

Oakwood Court College

Independent Specialist College

Inspection dates

11–13 November 2015

Overall effectiveness

Good

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for learners	Good
Provision for learners with high needs	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Learners achieve well and make good progress through the good teaching and well-designed curriculum.
- Learners' work is of a high standard, particularly in cooking, information and communication technology (ICT), horticulture, English and mathematics.
- Learners develop good employability skills and confidence through participation in external work placements. They make good progress into employment, further training and supported or independent living.
- Staff are highly skilled in managing learners' behaviour and improving their confidence levels.
- Teachers are particularly good at encouraging learners to develop and excel in their sporting achievements and social interactions through the very good range of enrichment activities.
- Decisive leadership has led to significant improvements in the development of the curriculum and in teaching and learning.

It is not yet an outstanding provider

- Teachers' reviews of second year learners' progress and their feedback to learners, parents and carers do not take place frequently enough.
- Staff do not plan for what learners will do when they leave college from the start of learners' programmes.
- The self-assessment process does not accurately identify the college's strengths and weaknesses, or include the views of staff, learners and key stakeholders.
- The Board of Directors does not pay sufficient attention to learners' achievements and the quality of teaching and learning.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Oakwood Court College is a residential and day independent specialist college, operated by Phoenix Learning and Care Limited since 1998. The college offers vocational programmes for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in horticulture and conservation, catering, retail, animal care, vehicle maintenance, retail and enterprise, and information learning technology as well as independent and living skills. The college operates from two sites in Devon and Cornwall. At the time of the inspection there were 32 learners enrolled on study programmes and three on internships. Two thirds of the current learners are residential.
- Since the last inspection a new Principal has been appointed and took up post in September 2015. The curriculum has been redesigned to better reflect learners' ambitions relevant to the local labour market and classroom and workshop accommodation has been refurbished and redesigned.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve the reviewing and reporting on all learners' progress by:
 - ensuring that learners in their second year have regular reviews of their progress and achievement towards targets
 - informing parents, carers and learners about the progress they are making.
- Strengthen the focus on learners' employment goals by:
 - ensuring that all staff focus on learners' long-term destination goals from the beginning of their programmes
 - ensuring that the destination goals are reviewed and amended throughout the learners' programme.
- Revise and improve the self-assessment process so that:
 - all staff, learners and key stakeholders contribute to the report
 - the report accurately identifies the strengths and weaknesses of the provision by using data and information from all curriculum areas, learners and stakeholders.
- Improve the scrutiny and challenge by the board of directors by:
 - ensuring that they receive reports about learners' achievements and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment on a regular basis
 - directors providing professional and robust challenge to help bring about further improvements.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- Following the appointment of a new Principal in September 2015, senior leaders and the board of directors reviewed the college provision, timetable and curriculum and made significant changes, which have already had a very positive impact on the learners. The curriculum is more responsive and learners' timetables are designed to better meet their individual needs.
- Senior leaders and staff have high expectations for all learners and this is reflected in the very good outcomes and good progression to employment, further training and independent or supported living.
- The Principal has a clear vision for the continuing development of the college. He has forged links with key stakeholders in the region and is very clear about the future developments needed to ensure the viability and sustainability of the college.
- The college's arrangements to observe and evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and assessment are good. Senior staff formally observe all teachers twice a year and use the outcomes well to plan staff training and continuing professional development. There is very good support for staff who need to improve. The college has formed good links and worked well with another independent specialist college in the region to help improve teaching and learning and to share good practice.
- Processes for performance management are strong, with clear links to teaching, learning and assessment outcomes. The graded observations contribute directly to performance management outcomes and the newly introduced pay structure from September 2015 links teachers' qualifications, skills and performance in the classroom to pay.
- The new self-assessment process is at an early stage of development. The current self-assessment report does not accurately reflect the key strengths and weaknesses of the college and views of learners, parents/carers and key stakeholders are not routinely used to inform self-assessment.
- The vocational curriculum is well planned and takes account of regional and local priorities. Senior leaders collaborate well with employers, who provide very good work experience opportunities. However, staff have not yet used the expertise of the employers in developing the curriculum.
- Teaching staff tailor the study programmes to meet the needs of individual learners. Where learners have interests and aspirations outside of the vocational offer then work experience is used creatively to provide relevant experience. The college maintains its strong focus on English and mathematics and both are well integrated into learners' programmes.
- The college has placed a much stronger emphasis on equality and diversity since the last inspection. All staff have had extensive training, which they use well in promoting equality and diversity in their lessons. Bullying is not tolerated and staff deal very effectively with the few instances that occur. There is a high level of mutual respect between learners and staff, which is reflected in learners' exemplary behaviour.
- **The governance of the provider**
 - The board of directors has a clear oversight of the performance of the college. The Principal is part of the executive management group, which meets monthly. While there is a strong focus on safeguarding and health and safety in meetings, there is a need for more scrutiny of learners' achievements and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
 - The Board do not offer sufficient challenge to the Principal and senior managers. The directors acknowledge that there is a need for a director with an educational background to provide the specialist challenge required.
- **The arrangements for safeguarding are effective**
 - Recruitment checks are thorough and policies on safeguarding are regularly reviewed and include a policy on the 'Prevent' agenda. Managers train staff well so that they have a good understanding of their safeguarding responsibilities and reinforce learners' understanding of how to keep themselves safe.
 - Managers and staff have created a strong culture of safeguarding throughout the college. Learners report they feel safe and know whom to contact if they have any concerns. They are well informed about internet safety. Staff are sensitive to the needs of learners and work hard to prevent situations escalating by working in a calm manner.
 - Staff are vigilant and respond to any safeguarding incidents quickly. Records are updated, the number of incidents is closely monitored and action is taken promptly to reduce the likelihood of future incidents. Staff are well informed about the 'Prevent' strategy and have a good awareness of the duties in the recent legislation to prevent terrorism. A new programme of teaching about British values has recently been introduced.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Staff have high expectations of learners. Good teaching, effective support and a well-designed curriculum ensure that learners develop a good understanding of themselves and the world around them. All learners make good or better progress based on their previous experience and starting points.
- Teachers plan a good range of learning activities and successfully promote learners' independence. Learners become more confident and skilled in managing their own money and shopping for everyday items. They gain confidence in using a range of public transport including buses, ferries and trains. Consequently, learners are better prepared to live more independently in the future.
- Staff are skilled, knowledgeable and expert in creating a positive learning environment; they motivate and engage learners very well. Learners' life skills are consistently reinforced by teachers. Learners who have difficulties in social communication learn strategies to help them work successfully with, and alongside, others. As a result, learners become more confident and positive about themselves.
- Teachers use interactive learning technologies well in lessons. Learners in employability lessons used computers with independence, confidence and skill to research and write a presentation on health and safety in the workplace. Learners knew, understood and could apply the key points to their own experiences. They know how to keep themselves safe when using the internet.
- Teachers' baseline assessment of learners' skills and abilities is comprehensive. Learners' targets are carefully set, shared with all staff and worked towards throughout each element of their programme. Learners' behavioural objectives are clear and learners know what they need to do in situations they find challenging. However, learners' medium- and long-term goals on individual learning plans are too general and lack focus on their specific destinations on leaving.
- Learners' programmes are highly individual. All aspects of their programme, including work experience, employability, English and mathematics and enrichment activities, are tailored to meet their needs. However, planning for learners' progression to their next step does not begin early enough in their programme.
- Teachers use good verbal questioning to check learners' understanding and assess progress in lessons and learners know the incremental progress they are making on a day-to-day basis. However, reviews of overall progress and feedback to learners, parents and carers are insufficiently regular, particularly for learners in their second year.
- Teachers integrate English and mathematics well into programmes and they are aware of, and work towards, learners' targets in lessons. Teachers have extended the delivery of English and mathematics to include discrete lessons, providing good consolidation of learning at beginner level and continued challenge for more-able learners. As a result, learners develop their skills in these subjects well.
- Learners' additional support needs are quickly identified. Teachers manage and direct support staff very effectively and encourage independent learning across all programmes. In addition, interventions from a range of specialist support staff, including counsellors and therapists employed by the college, ensure that learners make good progress.
- Learners benefit from good work placements with a range of employers and voluntary and charitable organisations. Teachers focus well on matching the needs and preferences of individuals when planning work placements, ensuring that the placements are relevant to the career choices of the learners.
- Teachers skilfully manage wide-ranging discussions on aspects of discrimination including prejudice and bullying, ensuring learners' understanding. Equality and diversity are integrated well into lessons and teachers make useful links to practice in the workplace to explore these themes further.
- Learners feel safe and enjoy their learning. Teachers pay good attention to health and safety in practical lessons, for example cookery and horticulture, and as a result learners are very aware of potential hazards and take care of themselves and others.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

- All staff employ excellent strategies to help learners to manage their own behaviour and the behaviour management of learners on the autistic spectrum is outstanding. Consequently, learners become increasingly able to manage themselves, relating well to their peers and others. All learners enjoy their learning, are motivated in lessons, take pride in their work and achievements, are courteous to others in the college and are punctual in lessons.
- Well-qualified and expert support staff provide an excellent range of support, resulting in substantial improvements in learners' lives. Staff are very sensitive to learners' needs and work closely together, ensuring that the support strategies mirror the current needs of learners. They quickly put into place any

revisions made to risk assessments and support plans. As a result, learners' progress in personal and social skills is good.

- Learners improve their numeracy skills well in discrete lessons and during independent living activities in the community. They develop good listening and speaking skills through thoughtfully structured conversation. For example, discussing local wildlife and the nature of different types of soil in horticulture.
- Learners develop good and useful practical and employability skills that prepare them well for work and independent living, through the good and well-designed work experience placements. Learners receive good one-to-one support on first starting their work placement and this is gradually withdrawn as learners become more self-assured.
- The range of enrichment activities taking place at the weekends and in the evening is outstanding, with an excellent focus on learner choice. Learners participate in a wide range of sporting and social activities including attending local youth and social groups. Consequently, they substantially improve their social skills in unfamiliar situations.
- During enrichment activities, teachers encourage and support learners to develop and extend their skills in sport and a few learners have been successful at a high level. This has resulted in outstanding sporting achievements, for example one learner was supported to take up badminton, at which she excelled, receiving many national awards including 'Young Sportsperson of the Year'. Another learner represented his county at table cricket.
- The college has introduced a physical well-being programme for all learners with a strong focus on healthy eating and exercise. As a result, learners improve their social skills, join local community groups and benefit from a healthy lifestyle.

Outcomes for learners

are good

- Most learners make good or better progress as a result of the good teaching and the well-designed curriculum, which meets individual needs well. The detailed and thorough assessment of learners' starting points and the new tracking system provide a much clearer profile for each learner based on their previous experience. Baseline assessments for every aspect of a learner's programme now provide a clear starting point from which staff can accurately measure progress.
- Outcomes remain good. Learners' achievement of accredited qualifications is very good, with more learners than in previous years achieving full qualifications or a wide range of units appropriate to their career choices. All learners achieve individual challenging targets based on their interests and aspirations.
- The standard of learners' work is high. Vocational staff are very experienced and well qualified. They use their knowledge well to ensure that learners develop very good skills, particularly in communication, cooking and housekeeping. Current learners are making good progress in developing their confidence and self-esteem. They develop excellent independence skills, which enable them to lead fulfilling lives both in and outside of the college.
- Progression into employment or further training is good. Staff encourage learners' individual interests and learners are keen to develop their careers further. In the last three years most students progressed onto some type of employment, voluntary work, further education or supported living. However, destination information is not always well documented so it is not clear if learners have progressed into employment that is relevant to their goals and aspirations.

Provider details

Type of provider	Independent specialist college
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	33
Principal/CEO	Paul Hannan
Website address	www.oakwoodcourt.ac.uk

Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 and above	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	17	18	0	0	0	0	0	0
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
Number of learners aged 14–16								
Funding received from	Education Funding Agency (EFA)							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	None							

Information about this inspection

Inspection team

Margaret Swift, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Helen Scott	Ofsted inspector
Penny Mathers	Ofsted inspector

The above team was assisted by the curriculum manager accreditation, as nominee, and carried out the inspection at short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews and online questionnaires to gather the views of students and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

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