

Oaklands College

Partial reinspection report

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Introduction

Oaklands College is a large general further education college with four main campuses in mid and south Hertfordshire. It offers courses in all 15 subject areas. The college has its own work-based learning contract and also provides Train to Gain, Entry to Employment and informal adult learning provision. Its mission is 'To realise the potential of our communities'.

Ofsted inspectors conducted a reinspection monitoring visit of the college in June/July 2010, when they judged that managers were making reasonable progress in all eight themes considered. These themes were linked to the college's full inspection in November 2009, when overall effectiveness, capacity to improve, outcomes for learners, quality of provision and leadership and management were judged good. Of the five subject areas considered at that time, inspectors considered health and social care, construction learner responsive provision, performing arts and media, and literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) to be good. They judged construction employer responsive provision to be inadequate. This report comprises both the reinspection of construction employer responsive provision and the outcomes of the five monitoring visit themes.

The outcome of the reinspection is as follows:

Subject area	Original grade	Reinspection grade
Construction employer responsive provision	4	4

Context

Courses are offered in electrical installation, plumbing, carpentry and joinery, brickwork and plastering. At the time of inspection, 131 learners are on apprenticeship programmes and 58 learners are on Train to Gain courses. Most apprentices are aged 16 to 18 and all Train to Gain learners are adults. Nearly all learners are from White British backgrounds and are male.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are inadequate. Too many learners leave work-based learning programmes without completing all the required qualification components. Overall success rates for apprenticeship and advanced apprenticeship programmes declined in 2009/10 and are very low.
- Success rates on plumbing and electrical installation programmes are high, but too few learners achieve within the expected timescale. Learners on carpentry and joinery courses are successful in achieving the vocational elements of their programmes, but fail to achieve the key skills components of apprenticeship frameworks.

- Learners on Train to Gain courses achieve well. Most learners are successful in achieving their intended qualification aim and most do so within the expected timescale.
- The standard of practical work produced by learners is satisfactory. The quality of practical work meets the requirements of the qualification standards. Learners enjoy the practical elements of courses and use safe working practices.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Effective teaching enables learners to develop an appropriate level of knowledge and a wide range of practical skills. Electrical installation learners install and wire electrical components competently. Carpentry and joinery learners use hand tools safely to form different types of joint.
- Assessment practice is too variable. In electrical installation and in plumbing, assessment practice is good and learners' evidence portfolios are well organised and contain a wide range of evidence. In carpentry and joinery, portfolios are not as well organised and assessment, especially in the workplace, is not planned or conducted as effectively and is satisfactory.
- Courses meet the needs and interests of learners and employers satisfactorily. Facilities for training and assessment at the college are appropriate and some practical resources are of high quality. Many classrooms provide good access to reliable information and communication technology facilities.
- Partnership working with employers is satisfactory. Employers are involved in reviewing learners' progress and they receive regular communications from the college.
- Guidance and support are inadequate. Learners' progress reviews are not completed within appropriate timescales. Too many learners, especially second year learners on carpentry and joinery programmes, have not had a formal progress review for a considerable time. The monitoring of their progress is very variable and records are not always accurate.
- Leadership and management are inadequate. The actions taken to improve provision have not secured increased success rates. The roles and responsibilities of staff are unclear and managers do not always hold staff to account sufficiently or utilise them efficiently or effectively. Staff do not share good practice between different vocational areas.
- Recent changes have improved the quality of provision and the quality of learners' experience. The management, organisation, tracking and monitoring of first year learners have improved considerably. It is too early to judge the impact of these recent changes on learners' outcomes.
- Staff complete appropriate checks to ensure that learners are safe and protected at college and in the workplace. They promote health and safety and equality and diversity adequately. Learners have a satisfactory understanding of key issues in these areas.

What does Oaklands College need to do to improve further?

- Ensure learners complete all the required components of the apprenticeship frameworks within the agreed timescale by monitoring rigorously all aspects of qualification requirements against planned assessment dates.
- Share best practice in assessment practice, tracking, monitoring and in portfolio building so that all staff use a more consistent and high quality approach in each vocational area.
- Complete learners' reviews at frequent intervals and within the contractual requirements, so that all learners know the extent of their achievement. Ensure that targets set are specific and have a completion date so that all learners know what to do to progress and achieve.
- Clarify roles and responsibilities of staff and ensure that managers monitor staff performance against clearly defined criteria.
- Implement robust quality assurance arrangements to ensure the effective monitoring of subject area performance, the accuracy of records and the efficient and effective deployment of staff.

Additional Themes

Inspectors explored the following themes as part of this reinspection.

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has the college made through its self-assessment process and quality improvement plans to improve the accessibility and ease of use of management information data?

Reasonable progress

The self-assessment report covers this theme well. It is self-critical and identifies the areas for improvement accurately. Managers include this theme clearly and comprehensively in the quality improvement plan, which rates risk and tracks progress against targets effectively. All managers can access management information data readily. Most analyse data relevant to their area and set appropriate targets. They use these targets effectively to inform programme logs and appraisal. In team meetings, they monitor progress against these targets well. Managers in construction and adult and community learning are not as effective in their rigorous use of data to monitor performance and inform quality improvement when compared to managers in other subject areas. Staff development in the use of electronic learner data has improved staff confidence in its use to inform self-assessment and quality improvement plans. Pathway managers analyse data below the level of the monthly quality performance summary to scrutinise and resolve areas of concern. Managers have trialled the new software system and find it easy to use. They are due to train all staff in its use in February.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has the college made to improve success rates in key/functional skills, short courses and in AS and A-level sociology and law?

Insufficient progress

Although key skills and functional skills success rates increased considerably in 2009/10, they remain very low. Managers continue to provide staff development to help teachers embed functional skills more effectively in their lessons and to maximise the opportunities to improve learners' functional skills. Nevertheless, the delivery of functional skills is inconsistent. It is good in sports, forensic science and on entry-level programmes, but it is underdeveloped in the business and information communication technology subject areas. Staff do not always meet the requirements of the functional skills calendar. Short course success rates increased significantly in 2009/10 and are average. AS and A-level success rates in sociology and law increased in 2009/10 compared with 2008/09, but they are close to the rates of 2007/08. The success rate is low in sociology and very low in law. College predictions of pass rates based on the January module results were over optimistic, especially for AS law.

What progress has the college made to improve success rates on apprentice, advanced apprentice and Train to Gain provision?

Reasonable progress

In 2009/10, the overall success rate and the proportion of learners on the substantial Train to Gain provision, who completed within their expected timescale, increased significantly and are average. Success rates for learners on skills for life and NVQ courses are low. The overall success rates for the few learners on the apprenticeship and advanced apprenticeship programmes improved in 2009/10, but they are low, especially for advanced apprentices. The proportion of learners completing within their expected timescale is very low. Staff use initial and diagnostic assessments and meetings with prospective learners and their employers effectively to ensure that learners are on the most appropriate course, given their expertise and prior experience. They also check that each learner will be able to access a wide range of assessment opportunities to enable suitable learning, progress and achievement. Assessors review most learners' progress regularly, but a few reviews are overdue. They assess learners' progress against their plans well. The quality of learners' individual learning plans and target setting is satisfactory, although some targets are too general. The lead internal verifier monitors assessors' compliance with the requirements of the quality manual rigorously and ensures remedial actions are implemented.

What progress has the college made to increase pass rates on long courses at advanced level for learners aged 16 to 18 and at foundation and intermediate levels for adult learners?

Reasonable progress

Pass rates for learners aged 16 to 18 on long advanced level courses increased in 2009/10 to be the highest for three years, but they are just below average. Pass rates for adults on foundation level long courses increased to be the highest for three years and are just above average. Adult pass rates on intermediate level long courses also increased to be the highest for three years, and are close to average. Pass rates by adults on foundation level ESOL courses improved in 2009/10 and are high. The pass rates of adult learners on literacy courses at foundation and intermediate levels increased significantly in 2009/10 to the national average. Pass rates by adults on foundation level numeracy courses increased and are also average, but pass rates for the small number of learners on intermediate level numeracy declined and are low.

Leadership and management

What progress has the college made in completing equality impact assessments and in developing greater consistency in the promotion of equality and diversity within subject areas?

Significant progress

Managers have ensured that all college policies have an associated equality impact assessment. This assessment identifies if a policy could have any possible

discriminatory impact on different groups of people. The promotion of equality and diversity is much more consistent. Managers have continued to develop the use of equality and diversity impact assessments by focusing training initially on the areas of greatest need such as engineering, land-based, construction management and plumbing. Equality and diversity champions promote best equality and diversity practice in curriculum and business support areas. Staff training addresses issues beyond compliance regarding business development and planning. Subject areas that show much improved awareness of equality and diversity aspects in teaching, learning and assessment are media, electrical installations, beauty therapy, sport and equine studies. Subject area managers analyse learners' data by different groups and address areas of concern effectively. Lesson observation proforma include references to equality and diversity, which managers analyse and report on termly. The lesson observation handbook places significant emphasis on examples of good and poor equality and diversity practice. The lesson plan proforma includes appropriate references to differentiation and individuals' needs. The scheme of work proforma, however, does not make specific reference to equality and diversity.

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