

Oaklands College

Oaklands College, Smallford Campus, Oaklands, St Albans, Hertfordshire AL4 0JA

Inspection of residential provision

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this further education college with residential accommodation

This general further education college provides a wide range of education and training for adults and young people. The residential department operates a term-time-only provision for up to 61 students based across 15 houses. At the time of inspection, there were 59 residential students, 43 of whom were under 18. The college operations are carried on from two sites, but its principal campus is in a village, close to a town, main railway link and motorways. The accommodation is in the form of single bedrooms in residential houses. These houses range from three-bedroom to five-bedroom dwellings. All of the residential accommodation is situated on the principal campus.

The vast majority of residential students belong to a sports academy. The residential provision has also been accessed by a small number of other students studying as apprentices or with the equine department.

Inspection dates 23 to 25 January 2018

Overall experiences and progress of young people, taking in account **good**

How well young people are helped and protected good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers good

The college provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Overall judgement at last inspection: requires improvement

Date of last inspection: 26 January 2016

Key findings from this inspection

This college is good because:

- Leaders, managers and residential staff are invested in the quality of the provision.
- The staff, who know the students well, are reflective and student focused.
- The students say that they feel safe. They can identify adults with whom they can share concerns.
- The expectations of behaviour are made clear to the students. Action is taken to address unwanted and unacceptable behaviour.
- The college has strong and effective links with the police, and part-funds a police community support officer.
- There is good support available to meet the emotional needs of the students.
- Students who are at risk of or vulnerable to harm receive good support from the welfare and guidance staff.
- Monitoring arrangements across a number of areas have improved since the last inspection.
- The issues identified at the last inspection have been addressed.
- A wide range of enjoyable and educational recreational activities are available for residential students.

The college's areas for development:

- Boarding accommodation is basic and not consistently well maintained.
- In one instance, a person who lives on site has not had an appropriate Disclosure and Barring Service check.
- The approach to staff development and support through supervision, appraisal and team meetings is not consistently good enough.
- There is no formal policy for undertaking room searches.

What does the college need to do to improve?

Compliance with the national minimum standards for accommodation of students under eighteen by further education colleges

- 34.6 For all adults who after April 2002 begin to live on the same premises as children/students (for example adult members of staff households) but are not employed by the school, there is a verifiable Disclosure and Barring Service check completed at the standard level.
- 36.1 Student residential accommodation (including sleeping and living areas), and other accommodation provided for students, are appropriately lit, heated and ventilated, suitably furnished, accessible to any students accommodated who have disabilities, and adequately decorated, cleaned and maintained.

Recommendations

- Further develop the supervision, appraisal and team meeting systems designed to provide the residential staff with the support and challenge that they require to maintain their professional development.
- Define a clear room search policy and communicate it to the staff and students

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of young people: good

The staff know the students well. The relationships appear easy and engaging. The students say that they feel at ease talking to the staff and that they know they can ask the staff for help if they feel upset or anxious or have a problem. Observations of the staff interacting with the students during the inspection showed that the students have high regard for the staff. The students and the staff speak to each other with warmth. The residential staff are exceptionally young-person focused and genuinely care about the students.

There is evidence that residential students make greater progress than non-residential students. For example, attendance and attainment for residential students is greater than non-residential students. All of the residential students from the 2016/17 cohort moved on to further education, apprenticeships or employment.

Health and well-being is well looked after through access to the welfare services at the college. There is a dedicated team of advice and guidance counsellors. The highly effective referral system means that students who need support can access it quickly. They can be referred to the counselling service if necessary or have regular appointments with the advice and guidance staff, or both. All of the work is recorded clearly so that there is a comprehensive audit trail of the support provided and a way to

see whether concerns are reducing or escalating, and the efficacy of the action taken.

The students are treated as young adults, and enabled to take acceptable risks. The work that the college undertakes with the police is preventative and informative. It helps the students to become aware of their vulnerabilities and how to stay safe. Sessions including sexual health, anti-bullying and internet safety with the relevant professionals help the students to develop a good understanding of themselves and others and acceptable behaviour.

Residential students access a wide range of recreational activities because of their sporting academy attendance, socialising with peers, going out independently and enjoying enrichment activities that are available to all of the students. The residential students are supported by staff who know them, genuinely care about them and take an interest in them. There is a multi-faith room available for all of the students and staff. The residential students say that they have fun and enjoy boarding.

The residential students described the ways in which they can communicate their views and wishes. They are able to name changes that have been made as a result of their feedback, including improving the food and the provision of an extended range of activities. Residential staff make themselves available informally every day, to talk to the students and ask them about their views. Focus group meetings take place half termly, to provide a more formal opportunity for students to provide their views.

There have been no complaints relating to residence. The students know how to complain. They have access to staff with whom they can talk and to counsellors and advisers, which provides them with a number of ways in which they can raise concerns if they wish to do so.

The staff support the students to prepare for life beyond the college. Students develop their independence skills such as laundry, cooking, shopping, and tidying up their rooms and boarding houses. Enrichment activities provide the students with many opportunities to develop their knowledge of the wider world.

Hot meals are available three times a day, and the students have a choice of food. The menus are circulated each week, so that the students can make a decision about which meals they want to eat in the dining room, and whether they would prefer to cook for themselves. Students who are in training for their chosen sport and not back in time for meals can have packed meals, or food is kept for them at their request. Consequently, all of the students benefit from a range of nutritious meals that they can supplement with food that they have prepared for themselves at any time during the day or evening.

Boarding houses provide basic accommodation. They are adequately lit and heated. Each student has their own desk, chair, wardrobe and bed, and access to bathing facilities. The students are happy with the boarding houses. However, boarding houses are not homely or consistently well maintained. The furniture is sparse in communal areas. A number of the bathrooms were dirty, and the carpet was badly stained in one of the houses. A new, purpose-built residential block has been agreed. Work is starting

this year. The plans indicate that the new building will provide significantly improved facilities for the students.

How well young people are helped and protected: good

The college has a safeguarding team of trained safeguarding link staff, a designated safeguarding lead and deputy designated safeguarding leads. These staff are trained to the required levels and benefit from regular refresher training. The comprehensive and effective referral system means that safeguarding concerns are identified and made known to the safeguarding leads. When concerns require referral to children's services, the safeguarding leads do so and ensure that there is robust follow up and pursuit so that the students get the support that they need. Records are extremely thorough and provide a full picture of the action taken and the outcomes.

Students who are at risk of or vulnerable to harm receive good support from the welfare and guidance staff. Clear records set out the support that the student has accessed and appointments with other professionals. The welfare and guidance staff know the students well, as do the residential staff. Consequently, the staff are alert to and act on signs of anxiety or potential harm.

The residential students say that they feel safe. They can identify adults with whom they can share concerns.

The college has strong and effective links with the police, and part-funds a police community support officer role. There are good links with the Prevent coordinator. Senior staff representatives sit on a sub-committee group that discusses and shares information in respect of extremism and radicalisation issues affecting young people, learning from other professionals and staying abreast of current issues.

The residential staff report that the students are concerned about their performance in their chosen sports and therefore they do not smoke or drink or use illegal substances. The residential students say that alcohol and substance misuse are not issues in residence. One of the residential students said, 'We are athletes; we do not smoke or drink.'

The facilities team oversees regular checks of the extensive campus. Fire prevention systems are tested regularly, remedial works are carried out as necessary, and external professionals are contracted to carry out checks. Further checks were initiated following the Grenfell Tower fire, to ensure that the environment does not expose students to potentially unidentified risks. A health and safety specialist is consulted as needed. Premises risk assessments are in place and reviewed when there are changes. The checks contribute to providing a safe environment for the students.

Enrichment activities and tutorial topics inform the students about keeping safe online and when out socially. Strong links with the police reinforce this work. All of the students undertake a mandatory e-safety online module to help them to understand how to keep themselves safe.

The monitoring system to check on students' whereabouts throughout the day is effective. The students understand that they need to check in with staff. The staff physically check on them at the end of each evening. No residential students have gone missing from the college. The residential staff understand the process to follow to escalate concerns in the event that a student does go missing.

The students said that they have not had issues with bullying or discrimination. The residential staff say that there are no concerns because the residential students pick who they spend time with and the boarding-house dynamics are compatible. Enrichment activities such as anti-bullying week, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender awareness raising and disability awareness week help to raise the profile of such topics.

The expectations of behaviour are made clear to the students. Action is taken to address unwanted and unacceptable behaviour. 'Compliments' are entered on to the college's online system to provide students with recorded reinforcement of positive behaviours and achievements. Restraint is not used. The students are invested in their college courses and sporting academies. Discipline is an important part of their routine. Therefore, unwanted and unacceptable behaviours are minimal.

There has been one instance of an initiation ceremony. This was explored fully by managers. The records of the investigations are clear and set out how the college has followed the behaviour management policy and safeguarding protocols. The students have had meetings with senior staff and the students' parents to set expectations of behaviour and make clear that this cannot happen again. Every reasonable action has been taken to address the concern proportionately.

The college's welfare team gives students easy-to-access support and guidance. An example of a peer referral demonstrates that students look out for each other and know how to access help for themselves or others. The students can approach the welfare team directly, and any staff member can make a referral. The students' welfare is taken very seriously by the college.

Students say that they have not been subject to room searches. There are no records of any room searches in the last two years. However, there is no room search policy. Lack of written guidance for staff and students has the potential to put staff at risk of allegations, and means that the students may not be clear about what to expect in the event that a room search is necessary.

Recruitment records reflect that new staff are recruited safely. The adults who live on site work at the college and so have been subject to employment checks, with the exception of one person. Although a risk assessment is in place for that person, there is no Disclosure and Barring Service check. This person does not access the buildings on campus and does not have contact with the students, which minimises the risk to residential students. The college initiated checks during the inspection when this shortfall was identified.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

There are sufficient numbers of staff to meet the needs of the residential students. The staff work cohesively as a team. The majority of staff have been in post for a number of years. The staff spoke of improvements in terms of the clarity of their roles since the last inspection. The team is stable and experienced. A new residential manager is in post. He is known to the students and has quickly established a rapport with them. The staff say that they feel supported.

Leaders, managers and governors are invested in the success of the residential provision. The governors commissioned a thorough residential audit to identify areas for improvement. Senior college managers ensure that regular discussion about the residential provision takes place. As a result, managers across the whole college management team have a good understanding the provision. Consequently, the issues identified at the last inspection have been addressed and improvements sustained.

The quality of monitoring arrangements has improved since the last inspection. Monitoring takes into account feedback from young people. The discussions that take place at student focus meetings are fed back to the residential management group and, in turn, feed into quality improvement plans. Students are included in the final validation discussions. This ensures that the voice of students is included throughout the monitoring and review process.

The system to monitor student welfare addresses students' needs. Good monitoring and recording reflects how staff have responded to the needs of students. The quality of records on this system is good. College managers challenge providers when they feel that the response is not meeting a student's needs.

Effective monitoring systems enable the staff to track the progress that the residential students make. There are effective inter-disciplinary relationships across the college to ensure a joined-up approach to encouraging attendance and attainment. For example, residential staff and academy managers will link to identify the best way to motivate a student who may be struggling with attendance.

The staff habitually acknowledge the progress and achievements of students both formally and informally. Informal acknowledgement of achievement happens routinely by the residential staff. Formal award ceremonies take place and publicly commend achievements.

The staff support students who struggle with being away from home. Although this struggle is not commonplace, the staff have worked with students to change the way in which the residential enrolment process takes place. This followed feedback from young people and was designed to improve the quality of transition into the residential provision.

The staff have access to a variety of training opportunities. All of the residential staff are up to date with their safeguarding training. However, the system for supervision and

appraisal of residential staff is not strong. Although appraisal records exist, they lack depth, analysis and key information such as who has completed them. In one instance, there was no consideration of a member of staff's role in the residential provision. In addition, the process for one-to-one support outside of the formal annual appraisals is not recorded. Residential team meetings are not consistently recorded. Combined, these factors have the potential to limit the support and challenge that the staff require to maintain their professional development.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the differences made to the lives of young people. They watched how professional staff work with young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the college knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

Using the 'Social care common inspection framework', this inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with the national minimum standards.

Further education college with residential accommodation details

Social care unique reference number: SC059818

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Inspectors

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