

Re-inspection report

Audience Post-sixteen	Published April 2008	Provider reference 130723
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Introduction

Oaklands College was inspected in October 2005. Inspectors carried out the inspection under Section 62 of the Learning and Skills Act. The quality of provision was found to be satisfactory or better in all areas inspected, except in construction and the built environment which was found to be inadequate. Ofsted is responsible for re-inspecting all provision that is inadequate.

The less than satisfactory construction and the built environment was re-inspected on 4-5 March 2008. The outcomes of the re-inspection are as follows.

Curriculum area	Original grade	Re-inspection grade
Construction and the built environment	4	2

Context

The college offers programmes in trowel trades, carpentry and joinery, plumbing and construction management from levels 1 to 3. Most learners are full time. Learner numbers at re-inspection were 1,048 of whom 125 are on work-based programmes. The college also has 128 learners aged 14-16 on programmes from local schools.

Strengths

- good success rates
- well managed programmes
- good teaching
- particularly effective monitoring of progress
- good leadership and management

Areas for improvement

- underdeveloped target setting on some programmes

Achievement and standards

Success rates are good on all programmes. Rates have increased significantly at all levels since the last inspection to above national averages. Success rates on work-based programmes have also increased to above average. Learners' written work is of a satisfactory standard. Practical skills are developed progressively to industry standard levels of competency. Portfolio evidence is good and cross-referenced appropriately. Current in-year retention and

attendance rates are high at 98%. Progression to courses at the college from the 14-16 programme was high last year at 73%.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are well managed. Teachers use a wide range of strategies to involve learners and cater for their individual needs. Learners contribute well to lessons. Electronic presentations using interactive whiteboards are used effectively in theory and practical lessons. Learning materials on the virtual learning environment are used well by most learners. Tutors provide supportive feedback. Initial assessment is effective. Additional needs are identified and early support provided. Monitoring of progress is particularly effective. Regular tutorials inform a comprehensive tracking of all elements of the learner's programme. Individual target setting is underdeveloped on some work-based learning programmes, with learners following similar length programmes irrespective of ability. Links with employers are good.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are good. A new team provides clear direction and much successful work has taken place to improve success rates. Data are used well to inform programme development. Most workshops and resource rooms are new and well equipped. Many staff are new to the college. They are mentored well and receive good support. Communication across all areas is good. The self-assessment process is inclusive and reflects the area accurately.

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Oaklands College
Date of visit: 4-5 March 2008

Context

Oaklands College is a large general further education college and is one of four colleges serving Hertfordshire. The college has four core campuses across three local authority districts in mid and south Hertfordshire: Borehamwood; St Albans City; Smallford and Welwyn Garden City.

In 2006/07, college data show there were 18,237 funded enrolments. Of these, 6,771 enrolments were learners aged 16-18 (around 56% of the weighted total cohort) and 11,466 enrolments were adults. Around 14% of learners were from a minority ethnic heritage, higher than the average for mid and south Hertfordshire, and 56% of learners were female.

The college offers programmes in all 15 sector subject areas. The majority of learners are enrolled on programmes in preparation for life and work, arts, media and publishing, health, public services and care, and construction and the built environment. In 2006/07, 147 learners followed work-based learning (WBL) apprenticeships.

Last inspection and AAV

Oaklands College was last inspected in October 2005 and was judged to be satisfactory overall with good capacity to improve. Curriculum areas were judged to be satisfactory or better, with the exception of construction and the built environment which was judged to be inadequate. Construction had been judged as unsatisfactory at the previous inspection in November 2003, at the subsequent re-inspection in November 2004 and at the October 2005 full inspection. This is the third monitoring visit following the October 2005 inspection and includes a re-inspection of the construction and built environment curriculum area.

Achievement and standards

What progress has been made in improving learner outcomes?	Reasonable progress
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College data for 2006/07 indicate an improvement in the headline long success rate to 72% compared with 59% in 2005/06. This is broadly satisfactory when compared with national averages. For learners aged 16-18, success rates at level 1 and 2 increased to 87% and 76% respectively in 2006/07, above national averages, following a decline in 2005/06,. Level 3 success rates rose in 2005/06 to 70%, broadly in line with the national average. However rates show no improvement in 2006/07 and are below the national average. Success rates in ICT and science and maths are below national averages. The college has identified the underperforming programmes and put appropriate strategies in place. Targeted actions and close monitoring indicate early signs of improvement. Success rates for short programmes for learners aged 16-18 have improved year on year to well above the 2005/06 national average. Poor attendance is highlighted as an area for improvement in the self-assessment report. Electronic recording of attendance is enabling more accurate and timely reports to be produced for monitoring purposes. Early indications are of a small improvement to in-year attendance.

For adult learners, level 1 success rates recovered to around the national average in 2006/07 following a large drop in 2005/06 as a result of poor success rates in distance learning, information technology and modern language programmes. Success rates at level 2 in 2006/07 have not improved and are likely to be below the national average. Plans to use alternative funding streams to support adult learners who do not wish to follow an assessed route are in place. Success rates rose slightly at level 3 to around the national average.

What progress has been made in improving work based learning and key skills outcomes?	Reasonable progress
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For work based learners, the overall framework success rate of 45% in 2006/07 was well below the national average of 63%. The measure of completion within agreed timescales was also low at 36% compared with the national rate of 44%. Success rates for apprenticeships in construction, heating and ventilation and horticulture were high, and advanced apprenticeships in engineering were above the sector average. However, framework completion was poor in other sector subjects, although numbers were low. Improved tracking is now in place which details actions to be undertaken, dates for completion and clear responsibilities. Current data in

2007/08 show improvements in line with national rates for framework success rates and the completion of the framework within agreed timescales.

The headline success rate for key skills in 2006/07 was 69% compared with 34% in 2005/06, with 16-18 learners performing better than adult learners. Achievement has improved at all levels and across all key skills. Good success rates were achieved across business, tourism and retail and construction programmes. Key skills success rates were low on GCE A level, sports and beauty therapy programmes.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made in developing a more rigorous lesson observation scheme that can be used to improve the quality and consistency of teaching?	Reasonable progress
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The profile of good and better grades for lesson observations improved further in 2006/07 with 38 staff (13%) graded as outstanding and 168 (57%) as good, with a successful focus on continuing to reduce inadequate teaching and learning. The process for observing teaching and learning has been revised in 2007/08 with unannounced observations for staff and an aspiration and target for the quality of teaching and learning to be good or better. Where staff receive a satisfactory or inadequate grade, they are supported well through a structured programme to improve their practice and skills. This includes mentoring and coaching from one of the college's advanced skills practitioners (ASPs) before a follow-up, graded observation is conducted.

Detailed recording of the outcomes of teaching and learning observations enables the college to analyse effectively performance across levels, courses and by types of staff. Feedback from observation records is used well to inform the staff development programme and is also used by curriculum managers to monitor staff performance. Judgements generally support grades, but there is insufficient detail on the progress of learners and the use of learning support assistants. Moderation of the observation process is rigorous. The college has recently appointed two senior practitioners to co-ordinate the further development of strategies to improve learning and teaching and plans to appoint two more.

What progress has been made in improving the insufficient additional learning support to meet identified needs?	Reasonable progress
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The volume of additional learning support has increased significantly in 2007/08 with 629 learners receiving support compared with 233 in 2006/07.

Some 366 learners with specific learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive support. Almost all learners identified as needing support are receiving it. Processes for identifying learning support needs prior to learners joining the college have improved. Support is provided promptly. The college has expanded the learning support team to include co-ordinators on each of its main campuses and additional specialist staff. A skills audit has enabled the college to better locate learning support assistants in curriculum areas relevant to their backgrounds and expertise. Communication between curriculum teams and the learning support centre staff has improved as a result. Systems for monitoring support have improved. The college recognises the use of in-class learning support assistants across curriculum areas is inconsistent. Work based learners receive appropriate support in college and there are plans to appoint an outreach worker to support learners in the workplace. The use of assistive technology in the form of keyboards for note-taking, reading pens, digital dictaphones and electronic spell checkers is increasing. Plans to offer drop-in facilities in the learning resource centres for learners who need support with course work are underway. It is, however, too early to judge the overall effectiveness of support and its impact on improving success rates.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made in improving the ineffective management in beauty therapy and sports?	Reasonable progress
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Both the sport and beauty therapy curriculum areas are under new curriculum leadership, from college managers whose curriculum areas have been graded as outstanding through the self-assessment process. A strong focus on ensuring teachers are clear about their roles and responsibilities is evident, with an emphasis on supporting them to use the college's quality systems effectively to monitor and track students' progress. External consultant support, together with the use of the college's advanced skills practitioners and key skills champions, has provided appropriate guidance to develop teaching and learning strategies and practice, including the use of information learning technology (ILT). The managers are supported well by senior leaders, their peers and other college specialists to ensure timely interventions are taking place. Although it is too early to comment on the overall effectiveness of the management changes, early signs are that in-year retention in both areas has improved significantly when compared with the same period in 2006/07, and the level of learner complaints has decreased sharply. External partners involved in the sports academies programme have expressed their satisfaction with the improvements made to date.

What progress has been made in monitoring the performance of learners from minority ethnic backgrounds?	Reasonable progress
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Performance monitoring of minority ethnic learners has improved. Data are monitored monthly at senior management team level. Managers and curriculum leaders have regular access to data at course level to use in area monitoring reports. In 2005/06, the overall success rates of minority ethnic learners were in line with those of white British heritage aged 16-18 and well above those of adult learners. In 2006/07 success rates for learners aged 16-18 of minority ethnic heritage improved to 70%, however, retention fell slightly and achievement did not improve at the same rate as for white British learners. Success rates for adult learners from minority ethnic heritage did not improve at the same rate as for white British adults with retention falling slightly compared with the previous year. In-year retention data for 2007/08 suggest the overall retention of ethnic minority learners is currently higher than for learners of white British heritage.

What progress has been made to improve accommodation?	Significant progress
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Plans for the new college building are advancing well with the aim of completion and occupation in September 2010. Appropriate contingency plans to address any overrun are in place. In 2006/07 the college continued to invest in improving learning environments and facilities on its existing campuses including converting three redundant farm buildings on the main campus to provide new woodwork training, wet and dry plastering and large animal care workshops. The refurbishment of classrooms is prioritised well to bring learning environments up to an agreed standard, including the provision of interactive whiteboards. Curriculum area facilities have also been upgraded recently including new beauty therapy salons, additional computer rooms, the refurbishment of drama studios and the provision of two new electronics laboratories. The consolidation of some vocational courses to the main campus from other college sites has taken place, with the college providing a free bus service for students to support travel arrangements. The college continues to invest in ILT, including the installation of plasma projection screens in construction workshops and the equine centre, where students can video and review riding techniques. Student surveys indicate satisfaction with the college environment.