Oakmere Community College
Inspection report

Unique reference number:	53705
Name of lead inspector:	June Cramman HMI
Last day of inspection:	30 March 2012
Type of provider:	Independent learning provider
Address:	Oakmere House Cherry Lane Walton Liverpool L4 6UG
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Information about the provider

1. Oakmere Community College (Oakmere) is a private company and registered charity based in Walton, Liverpool. The headquarters consists of a training centre delivering 12 vocational subject areas. It has two other sites: one in Knowsley and another, close to the main site, called Unity 4. Most of the learners are from the most deprived areas of Liverpool.

2. The college delivers foundation learning, funded by the Young People's Learning Agency, for 203 learners. It also delivers a programme called New Futures, jointly funded by the Skills Funding Agency and the European Social Fund, targeted at young people needing shorter pre-foundation courses. There are 193 learners on this programme. All learners follow the same programme of activities and work in mixed groups. Around 90% of provision is government funded.

3. Learners work towards recognised qualifications, in addition to following a programme of non-accredited learning and some work placements. Learners develop vocational skills through practical based training in their chosen vocational area. This prepares them to progress further either within foundation learning or into apprenticeships, further education or employment.

4. In 2010, Oakmere was restructured after two other charities were merged with the provision. The board of trustees was re-formed and new terms of reference were written. The company's senior management team consists of the chief executive; the deputy chief executive, who is responsible for coordinating training; the finance manager; administration and sub-contracting manager; student support services manager and an executive officer. The chief executive reports to a board of eight trustees. There are 62 staff members. Half of the provision is delivered by subcontractors.

5. The following organisations provide training on behalf of the college:
    - Activate Arts
    - Advance Skills Academy
    - Basetech
    - Beechwood Community Trust
    - CITC
    - Forum Housing
    - Instant Training
    - Leasowe Development Trust
    - Mortimore
    - NWCS (Aintree)
    - Prescot Oasis

- Right Track Training
- Tranmere Community Partnership

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2010/11
Provision for young learners: Foundation learning	456 full-time learners

Summary report

Grades: 1 is outstanding; 2 is good; 3 is satisfactory; 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 2

Capacity to improve	Grade 2

	Grade
Outcomes for learners	2
Quality of provision	2
Leadership and management	2
Safeguarding	1
Equality and diversity	2

Subject Areas	Grade
Foundations for learning and life	2

Overall effectiveness

6. The overall effectiveness of Oakmere's provision is good. Learners develop good skills and benefit from good support and guidance as well as having programmes and partners that meet their needs very effectively. Teaching and learning are good overall but with some variations. Leaders and managers in Oakmere set a clear direction for staff and learners and make sure they are very safe both at work and in the centres. They also ensure learners fully understand their rights and responsibilites to each other and to the community.

7. Foundation learners make good progress towards positive destinations such as employment and education. They are also very succcessful in achieving functional skills qualifications. Learners make very good progress from low starting points. However, retention and attendance are low but improving.

8. Learners across the provision enjoy their courses, acquire good employability skills, increase their knowledge of health and well-being and become closely involved in a range of community projects.

9. Teaching and learning are good overall, with the better sessions being stimulating to learners through varied activities and the good use of resources. Others are less well planned for individual learners with insufficient use of information and learning technology. The range of provision is good and meets

learners' and community needs particularly effectively. Oakmere works collaboratively with partners to improve and extend this range. Arrangements for support and guidance are also good with learners getting good, practical advice on career development as well as individual support from a range of staff and partners to overcome barriers to learning and employment.

10. Leadership and management arrangements are good, although procedures to monitor quality are not always consistently applied. Oakmere's safeguarding arrangements are outstanding, with particular care and support for vulnerable homeless young learners. Equality and diversity measures are good although Oakmere does not always promote equality and diversity sufficiently in sessions.

Main findings

- Learners make good progress into mainstream destinations such as employment and education. Their achievement of functional skills qualifications has improved significantly and is now good. Overall success rates for vocational qualifications are satisfactory and learners make good progress from very low starting points. Attendance and retention are low but improving.

- Through learning and development, learners across the provision have good opportunities to improve their economic and social well-being. Most learners have a good awareness of safe working practices and of safeguarding issues, especially of internet safety. Learners feel safe and welcome. They are able to make informed and accurate choices about their own health and well-being, and their contribution to the community is good.

- Teaching and learning are good overall, although there is some variation. Many tutors use interesting and engaging activities to challenge learners. Learners benefit from the small class sizes where the tutors give good individual support. Resources are good and reflect industry standards. However, information and learning technology is not used sufficiently and some tutors do not always meet individual learners' needs.

- Initial assessment is good and it is used very effectively to inform individualised learning programmes. Individual learning plans are satisfactory. However, learners' personal targets are insufficiently identified and recorded. Learners' reviews and learning logs are completed regularly but they do not always record sufficiently the progress made.

- Programmes meet learners' needs very successfully. Learners can choose from a range of accredited and non-accredited provision and vocational options to improve their personal, social and employability skills. Tutors provide a strong ethos of inclusion for learners with complex needs to help them overcome their barriers to learning. However, too few learners benefit from work experience placements.

- Oakmere's partnership arrangements are good. It has extensive links with local authority services, training providers, support agencies and community organisations enabling effective collaborative working that benefits learners and

encourages participation. The provider works with a range of subcontractors to provide a good variety of specialised programmes that are accessible to learners from local communities.

■ Care, guidance and support are particularly good. Staff quickly gain a very good understanding of each learner's personal needs. The provider has very effective links with a range of external support agencies which assist in providing good levels of practical advice and support for learners. The good, prompt and sensitive support has enabled learners with complex personal issues to complete their studies successfully.

■ The college provides good learning opportunities and successfully raises the aspirations of harder-to-reach learners with few recognised skills. The business plan highlights important actions and targets needed to improve learner outcomes and provision. Good use is made of management information to monitor progress. Operational management of learning programmes is also good. Trustees carefully scrutinise the work of the college and exercise sound financial control.

■ Arrangements for safeguarding are outstanding. Learners are very well informed about the safe use of the internet and the college does not tolerate negative behaviour, including the use of weapons, drugs, alcohol, bullying and cyber bullying. Learners, staff and volunteers have a very good understanding of safeguarding and safe working practices. Vulnerable learners receive excellent help to meet their welfare needs, including help to obtain emergency accommodation.

■ The promotion of equality, diversity and respect for all users is good. Staff successfully help individual learners overcome identified barriers. In induction, stimulating prompts are used to improve learners' understanding, including diversity bingo. However, the promotion of equality and diversity through training activities is uneven. The provider is successfully narrowing the achievement gaps between different groups of learners.

■ The engagement of users to promote improvement is good. Staff make good use of reviews and informal methods to collect learners' views. The youth forum has influenced several improvements including in the induction process and the development of the café. Following the merger, good opportunities were given to stakeholders to influence future developments. Learners have benefited from improvements to the programme through links with employers.

■ The college is reviewing its quality framework to strengthen the focus on quality improvement. Existing measures have led to improvements particularly in areas such as learner success, retention and progression. The monitoring of the work of subcontractors is satisfactory. The quality of some aspects of training, learning and assessment is uneven and the implementation of quality systems by staff is variable.

■ The college offers good value for money and has sound measures for budgetary monitoring and control. Learners make good progress. Functional skills achievements are good and success rates for vocational qualifications are satisfactory. Stimulating realistic work environments for learners meet industry

standards in a wide range of vocational areas. Arrangements for leasing the conference centre, the diving pool facilities and the tall ship help generate additional income.

What does Oakmere Community College need to do to improve further?

- Improve success, retention and attendance rates for learners by improving quality measures to analyse management information and to monitor and track processes.

- Improve teaching and learning, and extend the use of information and learning technology, so that all learners have access to exciting and engaging activities that increase their knowledge, skills and understanding.

- Meet the individual needs of learners more consistently through setting precise individual targets and accurately recording progress in individual learning plans.

- Develop more links with employers and voluntary projects to ensure more learners have access to work experience.

- Monitor more rigorously how successfully quality systems and procedures are implemented and applied to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and embed a fully systematic approach for evaluating and improving the learner experience.

- Extend the active promotion of equality and diversity by giving a higher profile to learner discussions and understanding of equality and diversity in training sessions, reviews and special projects, measuring and recording the impact on learners.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- the supportive, friendly, helpful and understanding staff

- being treated with respect as an adult

- the good, enjoyable courses and developing new practical skills that employers value

- the good resources and being able to try out new skills such as painting and decorating

- the help with personal issues and being paid daily

- the well organised, calm and friendly atmosphere that feels safe

- the opportunity to improve their chances of getting a job

- the fact that Oakmere is like a big family.

What learners would like to see improved:

- the use of information and learning technology in all lessons

- the arrangements for taking a break: breaks are currently too short

- their access to greater financial help
- their access to the diving pool.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement   Grade 2

11. Oakmere's capacity to improve is good. Learners' progression into positive destinations and achievement of functional skills is good. Their achievement of vocational skills qualifications is satisfactory. Learners improve their employability skills and enhance their economic well-being. The provider sets measurable targets to improve outcomes and offers strong incentives to learners to improve their attendance, retention and progression.

12. Management of the college by the executive leaders and trustees is good. Strategic priorities are aligned closely with the core values of the charity. Trustees use their varied expertise to support and challenge college leaders. Leaders and managers motivate staff and learners to succeed. Accommodation and facilities at the training centres are particularly good. Learners' views are used effectively to bring about improvements to the provision. The quality improvement process is contributing to continuing improvement although some aspects are not implemented systematically. The self-assessment process is inclusive and mostly evaluative. The report is largely accurate although inspectors identified some issues that are not sufficiently emphasised.

Outcomes for learners   Grade 2

13. Learners' progression to positive destinations, such as employment and further education, is good. Their qualification success rates in functional skills are also good. Learners make very good progress despite having low starting points. Many have multiple barriers to learning and around three quarters come from areas of high deprivation. Their achievement of vocational qualifications is satisfactory as are standards of work. Retention and attendance are improving but remain low.

14. Oakmere carefully monitors data to narrow achievement gaps. The college identified a significant gap between male and female achievement of functional skills. It took very effective action and has closed this gap.

15. Learners succeed in improving their economic and social well-being through learning and development. They enjoy their learning, become much more self-confident and demonstrate good behaviour. They develop good vocational skills, enhanced by the use of good practical resources. Learners in areas including hairdressing, motor vehicle, construction and music technologies develop good vocational skills, making good progress in short timescales.

16. Learners feel very safe and apply safe working practices. They have a very good understanding of safeguarding issues, displaying a good understanding of internet and social network site safety. They have a good understanding of health and safety, and take responsibility for their own and others' safety.

Oakmere places a high priority on the health and safety of its learners and thoroughly prepares them for the workplace.

17. Learners have good knowledge of health and well-being. They enjoy regular well-being sessions built into the programme. They attend Oakmere's health and well-being events that promote, among other things, healthy eating, chlamydia testing, sexual health information and fitness testing. They benefit from good learning mentors, advocates and student-service staff who help with a wide range of issues including mental health problems, domestic violence and pregnancy. They take part in a range of physical activities.

18. Learners are developing good communication, team working and planning skills through contributing to community projects. They are mixing succcessfully with a wide range of people, such as people with disabilities, older people and people from other minority ethnic communities. They develop a good understanding of the barriers other people face. Through the development of the Unity 4 building, learners created both a highly effective learning environment as well as a multi-use community resource. They also created a safe community garden that was previously notorious as a 'no-go' dog-fighting area.

The quality of provision   Grade 2

19. Teaching and learning are good overall, but there are some variations. In the better sessions, tutors use interesting and engaging activities. The good interaction encourages teamwork and motivates learners to make valuable contributions. Tutors make good use of imaginative topics to develop learners' confidence and communication skills, for example by organising tournaments for a sports coaching session. Learners benefit from the small class sizes where the tutors give good individual support. The good specialist practical resources are of considerable benefit to learners and give them the opportunity to develop their vocational skills in a work setting. However, a minority of tutors do not always meet each individual learner's needs sufficiently. Some rely too much on worksheets and do not use interactive technology sufficiently to promote learning.

20. Initial assessment is good and it is used very effectively to inform individualised learning programmes. The standard of work is satisfactory overall, with some good examples such as in hair and beauty portfolios. Individual learning plans are satisfactory, although personal targets are insufficiently specific and in reviews, progress is not always fully recorded.

21. The provision successfully meets the needs of learners and the community, and it is carefully planned for learners with additional barriers to learning. Learners are appropriately consulted about the design and delivery of their individual learning programmes. Tutors provide a strong ethos of inclusion for learners with complex needs to overcome individual barriers to learning. Learners access a good range of personal and social development, vocational and work skills.

However, not enough learners benefit from work placements to enable them to have a better understanding of the world of work. Learners appreciate the informal and inclusive ethos which contrasts with their previous negative experiences.

22. Oakmere's partnership arrangements are good, with extensive statutory and non-statutory links with partners such as local authority services, Connexions, training providers, charities and community agencies. The good partnership working enables learners to access provision that helps them to identify and overcome their individual barriers. The college works with a range of subcontractors to provide a good variety of specialised programmes that appeal to learners' vocational and personal aspirations, such as sports and dance provision.

23. Care, guidance and support are particularly good. The highly individualised personal support, advice and guidance enable learners to take a full part in their programmes. Staff quickly gain a very good knowledge and understanding of learners' individual needs. Oakmere has effective links with a range of external support agencies which are used to benefit learners. Staff encourage learners to increase their aspirations, become better citizens and act as positive role models. Learners feel valued and they appreciate the approachable staff who are sensitive to individual needs. Induction is good.

Leadership and management   Grade 2

24. The college raises the aspirations of harder-to-reach learners with few recognised skills through tailored learning programmes, enabling them to overcome successfully personal and social barriers to learning. The business plan highlights important actions needed to improve learners' outcomes and provision. The operational management of foundation learning programmes is good and staff have good vocational qualifications. Management information is increasingly used by managers to monitor progress and to inform planning for further improvement.

25. Trustees rigorously scrutinise Oakmere's work and receive informative and detailed reports on its budget and how well its performance targets are met. They exercise sound financial control.

26. Arrangements for safeguarding are outstanding. Learners, staff and volunteers have a very good understanding of the safe use of the internet and social media websites, safe and healthy working practices, and risk assessment. The college takes vigorous action against the use of weapons, drugs, alcohol and bullying, including cyber bullying. All staff and volunteers are thoroughly trained in safeguarding. Subcontractors' policies and procedures are monitored stringently. Exceptional support is provided for vulnerable homeless young people who are given emergency accommodation at weekends in Oakmere's conference centre. Vulnerable learners receive excellent additional welfare support including clothes, food, and through partnerships with specialist

agencies. Detailed confidential records are kept of highly sensitive safeguarding issues and their resolution. Policies and practice are reviewed regularly.

27. Oakmere's arrangements for equality and diversity are good and there is a supportive ethos of respect for all users. Staff know learners well and intervene positively to support their individual needs. In induction, diversity bingo and challenging stereotypes cards are used to stimulate learners' discussion of their views. 'Golden Rules' on behaviour outline learners' responsibilities very clearly. Thematic, practical community cohesion projects are used successfully to raise learners' awareness of issues such as gun and knife crime. However, the promotion of equality and diversity through training activities is unevenly developed and not all trainers and assessors use opportunities to extend learners' knowledge. The provider is successfully narrowing the achievement gaps between different groups of learners.

28. The engagement of users to promote improvement is good. Staff make good use of reviews and informal methods to collect learners' views. The youth forum has influenced improvements in induction, the availability of bottled water and the development of the café. Following the merger of three charities to create Oakmere as it is now, managers extensively consulted all stakeholders across those charities to influence the priorities of the successor organisation. Learners benefit from good employer links that have provided football changing facilities and financial support to learners for further training.

29. The college is reviewing its quality framework to strengthen the focus on quality improvement. Existing measures have led to improvements particularly in areas such as learner success, retention and progression. The monitoring of the work of subcontractors is satisfactory with some good features. The quality of some aspects of training and learning is uneven and the implementation of quality systems by staff is variable. Arrangements to monitor the quality of training and assessment lead to improved teaching practice but arrangements to follow up issues raised by observers are not always effective. Not all observation records are sufficiently evaluative, and findings and grades are not moderated. Processes to standardise assessors' practices are underdeveloped.

30. The college offers good value for money through sound budgetary monitoring and control. Learners make good progress and succeed, taking account of their starting points. Stimulating, industry standard, realistic work environments attract learners to a wide range of vocational areas. Arrangements to lease conference and diving pool facilities and the tall ship help to generate additional income.

Information about the inspection

31. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and four additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's deputy chief executive, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the funding bodies, the previous inspection reports, and data on learners and their achievements over the period since the previous inspection.

32. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails to gain the views of learners and employers. They also looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed for the provider. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in each of the subject areas the provider offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Oakmere Community College

Learning types: 14 − 16: Young apprenticeships; Diplomas; **16-18 Learner responsive:** FE full- and part-time courses, Foundation learning tier, including Entry to Employment; **19+ responsive:** FE full- and part-time courses; **Employer responsive:** Train to Gain, apprenticeships

Grades **using the 4 point scale** 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall	16-18 Learner responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners Full-time learners Part-time learners	396	396
Overall effectiveness	**2**	**2**
Capacity to improve	2	
Outcomes for learners	**2**	**2**
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	2	
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	3	
How well do learners progress?	2	
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	2	
How safe do learners feel?	2	
Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well-being?*	2	
How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*	2	
Quality of provision	**2**	**2**
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	2	
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	2	
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	2	
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	2	
Leadership and management	**2**	**2**
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	2	
How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*	2	
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	1	
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	2	
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	2	
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	3	
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	2	

*where applicable to the type of provision

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