

# Inspection of Oaklands College

Inspection dates: 21–24 September 2021

## Overall effectiveness

## Requires improvement

The quality of education	<b>Good</b>
Behaviour and attitudes	<b>Good</b>
Personal development	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Leadership and management	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Education programmes for young people	<b>Good</b>
Adult learning programmes	<b>Good</b>
Apprenticeships	<b>Inadequate</b>
Provision for learners with high needs	<b>Good</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

## Information about this provider

Oaklands College has two main campuses in St Albans and Welwyn Garden City, with a smaller provision in Borehamwood. Oaklands College is a large general further education college, with land-based programmes, offering provision in all 15 subject sector areas and all age groups. It attracts learners and apprentices from the main districts and borough councils of, Hertsmere, St Albans, Welwyn and Hatfield.

Oaklands College offers courses from entry level to level 5 for adults, young people, apprentices and for learners with high needs. Most learners aged 16 to 19 access level 3 courses. Around half of learners on study programmes enrol with at least five GCSE qualifications at grade 4 and above, including mathematics and English.

At the time of inspection, 2,950 learners had enrolled on study programmes. In addition, 1,050 adult learners, 589 apprentices and 313 learners with high needs were enrolled. Oaklands College works with two subcontractors.

## **What is it like to be a learner with this provider?**

Too many apprentices do not get the opportunity to practise what they learn at college within their job roles. Apprentices do not understand how the theory they learn at college will help them to become better at their jobs. They cannot explain, for example, how the skills they learn in fabricating workshops apply to the industry setting in which they work.

Learners on study programmes benefit from a purposeful and focused curriculum. Their access to specialist vocational pathways enables them to progress to employment and higher-level study. Most learners enjoy a good range of work experience activities. These activities expose them to industry expectations very effectively.

Most learners develop relevant new skills and knowledge. They attend punctually and are fully prepared to learn. Learners enjoy studying and develop a good attitude to learning. They understand the need to treat everyone respectfully, and value the calm and orderly environment of the college.

Adult learners are motivated and most have well-defined ambitions for their future lives. They are keen to achieve their qualifications and gain better jobs. Adult learners who are speakers of other languages, make significant gains in their confidence in using English. This enables them to help their children at school more effectively.

Learners with high needs learn independence in their everyday lives. They learn communication skills and enjoy taking part in a good range of extra-curricular activities. These activities help them to improve their health and well-being. Learners also make friends with learners outside of their own groups.

Learners feel safe and they know who to report concerns to, should they arise. Learners are confident that such concerns will be taken seriously by staff and dealt with quickly.

## **What does the provider do well and what does it need to do better?**

Since the previous inspection, leaders have not maintained the good practice identified in the apprenticeship provision. Leaders have failed to identify and act upon the serious weaknesses in a substantial proportion of their apprenticeship provision. They underestimated the impact of the weaknesses they have identified on the quality of apprentices' learning experience. As a result, too many apprentices do not enjoy or benefit from their training.

Leaders and managers do not ensure that enough employers fulfil the commitment to give apprentices time away from their job roles to learn. Assessors do not have

discussions with apprentices and their employers about apprentices' progress frequently enough. As a result, too many apprentices and their employers do not know which elements of the apprenticeship they are working towards. Too often, assessors do not provide apprentices with helpful feedback to help them improve. Consequently, too many apprentices do not develop new skills and knowledge related to their job roles.

Too few adults and apprentices develop knowledge of wider personal topics outside of their qualifications. Staff do not plan a personal development curriculum that helps enough apprentices and adults to fully understand, for example, the 'Prevent' duty. Consequently, too many of these learners are not sufficiently aware of how these wider topics impact on their professional or personal lives. Most learners understand the benefit of treating everyone respectfully.

Leaders ensure that staff have good subject knowledge. Teachers use these skills to provide interesting and useful lessons. Teachers of learners who speak other languages, respond particularly well to learners' needs. This includes ensuring that learners use correct intonation and are clearly understood when speaking. Hospitality and catering teachers ensure that learners gain work experience in high-quality hotels and restaurants. This helps learners to develop their skills to professional standards quickly. As a result, most learners develop the skills needed to succeed in their chosen careers.

Leaders have ensured that support for vulnerable learners is highly effective. Staff closely monitor learners who are, for example, looked after or care leavers to make sure that they attend classes and thrive. If learners are absent, staff quickly follow this up to ensure that learners are safe. A designated teacher works closely with external organisations, such as the virtual school. As a result, the most vulnerable learners stay in learning and achieve.

Leaders have set high expectations of behaviour to ensure that learners develop appropriate work-ready attitudes to learning. Most teachers have developed a supportive and productive learning environment. Teachers help learners to develop effective team working and communication skills through working collaboratively with their peers from other departments. Hospitality and catering learners, for example, demonstrated how to prepare and cook ingredients grown by horticulture learners in a weekend festival called 'From Farm to Fork'. As a result, most learners enjoy their studies and arrive to lessons on time and ready to learn.

Leaders have not ensured an appropriate curriculum is in place for the small proportion of learners on supported internships. Despite leaders enrolling a new cohort of learners in September, leaders have not secured enough work placements. In place of individual work placements, teachers have planned classroom based or group work activities. These activities do not build on learners' previous learning or reflect their needs and interests. Consequently, learners do not develop the good quality work-related skills they need to gain jobs that they are interested in.

Managers do not provide useful or timely ongoing careers advice and guidance to adult learners and apprentices. Tutors do not discuss what alternative job roles would be available to apprentices upon completion of their studies. Tutors have not ensured that adults are aware of the progression pathways open to them in other vocational areas beyond those they study. Adults, for example, do not know that they can join accountancy courses at the same time as studying courses to improve their English. Consequently, too many adults and apprentices do not know what wider career choices are available to them or how to achieve their current aims.

Learners on study programmes have access to high-level careers locally because leaders have developed clear progression pathways. This includes most learners with high needs. Courses lead to either higher-level study or employment. Leaders work collaboratively with local employers and the Council. They develop new courses to fill specific skills gaps they identify. Recent innovative courses include a space technician engineering apprenticeship.

Leaders have a good rationale for their subcontracted provision. Leaders work with providers who offer courses that they do not teach at the college, such as online English and mathematics courses for adult learners from diverse backgrounds. Adult learners benefit from effective teaching that improves their understanding and ability to use English and mathematics in their work and everyday lives. As a result, learners produce better quality work, which helps them to progress to higher levels of study, university, or gain promotion at work.

Staff use assistive technology very effectively to enable learners with complex needs to access their learning activities appropriately. This enables learners to overcome barriers and achieve their challenging learning goals. Leaders and managers coordinate relevant support services for learners where appropriate. This includes, speech and language therapy, behaviour management and nursing. The nursing team support and train other staff. This helps staff to meet the needs of an increasingly complex cohort of learners. But leaders have been too slow to ensure that occupational and physiotherapy is available in a timely way for those learners that need it. The lack of early and frequent access to occupational and physiotherapy hinders learners' ability to become more physically independent.

Teachers give learners clear and useful feedback to help them improve their skills and knowledge. Teachers check learners' understanding of new learning frequently. Where teachers use peer marking and assessment, they ensure that learners share newly acquired knowledge and learn from each other. Teachers reinforce and assess learners' recall of prior learning through a variety of effective group and individual learning activities. Teachers often adapt learning plans to ensure that learners' gaps in knowledge improve before they learn more complex theories and skills. As a result, most learners gain the skills and knowledge needed to pass their qualifications.

Staff teach learners effectively about healthy lifestyles. They promote sports activities, such as football and golf, to enthuse reluctant learners into sports.

Learning mentors ensure that younger learners understand about healthy relationships. Learners can clearly identify aspects of an unhealthy relationship. They understand how inappropriate behaviours can develop over time. As a result, learners confidently raise issues with staff when required.

Teachers help learners understand British values and equality and diversity topics effectively. They skilfully discuss sensitive issues with learners. Teachers take particular care when discussing topics with groups of learners from a wide cultural mix. This helps learners to understand the relevance of British values to their lives. Teachers skilfully manage class discussions about topics, such as homophobia, to teach learners about tolerance in modern society. As a result, learners know the importance of respect for, and courtesy towards others.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have established a culture of safeguarding that enables learners to feel safe. Learners know they can report any concerns to staff with the confidence that their concerns will be resolved. Leaders have successfully introduced a strategy to promote and ensure a safe environment. Learners who are aged 16 to 18 discuss a range of sensitive topics in personal development sessions. Subjects include homophobic hate crimes and sexual harassment. As a result, these learners can confidently discuss how these issues impact on their own lives.

Managers do not help apprentices understand well enough how the 'Prevent' duty applies to their work settings. Staff do not discuss, for example, how working in a communications intelligence setting may pose risks to those apprentices working in that sector. Apprentices, for example, in the gas industry cannot explain what specific areas extremists could target. As a result, too many apprentices are not always aware that they may be vulnerable because of the sensitivity of their job roles.

## **What does the provider need to do to improve?**

- Leaders must develop robust and accurate processes to identify weaknesses in their apprenticeship provision. They must then take decisive action to ensure that employers and apprentices benefit from high-quality training which is relevant to their job roles.
- Leaders must ensure that apprentices and adults benefit from ongoing high-quality careers advice and guidance, so that they understand and know how to achieve the job roles and careers they seek upon completion of their courses.
- Leaders must ensure that learners on the supported internship course benefit from meaningful work experience placements that reflect their needs and interests. Learners must be enabled to develop the skills they require to gain sustainable jobs that interest them.

- Leaders must ensure that learners who require occupational and physiotherapy services have access to them in a timely way and become independent learners.
- Leaders must ensure that apprentices understand how the radical views and extremist behaviour of others may impact on their personal and working lives. Apprentices need to understand that the work they do may result in them being at risk from terrorist activity.

## Provider details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	130723
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<b>Principal/CEO</b>	Andrew Slade
<b>Provider type</b>	Further Education College
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	24–27 April 2018
<b>Main subcontractors</b>	Progression 2 Groundworks

## Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the deputy principal, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. The inspection was carried out using the [further education and skills inspection handbook](#) and took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence to inform judgements including visiting learning sessions, scrutinising learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

## Inspection team

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