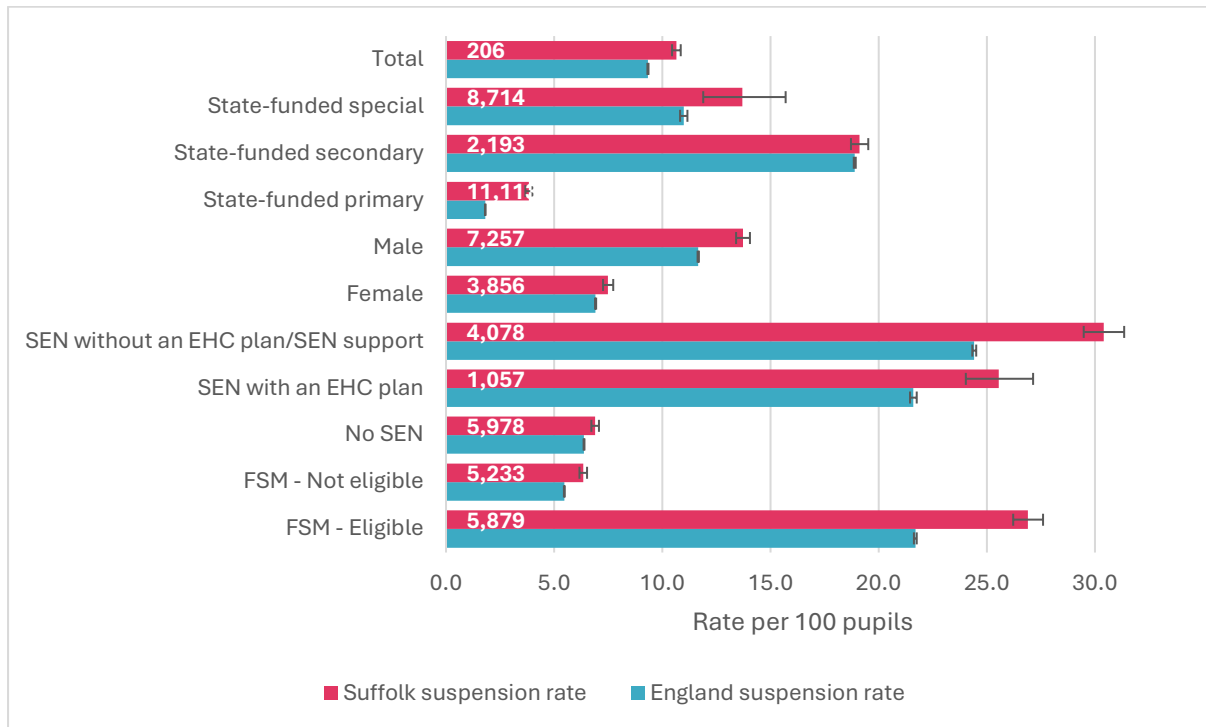
**Table 6: Suspensions and exclusions by pupil or school characteristic, Suffolk and England, 2022/23**

Characteristic	Suffolk permanent exclusions	Suffolk permanent exclusion rate	England permanent exclusion rate	Suffolk suspensions	Suffolk suspension rate	England suspension rate
FSM - Eligible	106	0.49	0.29	5,879	26.90	21.70
SEN with an EHC plan	15	0.36	0.20	1,057	25.55	21.60
SEN without an EHC plan/SEN support	75	0.56	0.37	4,078	30.40	24.42
Sex: female	57	0.11	0.07	3,856	7.49	6.91
Sex: male	112	0.21	0.15	7,257	13.73	11.66
State-funded special	2	0.13	0.08	206	13.70	10.99
State-funded primary	38	0.07	0.03	2,193	3.83	1.81
State-funded secondary	129	0.28	0.22	8,714	19.12	18.90
<b>Total</b>	<b>169</b>	<b>0.16</b>	<b>0.11</b>	<b>11,113</b>	<b>10.65</b>	<b>9.33</b>

Source: DfE, [suspensions and exclusions statistics](#), 2024.

Between the academic years 2018/19 (pre-pandemic) and 2022/23 (latest figures), the number of suspensions increased in Suffolk schools by 5,057, from 6,056 to 11,113 (Table 6). The rate of suspensions in Suffolk (10.7 per 100 pupils, is statistically significantly higher than England (9.3 per 100 pupils). Suffolk suspension rates were statistically significantly higher than England for each school or pupil characteristic except state-funded secondary schools (19.1 per 100 pupils in Suffolk compared to 18.9 in England) which were statistically similar to England (Figure 3).

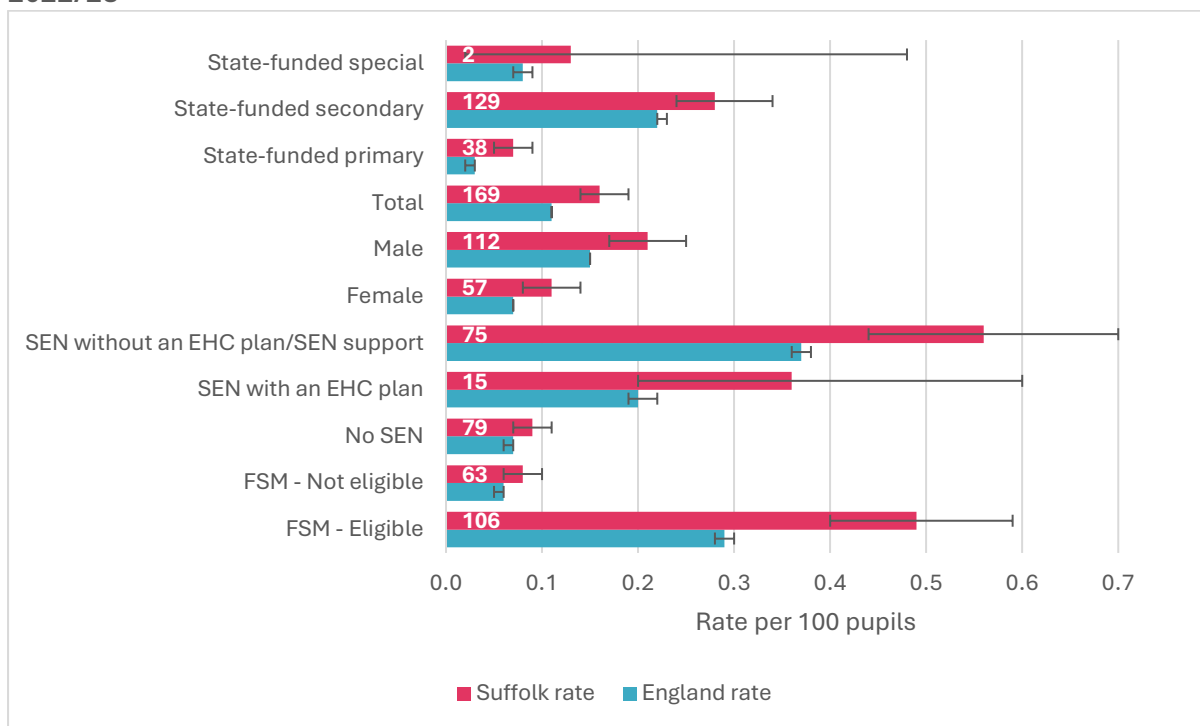
**Figure 3: Suspension rate by pupil or school characteristic, Suffolk and England, 2022/23**



Source: DfE, suspensions and exclusions statistics, 2024

Between the academic years 2018/19 (pre-pandemic) and 2022/23 (latest figures), the number of permanent exclusions increased from 106 to 169 (Table 6). The rate of permanent exclusions (0.16 per 100 pupils) is statistically significantly higher than England (0.11 per 100 pupils). Suffolk permanent exclusion rates were statistically significantly higher than England for each pupil or school characteristic, except state-funded special schools (0.13 per 100 pupils in Suffolk compared to 0.08 in England) which were statistically similar to England. Suffolk permanent exclusion rates for SEN pupils with an EHC plan (0.36 per 100 pupils) were also statistically similar to England (0.20 per 100 pupils) (Figure 4).

**Figure 4: Exclusion rate by pupil or school characteristic, Suffolk and England, 2022/23**



Source: DfE, suspensions and exclusions statistics, 2024

“Persistent disruptive behaviour” accounted for around half the suspensions in the autumn term 2023/24 (Suffolk 48.2%, England 50.1%) and for over a third of permanent exclusions (37.0% Suffolk, 35.8% England) (DfE, [suspensions and exclusions statistics by reason](#), 2024).

## Post-16 activity year olds

Once children finish secondary school, they can do one of the following three things up to the age of 18: stay in full-time education, for example, at sixth form or college; start an apprenticeship or traineeship; spend 20 hours or more a week working or volunteering, while being in part-time education or training (DfE, [school leaving age](#), accessed December 2024).

The proportion of 16-17 year olds participating in education or training in Suffolk has increased in recent years from 89.5% in 2016/17 to 90.0% in 2023. This is comparable with the England average of 92.3%. Among local 16-17 year olds, 81.6% were in full-time education (85.7% nationally), 6.1% on an apprenticeship (4.7% nationally), and 2.2% (compared with 1.9% nationally) were in other education and training (DfE, [NEET and participation LA scorecard 2023](#)).

### Young people not in education, employment, or training (NEET)

Young individuals who are not engaged in education, employment, or training (NEET) face a higher risk of experiencing poorer physical and mental health. This is in part due to an increased likelihood of unemployment, low wages, or low quality work later on in life (House of Commons Library, [Research briefing: NEET](#), 2021). The Government acknowledges that increasing young

people's participation in learning and employment not only significantly impacts their lives but also plays a crucial role in enhancing social mobility and driving economic growth.

To help more young people pursue education and acquire the skills and qualifications needed for stable employment, and to reduce the likelihood of them becoming NEET, legislation was introduced in 2013 to raise the participation age as outlined in the Education and Skills Act 2008. This law mandates that from 2013, all young people must stay in some form of education or training until the end of the academic year when they turn 17.

In 2022/23, there were 805 16 and 17 year olds who were classified as NEET in Suffolk. This was 5.1% of the age group, which was statistically similar to the England average of 5.2%. There was no statistically significant difference between the NEET rate for males (5.5%) and females (4.7%) in Suffolk in 2022/23 ([Office for Health Improvement and Disparities 2023](#)).

Amongst 16–17-year-olds, those from any other ethnic background (other than White) are under-represented amongst those that are not in education, employment or training, but also amongst those that are in education, worked-based training, or work with study (Suffolk Office of Data and Analytics 2023).

## Key Stage 5 attainment

Key Stage 5 covers the two years of education for students aged 16-18. During this time, students in Suffolk will typically be studying A-levels, vocational or technical qualifications.

86.8% of students (at end of 16-18 study) achieved at least 2 A-levels in Suffolk (compared to 76.5% in 2018/19), which is lower than England (87.5%) although significance has not been tested (DfE, [A level and other 16 to 18 results](#), 2024).

In 2022/23 (latest year available) Around 1 in 10 students locally (10.2%) achieved 3 A\*-A grades or better in their A-levels, compared with 16.1% in England, whilst 17.6% of students in Suffolk achieved AAB grades or better in their A-levels compared with 25.6% nationally. 9 out of 10 students (90.7%) in Suffolk achieved at least 2 substantial Level 3 qualifications compared with 93.1% in England. Statistical significance was not tested.

## Apprenticeships

For many 16-18 year olds, apprenticeships offer an alternative to studying at sixth form or college. Apprenticeships are available to people over the age of 16 who work in England; they take between one and six years to complete. They are paid jobs which incorporate on and off the job training. Intermediate apprenticeships (level 2) are equivalent to 5 GCSE passes, Advanced (level 3) to 2 A-level passes, Higher (levels 4-7) to a foundation degree or above, while a degree apprenticeship (level 6 or 7) is equivalent to a bachelor's or master's degree (House of Commons, [Apprenticeships policy in England](#), 2024).

For employers, there are many benefits to employing apprentices, including upskilling existing staff, reducing staff turnover, improving productivity (National Apprenticeship Service, [Achieving the benefits of apprenticeships](#), 2018).

In 2023, 6.1% of Suffolk young people aged 16 or 17 were on an apprenticeship, compared to 4.7% in England as a whole (DfE, [NEET and participation LA scorecard 2023](#)).



Since 2018/19, the number of 16-18 year olds starting an apprenticeship has fallen in Suffolk from 1,470 to 1,140 (2023/24) - a 22.4% fall, statistically significantly larger than the fall seen nationally (19.2%) (DfE, [apprenticeships by geography](#), 2024).

## Higher education

In 2022/23, 7,660 students from Suffolk entered higher education (HE). This is an increase of 5.5% (400) on the number of entrants in 2018/19. Most (84.0%) of people in Suffolk who entered HE or an apprenticeship in the year entered HE, statistically significantly lower than 2018/19 (88.9%), and statistically significantly lower than England in 2022/23 (86.8%) (DfE, [Higher level learners by local authority of permanent address](#), 2024).

In 2022/23, the HE progression for Suffolk was 38.8%, compared to 46.9% for England, and the progression to “high tariff” HE (institutions that have higher entry requirements) was 10.4%, compared to 15.3% for England (statistical significance not available) (DfE, [Widening participation in HE](#), 2024).

## Highest qualification

2021 Census data for young people (aged 16-24) indicates that Suffolk residents generally hold lower qualifications compared to the national average for England. For example, a higher proportion of Suffolk residents have no qualifications (15.2% vs. 11.1%) and fewer have Level 3 qualifications (24.2% vs. 31.1%) or Level 4 qualifications and above (14.2% vs. 19.5%).

**Table 7: Highest level of qualification, young people aged 16-24 in Suffolk and England (2021)**

Qualification	Suffolk count	Suffolk (%)	England count	England (%)
Level 1 and entry level qualifications	8,492	12.4%	542,224	9.1%
Level 2 qualifications	18,545	27.0%	1,443,668	24.1%
Level 3 qualifications	16,604	24.2%	1,860,937	31.1%
Level 4 qualifications or above	9,720	14.2%	1,169,767	19.5%
No qualifications	10,462	15.2%	662,233	11.1%
Other	4,823	7.0%	310,404	5.2%

Level 1: 1 to 4 GCSEs grade A\* to C, Any GCSEs at other grades, O levels or CSEs (any grades), 1 AS level, NVQ level 1, Foundation GNVQ, Basic or Essential Skills

Level 2: 5 or more GCSEs (A\* to C or 9 to 4), O levels (passes), CSEs (grade 1), School Certification, 1 A level, 2 to 3 AS levels, VCEs, Intermediate or Higher Diploma, Welsh Baccalaureate Intermediate Diploma, NVQ level 2, Intermediate GNVQ, City and Guilds Craft, BTEC First or General Diploma, RSA Diploma

Level 3: 2 or more A levels or VCEs, 4 or more AS levels, Higher School Certificate, Progression or Advanced Diploma, Welsh Baccalaureate Advance Diploma, NVQ level 3; Advanced GNVQ, City and Guilds Advanced Craft, ONC, OND, BTEC National, RSA Advanced Diploma

Level 4: degree (BA, BSc), higher degree (MA, PhD, PGCE), NVQ level 4 to 5, HNC, HND, RSA Higher Diploma, BTEC Higher level, professional qualifications (for example, teaching, nursing, accountancy)

Other: apprenticeships, vocational or work-related qualifications, other qualifications achieved in England or Wales, qualifications achieved outside England or Wales (equivalent not stated or unknown)

Source: ONS, Census 2021, [England highest level](#), [Suffolk highest level](#) (accessed December 2024)



# Economic activity and employment

Employment can bring better income, financial stability, security, and greater sense of purpose, which in turn can lead to healthier diets and exercise, higher living standards, and better mental health. Poor health, on the other hand, can make it harder to participate in the labour market (Health Foundation, [Relationship between employment and health](#), 2024). For more information, see the [State of Suffolk: Work and health in Suffolk report](#), 2024)

In 2023/24, just under half 16-24 year olds (48.7%) were economically inactive in Suffolk, lower than England (41.2%) but not statistically significantly different (Table 8).

**Table 8: Economic activity and employment (percentage) among adults aged 16-24 in Suffolk and England (July 2023 – June 2024)**

Variable	Suffolk (estimate count)	Suffolk (%)	Suffolk CI	England (%)	England CI
Economic activity rate	32,500	51.3	14.1	58.8	1.1
Employment rate	25,600	40.4	13.9	51.9	1.2
Unemployment rate	6,900	21.3	*	11.6	1.0
% who are economically inactive	30,800	48.7	14.1	41.2	1.1
% in employment working full-time	15,400	60.4	22.6	62.7	1.6

\* Estimate and confidence interval unreliable since the group sample size is small (3-9).

CI – Confidence Interval

Source: ONS via Nomis, [Annual Population Survey](#), 2024

## Education, skills, and training deprivation

The [2019 Indices of Deprivation \(IoD\)](#) is the official measure of relative deprivation in England and provides a way of comparing deprivation using seven domains: income, employment, health and disability, education, crime, barriers to housing and services, and the living environment. Relative deprivation does not tell us how many people are affected by deprivation, but it shows how deprived an area is relative to other areas, so can be used for identifying the most deprived areas within England.

The Education, Skills, and Training Deprivation Domain of the IMD measures the lack of educational attainment and skills in a local population. The indicators used to measure this domain of deprivation fall into two sub-domains: one relating to children and young people and one relating to adult skills.

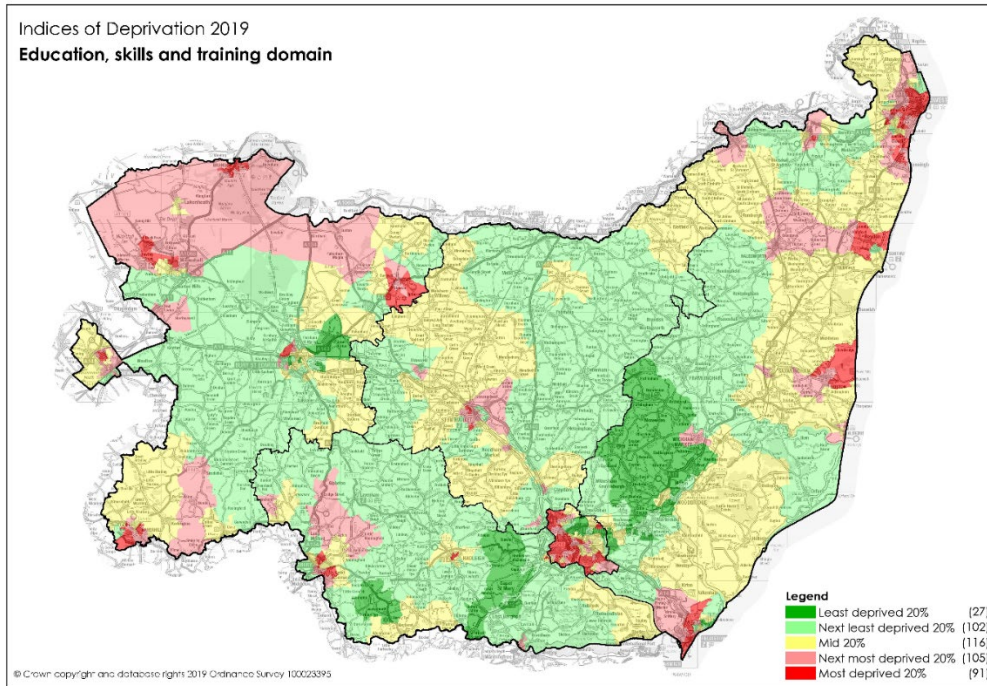
These two sub-domains are designed to reflect the ‘flow’ and ‘stock’ of educational disadvantage within an area. The Children and Young People sub-domain measures the attainment of qualifications and associated measures (‘flow’), while the Adult Skills sub-domain measures the lack of qualifications in the working age adult population (‘stock’).

Across Suffolk, the greatest levels of deprivation on the Children and Young People sub-domain were around Mildenhall, Newmarket, Haverhill, Glemsford, Sudbury, Bury St Edmunds, Stanton, Stowmarket, Ipswich, Felixstowe, Leiston, Reydon, Bungay, and Lowestoft (Figure 3).

Additional hotspots of deprivation on the Adult Skills sub-domain include areas around Hundon, which is close to Haverhill (Figure 4).

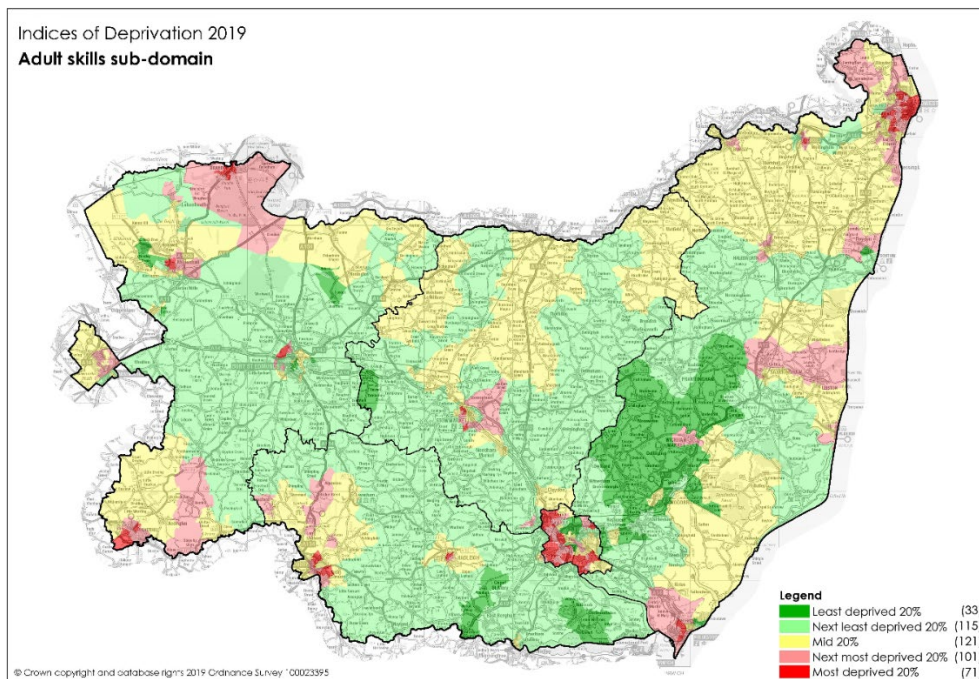
Although many of the most deprived areas in Suffolk, on both sub-domains, are concentrated in towns and other urban areas, pockets of rural deprivation, often masked by areas of relative affluence, are likely to exist. As these areas are difficult to identify, it may mean some children and young people, along with adults, do not receive the same levels of services and interventions that larger and more noticeable areas would.

**Figure 5: 2019 Children and Young People sub-domain of deprivation - education, skills and training in Suffolk**



Source: Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. [English Indices of Deprivation](#), 2019

**Figure 6: 2019 Adult Skills sub-domain of deprivation in Suffolk**



Source: Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. [English Indices of Deprivation](#), 2019

## Social mobility

Social mobility is about ensuring everyone has the opportunity to build a good life for themselves regardless of their family background. In a socially mobile society, everyone has a fair chance of reaching their potential (Social Mobility Commission, [State of the Nation 2017: Social Mobility in Great Britain](#)). In 2017, the Social Mobility Commission published a [Social Mobility Index \(2017\)](#) which assessed the education, employability and housing prospects of people living in England. In 2024 an update was published at county and unitary council level. Suffolk was classified in the middle group (of five groups: most favourable to least) for the four measures of social mobility: promising prospects, conditions of childhood, labour market opportunities for young people, and innovation and growth (Social Mobility Commission, [State of the Nation 2024: data about social mobility in the UK - Suffolk](#), 2024). “The groups are not equally sized – the middle group is larger because most local authorities are very near the average.”

The 2017 Index highlighted where people from disadvantaged backgrounds were most and least likely to make social progress at district or borough council level (pre-2019 local authority boundaries). In addition to the overall Social Mobility Index ranking, individual rankings are given for different life stages: early years, schools, youth, and adulthood. It is clear from these rankings that social mobility gaps often open up at an early age, persist into schooling and continue into adulthood.

In 2017, Ipswich, Forest Heath (West Suffolk), Babergh, and Waveney (East Suffolk) were ranked in the worst 20% of local authorities for social mobility, which indicates that people from disadvantaged backgrounds in these areas were least likely to make social progress. Compared with 324 other local authorities in England, Waveney was ranked the 11<sup>th</sup> worst on the Social Mobility Index.