

Inspection of Oakbridge Special Education

Inspection dates: 14 to 16 March 2023

Overall effectiveness

Good

The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Requires improvement
Leadership and management	Good
Provision for learners with high needs	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this provider

Oakbridge Special Education (Oakbridge) is an independent specialist college located in the London Borough of Barnet. Oakbridge is a subsidiary company of the Barnet Special Education Trust. Oakbridge has its own board of directors.

At the time of the inspection, there were 26 learners attending the college. Learners have a range of complex learning difficulties, including autism spectrum disorder. Most learners live in Barnet.

Learners follow a two-year accredited programme of study, which focuses on preparing learners for living and working independently.

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

Learners enjoy being at the college very much. Most learners flourish in the calm and supportive environment. They benefit from staff who understand and meet their specific needs. For example, staff ensure learners with sensory needs have the correct protective equipment, such as gloves, so that they can work with soil in the garden.

Learners have positive attitudes to learning. They behave well around the college site and know how to regulate their behaviour when they feel anxious. They complete the tasks staff set in lessons with enthusiasm. Consequently, most learners make sound progress in meeting the learning goals identified in their education health and care (EHC) plan. Learners' attendance overall is high.

Learners value greatly the work experiences they undertake in the community. For example, learners improve their numeracy skills when counting out notes and coins in the Trust's shop. Learners' self-esteem grows through regular conversations with members of the community at coffee mornings at the local church. They gradually build their skills and confidence when serving refreshments to adults.

A very small minority of learners who use wheelchairs or who have restricted mobility cannot access the bedroom and bathroom areas of the life skills house. As a result, they miss out on aspects of the curriculum around how to live independently.

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

Leaders have planned a curriculum that meets learners' individual needs. Learners study a range of relevant topics, including cooking, gardening, and health and well-being. Learners improve their knowledge of English and mathematics through activities, such as preparing a shopping list using key words and handling money when shopping.

Leaders have worked diligently to forge new partnerships with local community organisations to offer learners purposeful work experiences. For example, learners carry out gardening tasks at the local church. They also use the church's facilities to learn how to cook everyday meals, such as pizza, and bake cakes which they serve at the coffee morning. Leaders prepare learners appropriately for their next steps into adulthood.

Teachers assess thoroughly learners' starting points against their EHC plan outcomes within the first six weeks of the course. Where necessary, they refine the outcomes to make them appropriate for a college environment in consultation with learners' parents or carers. Teachers track systematically learners' progress towards meeting their EHC plan outcomes. However, teachers do not identify in detail the knowledge, skills and behaviours they intend learners to achieve. For example, they do not break down the specific skills and knowledge they plan learners to gain during cooking lessons.

Teachers involve learners in setting their own targets skilfully. They capture learners' feedback verbally or by using symbols to identify and record how well learners have met their targets.

Teachers use a range of useful teaching strategies to help learners grasp new knowledge and skills. For example, in cooking they give clear, straightforward verbal instructions, such as 'put the peas in the bowl'. Consequently, learners know what they need to do to successfully complete the task. Teachers check that learners understand new topics securely by questioning them directly. For example, in gardening lessons learners respond capably by describing the steps they take to make a hole in the compost to plant pepper seeds. However, in a minority of lessons, leaders do not ensure that tutors plan consistently age-appropriate activities that encourage adult behaviours. For instance, in some sport lessons learners play games, such as musical chairs.

Most teachers plan opportunities for learners to develop digital skills. For example, in shopping lessons, teachers show learners how to use self-scan checkouts in the supermarket. In employability lessons, learners use computers to find out about different education courses relevant for their next steps. In a minority of lessons, however, teachers do not adapt resources to make the best use of technology. For example, learners stick pictures on key dates on a paper-based calendar rather than use an electronic calendar to set up events.

Parents and carers speak highly of the support and teaching learners receive. They appreciate the efforts staff make to welcome new learners into the college. Parents and carers notice how learners grow in confidence and take part in more activities at home, such as socialising at family events. Staff support learners effectively to make choices about their next steps. Consequently, most learners progress to further learning and supported internships when they finish their course.

Leaders and managers have not planned a sufficiently robust curriculum for teaching learners how to keep themselves and others safe, or about healthy adult relationships. They teach a few topics about stranger danger and friendships. However, teachers do not cover relationship and sex education subjects in any depth. Nor do they teach about the dangers of extremism and radicalisation, such as the risks of online grooming. Leaders have identified this as a high priority area for development through an internal review and have credible plans in place to make the necessary improvements.

Leaders have recently broadened the membership of their board of directors. They now have directors with experience in business operations, safeguarding and community links. Directors receive suitable information about the strengths and areas for improvement in the college's quality of education. Leaders do not provide directors with enough information, so that they can scrutinise safeguarding matters effectively.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and staff create a positive culture of safeguarding. Staff, including the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and the deputy DSL, are suitably trained and experienced for their roles. Leaders carry out the required pre-employment checks on new staff, including those recruited through agencies.

Leaders have made links with a wide range of useful welfare organisations to provide effective support to learners and their families and carers.

Staff report promptly any learner safeguarding or well-being concerns. Leaders keep comprehensive records, which they review daily. When concerning patterns of behaviour emerge, staff quickly contact parents and carers to discuss them.

Learners say they feel safe and happy at the college.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders must plan a curriculum to teach learners about how to keep themselves and others safe from the dangers of extremism and radicalisation.
- Leaders must ensure that staff teach learners to have a broader and more detailed understanding of healthy adult relationships.
- Leaders should train teachers to identify the knowledge, skills and behaviours learners will develop on their courses over and above their EHC plan outcomes.

Provider details

Unique reference number	146552
Address	30 High Street Edgware HA8 7EQ
Contact number	02030260611
Website	https://oakbridgesen.org
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Simon Clark
Provider type	Independent specialist college
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the Provision Manager, 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

Sue Hasty, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Joanna Walters

His Majesty's Inspector

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