

Oaklands College

Inspection report for further education college

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Inspector	Julian Mason
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Date of last inspection	13 November 2006

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About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

Accommodation for students is provided in two groups of houses located in the grounds of the college. The properties can house between three and five students and offer single accommodation bedrooms, a small kitchen, shower and toilet. Most houses have a lounge as well. Within the main complex there is a fitness centre, a common room and a cafeteria. Students attend the college for academic courses as well as being part of various sports academies.

Summary

This was a full announced inspection that concentrated on key national minimum standards for the accommodation of students under the age of 18. The inspection focused on areas relating to being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution, achieving economic wellbeing and how staffing and management arrangements supported the operation of the college.

The overall judgement for Oaklands College is satisfactory with a number of outcome areas judged as good. Students can readily access support and help when they need it. Managers provide clear leadership to the welfare team to ensure students are safe. Staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities and work consistently with students in residential accommodation. Students are provided with a living environment that is respectful and sensitive to the needs of everyone. Five good practice recommendations have been made that identify shortfalls against some key national minimum standards. In particular, the way in which the college assesses fire risks and the processes for vetting new staff.

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

Improvements since the last inspection

The college has taken action to address some of recommendations made at the last inspection in 2006. In particular, improvements have been made in areas that relate to: the laundry provision, the monitoring and security of the campus at night and work related reference requests. Two recommendations have been repeated that relate to fire risk assessments and the standard of accommodation.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Students' good health and wellbeing is actively supported and promoted. The college provides a range of ways in which students can learn about how to keep themselves healthy. For instance, they participate in a number of enrichment activities that deliver key information about drugs, alcohol, substance misuse and sexual health. The college is actively involved in engaging students in these areas with trained staff on-hand to ensure they receive timely and appropriate advice and guidance. In addition, staff provide the necessary help for students so that they can access community health services as and when needed. Communication between welfare and other college staff about the individual needs of students is beneficial, and managed sensitively and confidentially.

Students' emotional wellbeing is also well supported by responsive staff who are interested in their welfare. Students are aware of the available welfare services and trust college staff to provide individualised, practical help and support.

Students have a clear understanding and are aware of the importance of maintaining a healthy diet and lifestyle. The college provides a good range of food that is reflected in varied and changing menus. College staff work in partnership with the catering team to ensure the nutritional and dietary needs of students are consistently met. Any special diets are catered for and students are sometimes able to choose foods that represent different cultures and countries. Students also benefit from getting involved in planned cooking activities which helps them to develop their life skills. However, these sessions are delivered by staff who have not received any food hygiene training.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

Overall, students' safety and protection is a key priority for the college. This results in each student feeling safe and that their welfare is important to college staff. There are effective policies in place that guide and support staff in carrying out their duties. Students expressed feeling safe in their accommodation and the wider college campus. Students know how to complain and there is an effective process to ensure concerns are heard and resolved promptly.

Students live and learn in a college where bullying is not tolerated and where any form of unwanted behaviour is challenged. The college's approach to unacceptable student behaviour is underpinned by clear policies that staff understand. There is a range of well advertised anti-bullying information around the college which is matched by frequent engagement with students about their safety and expected standards of behaviour.

Staff promote a college environment where there is a clear focus on setting fair and reasonable behavioural boundaries. Students understand what is expected of them and most difficulties are settled informally. Staff are patient and listen to students which results in dialogue that helps adjust and improve inappropriate behaviours. Students view these factors as making the college's behaviour management approach very fair.

In addition, students' welfare is safeguarded because staff receive in-house training in child protection. The training provides staff with key information about their role and responsibilities which is also reinforced by detailed policies and procedures. These arrangements support the college's clear focus on student safety and welfare. The designated child protection officers and key staff attend external training to maintain their knowledge of national and local child protection procedures which ensures the college's responses reflect robust practices. Staff respond in a professional and conscientious manner to any concerns about a student's safety.

Further steps are taken to promote student safety in their living accommodation. For instance, regular health and safety checks are carried out, fire drills are practiced and routine servicing of fire equipment is completed. Checks on alarms are also carried out but not on a regular basis. The college completes basic fire risk assessments but these do not necessarily reflect the range of information that the college has about its fire prevention systems. For instance, the assessments do not assess the possible risks to students if they must evacuate their houses in darkness or the fact that fire extinguishers are regularly moved from their fixed points. The assessments do not reflect the college's responses to a number of fire prevention

recommendations made as result of a visit by a local environmental health officer. The college have responded to many of the areas highlighted but it is not clear if all recommendations have been addressed. The assessments do not reflect or assess new information about the effectiveness of fire evacuation procedures although some of these details are reflected in departmental emails. The college does not ignore these matters but responses are not underpinned by a comprehensive or robust system of written assessments which include clear risk reduction measures.

Overall, there is an adequate recruitment, selection and vetting process in place for new staff. However, there are some shortfalls in a number of cases that bring into question the consistency of the college's recruitment practices. For example, not all work related references are in place or verified; gaps in employment histories are not always explored, previous criminal record bureau checks from other employers are used but the college does not follow recommended risk assessment guidance in these circumstances. In addition, the college uses a risk assessment process to start new employees before their criminal record bureau checks have been received. These circumstances do add an element of risk in determining the suitability of new staff to work with students.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Students benefit from good levels of personal support. They are able to confidently identify a range of staff who will help them if needed. There is an established network of staff support across the college that is well advertised and promoted. Welfare and teaching staff work in partnership with each other for the benefit of students. Residential staff ensure that there is good communication between different college departments to ensure consistent and helpful support is provided.

Students are provided with an environment where they are treated as individuals and respected regardless of their backgrounds, identities, culture or religion. Staff understand the need to promote social inclusion and to challenge any form of discrimination. The college's policies outline and demonstrate a clear commitment to deliver and promote services that are relevant and appropriate to the diverse needs of its student population. The college's approach to equality and diversity is also underpinned by staff training which clearly promotes tolerance and understanding. Students live and learn in an environment where they are treated fairly and with equal regard.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The college puts good efforts into ensuring that students are provided with the information and support they need to take an interest in the running of the college and residential services. Systems for listening to and obtaining the views of students are integrated into the running of the residences. Staff respond to students in a positive and supportive way and students are also positive about their relationship with support and welfare staff. This encourages students to participate in consultation and discussion about their college and residential experiences.

There are clear routines and procedures in place for supporting students on their arrival and departure to and from the college. Students gain a clear picture of the college's operation

because they are provided with a good induction. This gives residential students a good start to college life.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is satisfactory.

Students are provided with a variable range of accommodation that is adequate overall. The living accommodation is basic but fairly clean and tidy. Students live in a number of self-contained, small domestic style houses some of which have been updated and redecorated. Some houses are more comfortable than others, some of the furniture and decor is scruffy and worn. Students identify that the differing range of accommodation sometimes impacts on their comfort and feelings of homeliness in each house.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

Students and their parents are provided with a comprehensive range of written information about the college, how it operates and the services available to them. Staffing and management arrangements are coordinated in a way that supports student welfare. There is a mixed residential team of experienced and newer staff who are led by competent and supportive managers. The team is arranged with a clear focus on the support and supervision needs of students. The style of management results in staff having a clear understanding of their role and responsibilities and students feel that residential services are managed with consideration for their safety and welfare.

Staff are guided by the college's residential handbook, policies and procedures which are kept up-to-date. The residential team have effective support and communication systems in place and this aids the delivery of a consistent service. They provide practical day-to-day support that is appreciated by students. The college's residential services are monitored but there are some areas that need improvement as outlined in the staying safe outcome.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Residential staff are provided with clear guidance about anti-discriminatory practice and how this is translated into the daily operation of the college. The college provides an environment where differences are acknowledged and prejudice or discrimination on any grounds is actively challenged. Staff act as role models and educators to students. They use daily events and circumstances to talk to students about different cultures and lifestyles to aid their learning and awareness.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
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Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure staff that are supporting students in the preparation of food have received appropriate training in food handling and hygiene (NMS 22)
- ensure the college's records demonstrate that risk assessments in relation to fire risks and fire precautions are carried out as required under the Fire Safety Regulation Order 2005 (NMS 24)
- ensure the college's records demonstrate regular testing and checking of fire alarms and fire fighting equipment (NMS 24)
- ensure the college's system for recruiting all staff who will work with students under 18 includes all necessary vetting checks before appointment which can be verified from recruitment records (NMS 34)
- ensure all student residential accommodation (including sleeping and living areas) is suitably furnished, maintained and adequately decorated. (NMS 36)