

7 December 2015

Ms Zoe Hancock
Principal and Chief Executive
Oakland College
Smallford
Hatfield Road
St Albans
AL4 0JA

Dear Ms Hancock

Short inspection of Oaklands College

Following the short inspection on 10 and 11 November 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the provider was judged to be good in November 2009.

This provider continues to be good.

- The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education and training in the college since the previous inspection. You and your team have continued to have a strong focus on sustaining the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and the large majority of learners are at least making the progress expected of them. Lesson observations carried out by your team of observers identify strengths and areas for improvement across all aspects of your provision accurately, including in apprenticeships and sub-contracted provision. A thorough and accurate self-assessment process and timely interventions ensure that underperforming courses improve rapidly.
- With senior leaders and governors, you have set a clear strategic direction. You work very closely and well with the local enterprise partnership (LEP), local authorities and employers to ensure that provision is responsive to local and regional priorities and demands. As a result, a high proportion of your learners progress to further study, higher education, apprenticeships and employment.
- Governors support and challenge you, senior leaders and managers well in their drive to improve the quality of teaching and learning. They review the information they receive carefully, comparing outcomes with targets. As a result they are very well informed about any areas that require improvement.

- The implementation of 16 to 19 study programmes is effective. Progression routes are clear and in place at all levels, with a wide range of academic or vocational programmes preparing learners well for their next step. The design of programmes includes an appropriate focus to improve English and mathematical skills, with many more learners studying these subjects than previously.
- Learners on 16 to 19 study programmes, including those eligible for high-needs funding, develop their practical vocational skills well through relevant work experience, work-related projects and 'live' briefs.
- Senior leaders and managers have identified correctly that improvement is required in the quality of the English and mathematics provision. Learners' progress in these subjects, and also the proportion of learners on AS-level courses who are successful with their qualifications, require further improvement. You have appropriate strategies in place to improve these concerns.
- At the previous inspection, inspectors identified a number of actions to bring about improvement: improve the provision tailored to employers' needs; raise the success rates in key skills, which are now covered through functional skills courses and GCSEs in English and mathematics; and improve learners' understanding of equality and diversity. The leadership team has taken decisive action to improve these areas, and clear progress has been made to the benefit of learners.
- Your employment provision has grown and been strengthened. You now have good relationships with employers, and the proportion of apprentices completing their qualifications is high. Links with employers and the LEP are now strong; these links support the work-experience element of 16 to 19 study programmes successfully.
- In order to raise the success rates of functional skills, you have recently introduced a new management and teaching structure for both functional skills and GCSEs in English and mathematics. You recognise that improvements in this area have been slow; however, early indications are that the new structures have started to improve the provision.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is now an integral part of all aspects of learners' time at the college. Recent additions, such as the introduction of the 'Prevent' agenda into group and one-to-one tutorials, have enabled learners to gain a valuable understanding of matters such as radicalisation and British values.

Safeguarding is effective.

The governing body and leadership team have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose, and highly effective action is taken to safeguard learners. Staff are aware of their responsibilities and have undertaken appropriate training and steps to protect learners from radicalisation and extremism. They encourage a strong culture of fairness and respect which is returned by learners. Learners behave particularly well at college and respect each other and their

teachers. Managers at the college work effectively with a range of local agencies to ensure that the most vulnerable learners are identified and kept safe. They work particularly well with external agencies to identify young people at risk, particularly those with high needs.

Inspection findings

- Teachers, learning and assessment are consistently good, resulting in the large majority of learners achieving their qualifications and progressing either to employment or further study. Teachers plan and structure a good range of learning activities to ensure that all learners participate well in lessons and develop their knowledge and skills effectively, including in most lessons the application of English and mathematical skills.
- Most learners are making at least the progress expected of them. Teachers check learning and progress regularly and routinely in the majority of lessons. When marking assignment work for learners and apprentices, teachers check spelling and grammar effectively, and provide good information on how learners can improve their performance.
- Learners on AS-level courses in 2014/15 did not make the progress expected of them based on their prior achievements. Leaders did not use data about their poor progress during the year to identify this underperformance effectively. However, following actions taken by managers, current learners now benefit from improved teaching, learning and assessment, and a majority are making the progress expected of them. The standard of work on the extended project is extremely high.
- Learners demonstrate good work-related skills at an appropriate level: for example, electrical installation apprentices complete wiring tasks with accuracy and detail; hairdressing learners are able to discuss the finer details of cutting techniques above the level they are working towards; and high-needs learners, who benefit from high levels of support, improve their personal confidence.
- Learners' rates of progression after their courses to further study, higher education, apprenticeships or employment are high.
- In 2014/15 the proportion of learners achieving their English and mathematics qualifications, including higher grades at GCSE, was too low. Learners' attendance at discrete lessons in these subjects has not been good enough. Leaders and managers have implemented a robust strategy to improve outcomes on these courses, and early indications are that the steps taken have been beneficial. Teachers improve learners' applied English and mathematical skills during vocational and academic lessons successfully.
- Learners take part in a good range of sports, educational visits, work experience and other enrichment activities. The large majority of learners take part in relevant external work experience. For example, ex-learners make frequent visits to talk to current learners about their experience of university or their workplace. Learners benefit from a dedicated learner support team to help them make the correct choices regarding their next steps.
- The apprenticeship provision at the college is managed well. A large majority of apprentices complete their qualifications and gain employment often in well-paid sectors such as engineering and technologies. Apprentices benefit from good training and accurate feedback from assessors after their assessment activities, including on how to improve further. However, in a few

instances, apprentices would benefit from more reinforcement of their understanding of health and safety and equality and diversity in relation to their work role.

- Leaders and managers have developed an effective strategy to increase the numbers of learners on science, technology and engineering programmes to meet the LEP's priorities.
- Processes to assess high-needs learners accurately are robust. College staff communicate very well with partner schools and other agencies and, as a result, arrangements to help learners make the transition to college are highly effective. Learners have effective individualised learning plans and are making good progress. However short-term and sessional targets set are not always sufficiently specific for individual learners.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- the actions currently in place to improve the teaching of discrete English and mathematics, particularly for learners aged 16 to 19, are implemented fully; and that the impact of these is evaluated fully and monitored closely throughout 2015/16, so that the proportion of learners who gain grades A* to C at GCSE or achieve their functional skills qualifications improves rapidly
- monitoring and reporting about the quality of A-level provision are strengthened further, so that teaching, learning and assessment are of a consistently high standard, and all learners make good or better progress
- senior leaders have a clearer and more frequent overview of how well learners are progressing against their expected grades, and take swift remedial action where necessary, particularly, but not exclusively, for learners on AS-level courses
- through all apprenticeship progress reviews, staff promote and extend learners' understanding of health and safety and equality and diversity actively, and also increase the sharing of best practice that exists in many departments.

This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Hunsley
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we were assisted by the deputy principal as nominee. We met you, your senior leaders, middle managers and governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body. We visited both your sites with members of your management and lesson observation teams to observe teaching, learning and assessment and to look at learners' work. We spoke to learners across the sites and to your apprentices. We held meetings with learners and staff, spoke to employers and reviewed key documents including those relating to self-assessment, performance and safeguarding. We considered the views of learners and employers by reviewing the comments received on Ofsted's online questionnaires and by seeking the views of learners and employers during the on-site inspection activity.