

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 81 students in one building. At the time of inspection, there were 76 residential students, 56 of whom were under 18. The college operates from two sites, but its principal campus is in a village close to a town, a main railway link and motorways. The accommodation is in the form of single bedrooms in wings of a new residential building situated on the principal campus. Most residential students belong to a sports academy.

The suitably qualified residential manager has been in post for four years.

The inspectors only inspected the residential provision at this college.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers carried out under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) on 17 March 2020. We returned to routine SCCIF inspections on 12 April 2021.

Inspection dates: 17 to 19 January 2022

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

How well young people are helped and protected **requires improvement to be good**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **good**

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

Date of last inspection: 23 January 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of young people: good

Students enjoy their time at this college. They benefit from new, purpose-built residential accommodation. It is well equipped and modern and maintained to a high standard. Students feel privileged to be at the college and, as a result, are determined and motivated to achieve.

Students are positive about the guidance from and availability of staff. Students benefit from a good range of activities. This includes activities designed to support their athletic pursuits as well as those that support their personal and social development. For example, sports training sessions are provided, as well as safety awareness events led by local police.

Students are given excellent support to attend, participate and engage in their education. For example, one student was absent from college for personal reasons. In response, residential staff provided extra opportunities for learning during residential time. This led to the student catching up and gaining qualifications that they would otherwise have failed to achieve.

Students develop their independence skills with the support of staff. This helps them to prepare for the next stage of their lives and further study. Students said that they have become better equipped to understand budgeting, to cook nutritious meals and learn how to carry out laundry tasks.

Students know how to make a complaint or raise concerns. There are several forums for students to express their views and opinions. They are very clear that managers hear and act on their views and wishes. For example, the provision of dishwashers, an exercise bike and a vending machine were all in response to the students' requests.

Students benefit from good support from staff, who generally know them well. Students with autism are doing well in the residential provision. A parent described her child as thriving. However, there are gaps in staff's knowledge of students with autism spectrum disorder. The lack of staff awareness has meant that on two occasions opportunities to support a student with changes to their routine have been missed. This resulted in anxiety that may have been avoided had staff been aware of the student's diagnosis.

How well young people are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good

The safeguarding team provides support to a wide range of students across the college, including in the residential provision. There is evidence of good responses to students, with managers being proactive in chasing referrals and seeking updates. However, on one occasion, significant errors were made in responding to an

incident. Although the incident was taken seriously and some prompt action was taken, managers did not inform relevant agencies before taking further action. This failing had the clear potential to compromise any subsequent investigation into the incident. Managers now recognise this and have taken steps to reduce the likelihood of recurrence.

Students feel very safe at the college and have established friendships with their peers. Students say that bullying is not an issue. Staff are alert to the potential for bullying to occur and recognise that no reporting does not mean no incidents.

The staff and managers manage situations and behaviour well. Students said that the staff are friendly and accessible but that they also apply clear and fair boundaries. Students recognise that the residential manager has clear expectations of their behaviour.

A specific safeguarding officer is allocated to the residential provision. He works with the managers, and fortnightly safeguarding meetings take place. This helps staff and managers to stay alert to safeguarding concerns for individual students. Safeguarding leads monitor the nature of safeguarding concerns. This increases the potential for trends to be identified.

Staff receive training in a good range of issues relating to safeguarding. This includes radicalisation, gang culture, knife crime and county lines. In addition, safeguarding managers provide regular safeguarding updates to staff and students in the form of newsletters. This helps staff to maintain their awareness and understanding of relevant issues.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The well-respected residential management team has maintained a good-quality service for the students despite the challenges presented by COVID-19.

Managers and staff have good relationships with the wider college. Managers and staff have a good understanding of the progress that students make. Management systems ensure that there is a multi-disciplinary response to any academic concerns or issues of significance that arise in residence. Consequently, managers and staff can quickly provide students with the guidance and support that they need to address issues.

Managers welcome challenge and monitoring. Managers complete internal reviews of the quality of the provision and commission external scrutiny. As a result, improvements have been made to the provision.

Managers work well with families. Feedback from families is positive and constructive. When families make suggestions for improvements, managers act on these.

Students benefit from guidance and support from a diverse staff team. Visible role models help students to feel comfortable with their own identity.

Managers have made some improvements to the supervision and support for residential staff. However, unlike the other designated safeguarding staff, the residential manager has not received clinical supervision. In addition, although the residential manager feels supported and has regular meetings with line managers, he does not receive recorded supervisions. The manager's role is wide ranging and complex. The absence of written records and access to the same beneficial supervision as his peers means that there are gaps in the support that he receives.

What does the college need to do to improve?

Compliance with the national minimum standards for accommodation of students under 18 by further education colleges

■ Ensure that:

- arrangements are in place to safeguard and promote the welfare of residential students;
- such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State that applies to the college and
- all staff who have responsibility for the care of residential students undertake safeguarding training, including regular updating. When disabled students are resident, specialist training is undertaken to enhance staff knowledge and understanding about their additional needs.

(NMS for the accommodation of students under 18 by FE colleges, 11.1)

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that staff and managers are aware of which students have autism spectrum disorders and understand how this diagnosis may affect the student's needs.
- The registered person should ensure that the residential manager receives supervision consistent with other designated safeguarding staff.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of young people, 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

Principal/CEO: Andrew Slade

Inspectors

Ashley Hinson, Social Care Inspector
Lianne Bradford, Social Care Inspector

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