

Oaklands College

Inspection report for further education college

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Inspector	Mark Ryder / Joanne Vyas
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Information about the college

The residential provision provides on-site full time boarding accommodation for 54 students who are studying on college sports academy programmes as well as a small cohort of aviation engineering students. The students are aged 16 to 18 years with seven over the age of 18. The accommodation is based in 10 houses located around the St Albans Smallford Campus. The staff team comprises a residential supervisor, two full time residential officers and a team of residential wardens providing support during the evenings and at weekends.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: a service of exceptional quality that significantly exceeds minimum requirements

Good: a service of high quality that exceeds minimum requirements

Adequate: a service that only meets minimum requirements

Inadequate: a service that does not meet minimum requirements

Summary report

Overall effectiveness of the provision	adequate
Outcomes for young people	good
Quality of service	adequate
Leadership and management	adequate
Safeguarding	adequate

Overall effectiveness

The overall effectiveness is judged to be **adequate**.

Learners gain from their experience of their residential placement at this college. They comment that it has improved their life chances and they enjoy the camaraderie and support of other students. Learners' educational, social and cultural needs are met. Learners say they feel safe and staff help them gain the most from their stay.

The residential provision has improved since the last inspection. There is a clear

focus on improvement as well as effective student consultation. The management and staffing of the residential side of the college has only recently been developed. While this appears to be working well there are areas of further development that require attention. There are five recommendations made as a result of this inspection. These shortfalls, however, do not adversely impact on the welfare and safety of learners and most of the national minimum standards have been met.

Outcomes for learners continue to be good with very positive comments from parents, learners and employers who sponsor placements at the college. A parent commented that 'things have much improved since last year.' Learners made a number of positive comments about the new staff that have joined over the last year.

The quality of care, safeguarding and leadership and management are judged adequate with some good aspects. Learners say they enjoy their courses and feel motivated to do well. The residential provision is overall positive, supports learners to integrate with different people encourages improvement. Learners are safe staying at this college, but the safeguarding policy and procedures are significantly out of date and are not considered fit for purpose.

What should the college do to improve further?

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

- develop and further improve an appropriate policy on protection of students under 18 from abuse and response to allegations or suspicions of abuse, which is consistent with Local Safeguarding Children Board procedures and is known to staff and students (NMS 3.1)
- prepare reasonable plans for the management of a range of foreseeable crises involving students' welfare, including emergency accommodation of students if a college residential unit becomes uninhabitable (e.g. through fire) (NMS 9.2)
- ensure where the college accommodates students under 18 and adults in the same building or unit the college carries out a regular (at least annual) written risk assessment in relation to any adverse welfare implications of these arrangements and takes appropriate action to minimise such implications in the light of those risk assessments and any adverse welfare incidents that may occur (NMS 10.4)
- ensure first aid and minor illness treatment are available at college by competent designated staff (e.g. by or under the supervision of a qualified nurse or first aider) (NMS 14.7)
- ensure that the college system for recruiting staff (including ancillary staff, contract/sessional staff and volunteers) who will work with students under 18 includes all the following before appointment, which can be verified from recruitment records: direct contact by the college with each referee to verify the

reference. (NMS 34.2 (iv))

Outcomes for young people

Outcomes for young people are **good**.

Learners excel as a result of their stay at this college. Staff strongly promote personal and social development. This results in learners who are self-reliant, confident and motivated to achieve their personal goals. Many of the learners aspire to sporting success, career development or university admission. The ethos of the college has high expectations that learners fully contribute to their own success through hard work and dedication. This is evident in the achievements made by learners. For example, learners have gone on to represent their county and country in sporting events.

Relationships between staff and learners are positive, nurturing and good humoured. Learners report the staff support and enable them to make the best of themselves during their time at this college. Development of independence is achieved through a staff team that constantly encourages learners to make mature lifestyle choices. Learners support each other in this and a culture of mutual respect is evident.

Learners influence and make considerable contribution to the function and activities of the residential side of the college. Senior staff, including governors, take time to listen to learners views. This has had a direct impact on recent improvements to the college. For example, food portions were increased following feedback from learners.

There are positive outcomes for learners with disabilities within this college. Consideration is given to learners who may require aides and adaptations to their living space in order that they can be as fully independent as possible. Religious and cultural needs are also well met and considered in all aspects of learners' time at this college.

Quality of service

The quality of the service is **adequate**.

Residential learners receive support and guidance to help them develop and succeed during their time at the college. Induction is relevant and provides learners with a range of information to help them understand the courses they wish to follow and the practicable residential arrangements. Learners commented positively about the induction process.

Recreational activities are available and used regularly by learners. For example, learners are able to go out on trips to London or theme parks. There is a local cinema which learners say is easy to get to and enjoy. Many of the learners commented favourably on the development of a common room on site and felt this helped to socialise and relax after training or study.

Learners benefit from welfare support services that provide them with guidance and support on a range of issues such as financial, relationships and stress related anxiety. Learners' files contain sufficient information to ensure staff are clear about how to support them throughout their time at the college. Staff comment that they have a good understanding of the needs of learners and are confident in helping them fulfil their potential.

The organisation of residential provision is satisfactory. Matching of learners to each house is carefully considered and generally works well. However, risk assessments for those who share accommodation under and over the age of 18 are not considered sufficiently robust. For example, there is limited information on the welfare implications for learners under 18 year olds and how the college effectively minimises potential welfare incidents.

Staff encourage learners to comment on the quality of the residential provision. There are regular resident meetings which learners are able to express their views regarding; for example, the maintenance of houses, food and transport. Records of such meetings show that staff respond to any issues identified. Learners say their views are taken seriously.

Learners have a balanced diet of sufficient quality and quantity. The college provides for learners with specific dietary needs, such as for religious or health reasons.. Learners felt meals have improved and that portions have increased as a direct result of consultation. A learner commented that the 'food's good here, we can cook our own meals in the house' All staff who handle food receive food hygiene training which is an improvement since the last inspection.

There are suitable health care arrangements for learners. Staff respond promptly when learners suffer ill health. Parents commented favourably about how staff support their children when unwell. However, there is presently no designated staff who are trained in first aid. While this has had no impact to date this is a minimum standard required for the future wellbeing and safety of learners.

Accommodation is adequate and meets the needs of learners. The houses are ex-council buildings that require substantial maintenance. However, there has been further renovation and resources made available to improve the state of accommodation since the last inspection. Residential learners were generally pleased with the houses, although many commented that they are very small and sometimes space is limited.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management are **adequate**.

Management is effective and provides residential learners with a safe and stimulating time at the college. The college has relatively new staff in place to manage and supervise the residential provision. While the new staffing structure works well it is still developing practice, policies and procedures which is reflected within this report.

All but one of the previous inspection recommendations have been met. The college recognises the need to ensure all recommendations have been fully addressed prior to the next inspection.

The college has a clear statement of principles which is accessible to staff, parents and learners. Learners also have access to a handbook about the college and residential provision which they acknowledge they have received. The aims of the college reflect the experiences of learners.

Staff are competent, knowledgeable and caring. They receive good managerial support and have regular training and development opportunities. There is sufficient staffing at all times including weekends. The outcome is that learners benefit from staff who are reliant and sensitive to their needs. A learner said 'I can talk to tutors about anything that worries me.'

There is robust critical internal monitoring and assessment of the service which provides on-going development. Quality assurance is effective and comments from a number of stakeholders help to promote improvement. Diversity needs of learners are recognised and responded to. The equality strategy is clearly evident and helps to promote a diverse and supportive environment which learners respond to. Management is aware of the college's strengths and areas of development. There are clear plans for future development of the site, in particular the boarding houses. Currently students are provided with a good maintenance service to the houses to ensure their accommodation is well maintained, safe and comfortable.

While the college is aware of and is able to respond to foreseeable crisis, plans are not considered thorough. For example, the business continuity plan does not refer to specific crisis that may occur to the residential provision, such as flooding, fire or in the event of infectious illnesses. Planning, therefore, is overly generalised and does not provide clear operational guidance.

Staff promote a culture in which learners respond to and make progress. Their individual needs are met and overall learners are pleased with the experience of residential placements.

Safeguarding

Safeguarding arrangements are **adequate**

Learners are protected and are provided with a safe environment to live and study. There is minimal bullying with learners commenting that they are able to speak to staff about any concerns they have. Staff regularly supervise residential learners to ensure they are safe and well. Guidance on reducing bullying, including cyber bullying, is accessible to all learners. A learner said 'I can speak to staff about any problems.'

Staff receive specific training on signs and symptoms of abuse and are fully aware of their legal responsibilities to report any concerns identified. A trained senior member

of staff is designated to coordinate and take overall responsibility for any safeguarding issues. Staff are aware of this member of staff's role and the system works well in protecting learners. However, the safeguarding policy and procedures are out of date as they do not refer to current guidance and legislation. While this has no impact on the safety and welfare of learners it is inconsistent with Local Safeguarding Children Board procedures. Therefore, this could potentially affect future practice in the protection of learners.

Residential learners have access to the rules and expectations on them while staying at the college. Learners report that they are treated with respect and that the rules are there to keep them safe. Staff use appropriate boundaries and encourage learners to behave responsibly. On occasions where learners have not behaved, staff have responded promptly with proportionate and effective sanctions.

Fire safety is managed well. Termly fire drills ensure both residential learners and staff are aware of safe evacuation procedures. Fire fighting equipment is regularly tested and maintained. Learners are, therefore, protected from the risk of fire. This is an improvement since the last inspection.

Recruitment processes are safe and ensure that residential learners are cared for and supported by suitable and trained staff. However, the procedures are not considered fully robust as references are not routinely verified by the college. This is particularly relevant where the college receives an unfavourable reference from a previous employer. While this has had no current impact on the safety of learners there is the potential for the recruitment process to be compromised in the future.

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 to assess the effectiveness of the service and to consider how well it complies with the relevant regulations and meets the national minimum standards.

The report details the main strengths, any areas for improvement, including any breaches of regulation, and any failure to meet national minimum standards. The judgements included in the report are made against the inspection framework and the evaluation schedule for accommodation in further education colleges.