

Oaklands College

Inspection report

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Name of lead inspector: Paul Joyce HMI

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Type of provider: General Further Education college

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Information about the college

1. Oaklands College is a large general further education college and is one of four colleges within Hertfordshire. The college has four main campuses across three local authority districts in mid and south Hertfordshire: Borehamwood, St Albans City, Smallford and Welwyn Garden City.
2. The college offers courses in all 15 sector subject areas with the majority of learners enrolled on programmes in the preparation for life and work, arts, media and publishing, health, public services and care, and construction and the built environment sector subject areas. The college has its own work-based learning contract and also provides Train to Gain, Entry to Employment and informal adult learning provision. The college has close links with local schools and provides learning opportunities, including Diplomas for pupils in Key Stage 4.
3. Hertfordshire is relatively prosperous although there are pockets of deprivation including some wards within the college's immediate catchment area. Unemployment rates in the area are below the national average and the most significant employment is within the service sector in areas such as finance, distribution and in hotel and catering. Participation in post-16 education and training is high in the area and many schools provide post-16 courses. Attainment levels in local schools are above average.
4. The college's mission is to provide 'outstanding learning opportunities and training solutions within a vibrant inclusive college experience, leading to recognised qualifications and outcomes that contribute to personal development, and the economic growth and social well-being of our community'.
5. The college provides training on behalf of the following providers:
 - University of Hertfordshire (HE provision)
 - North Hertfordshire College (Train to Gain provision)
 - Practical learning Opportunity (14-16 schools provision)
 - Hertfordshire Adult and Family Learning Service (Informal adult learning)
 - Construction Skills (Construction Provision)
6. The following organisation provides training on behalf of the college:
 - North Hertfordshire College (Train to Gain provision)
 - Advanced Construction (Train to Gain provision)
 - ALS Training (Train to Gain provision)

Type of provision	Number of learners in 2008/09
Young learner provision: 14-16	900 learners
Further Education (16-18)	2,610 full-time learners 432 part-time learners
Foundation learning, including	939 learners
Entry to Employment	38 learners
Adult learner provision: Further Education (19+)	408 full-time learners 2,010 part-time learners
Employer provision: Train to Gain Apprenticeships	1,179 learners 274 apprentices
Informal adult learning:	2,219 learners

Summary report

Grades: 1 is outstanding; 2 is good; 3 is satisfactory; 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 2
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Capacity to improve	Grade 2
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	Grade
Outcomes for learners	2
Quality of provision	2
Leadership and management	2
Safeguarding	2
Equality and diversity	3

Subject areas	Grade
Health and social care	2
Construction learner responsive provision	2
Construction employer responsive provision	4
Performing arts and media	2
Literacy, numeracy and English for Speakers of Other languages (ESOL)	2

Overall effectiveness

- This is a good college that has a good capacity to improve further. It has made good progress since the last inspection and continues to enhance the quality of education and training provided. Learners enjoy college life, feel very safe in the friendly and supportive environment and value the guidance provided by staff. Most learners make good progress and achieve well, although in a few areas, including on short courses and on key skill qualifications, learners are not as successful in achieving qualifications. Learner responsive provision is more effective than that for employers and too many learners on work-based and Train to Gain courses do not achieve by the target completion date.
- Teaching is challenging and helps students to learn and make good progress. Teachers use a wide range of teaching methods to ensure learners remain

engaged and motivated. Lessons are mostly well paced and enable learners to contribute to discussion and debate and to develop practical skills. In the small minority of less successful lessons, planning is not sufficiently effective to ensure all learners achieve the progress that they are capable of making. Learners benefit from a wide range of courses and many successfully progress from one level to the next.

9. The college works very effectively with a range of key partners and works especially well with local schools to provide good provision for pupils aged 14 to 16. Partnerships with employers are developing. Guidance and support within the college is good and learners particularly appreciate the personal and pastoral support provided by staff. Support for work-based learners is more inconsistent. Leaders and managers effectively monitor the performance of the college and quality assurance arrangements are robust. The college is particularly good at gathering and acting on learners' views to continuously improve their experience. The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory.

Main findings

- Outcomes for learners are good with high success rates on most courses. Male learners aged 16 to 18 achieve particularly well as do learners aged 16 to 18 on level 1 and 2 courses and adults on level 3 courses. However, success rates on short courses are below average and key skill success rates are very low.
- Learners enjoy their courses and many make good progress and achieve well. They produce work of a high standard and develop good skills that effectively contribute to their future economic well-being. Learners are well informed about risks and have the knowledge and understanding to make informed choices about their safety, health and well-being.
- Retention rates are particularly high and the majority of learners that start courses remain on them until the planned completion date. However, achievement rates are not as high, and whilst improving, remain broadly satisfactory overall. Success rates on Train to Gain and work-based learning programmes are satisfactory overall but are inadequate in the construction sector subject area.
- Learners feel particularly safe around the college and show mutual respect for one another. Relationships between learners and staff foster respect and build confidence.
- The quality of teaching and learning is good. In most lessons, learning activities are well paced and hold learners interest particularly well. The college's processes for assuring the quality of teaching are rigorous. On employer responsive provision, the quality of teaching, training and learning is satisfactory overall but varies considerably between different courses.
- In the most effective lessons, teachers use a wide range of resources to enable learners to make good progress and encourage independent study. In less effective lessons learners do not make sufficient progress as the pace of

learning is too slow and learners are not sufficiently engaged, motivated or challenged.

- The college's response to meeting the needs and interests of learners is good. A wide range of courses is available with good progress opportunities. Strong partnerships promote social and community cohesion very effectively. An extensive enrichment programme enables many students to participate in additional activities that further develop beneficial skills.
- Guidance and support are good overall. Learners receive particularly effective information advice and guidance. Tutorials provide good personal and pastoral support, which learners value. However, progress reviews for work-based learning do not always provide learners with sufficiently specific learning targets.
- Leadership and management are good. Strong leadership, an open management style and very effective team working have led to a significant improvement in college performance. The management of learner responsive provision is more effective than that for employers.
- Quality assurance arrangements are comprehensive. Self-assessment is accurate and takes account of learners' views. Governors maintain a very effective overview of the college and finances are well managed. However, the college's management information system is difficult to use. Managers do not always use the system effectively to improve provision.
- Equality and diversity is satisfactory overall. The college monitors the success rates of different ethnic groups and it has successfully narrowed the achievement gap. However, the completion of equality impact assessments has been slow and the promotion and reinforcement of equity and diversity varies considerable between different sector subject areas.
- Safeguarding procedures are good and the college has good links with relevant external agencies. Recruitment checks have been completed on college staff and detailed policies and procedures are in place to deal with issues such as bullying and harassment. Staff have received appropriate training and understand their safeguarding responsibilities.

What does Oaklands College need to do to improve further?

- Urgently implement the planned actions to secure improvement to employer responsive provision in the construction sector subject area. Ensure learners' progress reviews set clear targets for learners to achieve and improve learners understanding of health and safety and equality and diversity.
- Raise success rates on key skill courses and on short courses by improving course management and monitoring arrangements, and by developing staff assessment skills and expertise with regards to these qualifications.
- Urgently complete equality impact assessments and develop greater consistency in the promotion and reinforcement of equality and diversity within curriculum areas.

- Increase achievement rates on long courses by providing more detailed advice about how students can further improve their learning and ensuring the pace of learning in all lessons enables learners to be engaged, motivated and challenged so they make good progress.
- Raise success rates on Train to Gain and work-based learning programmes by implementing robust procedures to monitor the progress of learners. Ensure that planned teaching and assessment activity take place and that progress reviews inform learners of the actions they need to complete for them to achieve in a timely manner.
- Make the management information system less difficult to use and more accessible to managers so they are able to analyse data in greater detail and use the information to target improvement more effectively.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- The friendly and safe environment
- The helpful and supportive staff
- The way the college listens and responds to their views
- The free transport provided
- The wide range of teaching methods used
- The progression opportunities provided within the curriculum.

What learners would like to see improved:

- The long gaps between lessons
- The lack of social space
- The car parking charges
- The slow computers.

What employers like:

- The useful networking events
- The way the college responds promptly to needs
- The quality of teaching and training for employees
- The standard of learners' work

What employers would like to see improved:

- Aspects of communication with the college
- The feedback provided on apprentices progress
- The involvement they have in reviewing apprentices progress

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 2

10. The college has successfully addressed most of the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection and it provides a good range of evidence in its accurate self-assessment to justify the improved grade profile. In particular, the proportion of teaching which is good or better has increased and the monitoring of the performance of learners from minority ethnic groups is better. Long course success rates have substantially increased since the last inspection and these are now high. However, the college acknowledges that outcomes for both key skill qualifications and work-based learning programmes remain an area for improvement and that there are limitations around the accessibility and ease of use of management information data.
11. Quality assurance arrangements are comprehensive. Senior managers monitor closely improvement plans within curriculum areas and through quality review meetings. Internal audits of all college provision over a two-year period contribute well to quality assurance arrangements and are a useful quality improvement tool. The college is a member of a peer review group and benefits from the sharing of good practice with other colleges. A rigorous lesson observations process identifies any staff development needs to further improve the quality of teaching and learning. Opportunities for staff development are good and participation rates are high. The management development training for middle managers has been effective in supporting the college's focus on quality improvement.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 2

12. Overall success rates continue to rise and are high. Success rates for learners aged 16 to 18 on level 1 and 2 courses and for adult learners on level 3 courses are substantially above the latest available national averages. The college is particularly successful at retaining learners to the end of their course and this is reflected in the particularly high retention rates on all long courses. Pass rates, although increasing, are not as high and are broadly satisfactory overall. Success rates for pupils aged 14 to 16 attending college courses from local schools are high and progression onto post-16 courses at the college is good. Progression rates for learners on college courses from one level to the next are high.
13. Success rates are high in six sector subject areas where the college offers provision and in four of those areas learner numbers are substantial. In two sector subject areas, where learner numbers are low, success rates are well below national levels. Success rates on short courses are below average and key skill success rates in 2008/09 were very low. Overall success rates for work-based learning and Train to Gain programmes are satisfactory overall although too high a proportion of learners do not complete successfully by the target end

date. Outcomes for learners on work-based learning programmes in construction are inadequate.

14. Most learners make good progress and develop sound skills and knowledge related to their course of study. The development of literacy and numeracy skills is appropriate. The standard of learners' work, particularly practical work, is high in most curriculum areas. Learners in construction, health and social care, and performing arts develop good work-related skills that increase their employability prospects and contribute to their future economic well-being. However, in a minority of cases, particularly on some GCE A and AS level courses, learners do not make the progress expected based on their starting points.
15. The college closely monitor the success rates of different groups and is successfully narrowing the achievement gap. Male learners aged 16 to 18 achieved particularly well in 2008/09. There is no significant underachievement for any minority ethnic group, between males and females or for learners with learning difficulties and/ or disabilities. Attendance and punctuality to lessons is good.
16. Learners report that they enjoy college life and feel very safe in the harmonious environment. They are confident that any concerns they raise are taken seriously and are effectively addressed. Learners are well informed about risks and have the knowledge and understanding to make informed choices about their safety, health and well-being. They have a good understanding of their rights and responsibilities. Learners make a good contribution to the community and through a wide range of activities within the curriculum develop skills and knowledge that improve their economic and social well-being.

The quality of provision

Grade 2

17. The quality of provision is good. Teaching is good and lessons are typically characterised by detailed and effective planning to meet the needs of individuals. Well paced learning activities challenge students, keep their interest and enable them to make good progress. Regular staff development and the support from advanced practitioners develop staff skills and expertise well. The use of technology supports learning particularly effectively. A good range of resources is available, including material to promote equality and diversity through the college's virtual learning environment. In the small minority of less successful lessons learners are not sufficiently challenged and do not make sufficient progress because the pace of learning is too slow and learners are not sufficiently engaged, motivated or challenged. Relationships between teachers and students are good and promote learning well.
18. Effective initial assessment of learners' needs takes place early in the course and good timely support is provided to those identified as requiring it. Students in receipt of additional learning support make good progress and the overall success rate for this group of learners is higher than that for students that do not

receive support. Assessment is frequent and fair. Assessment practices on most college based courses are well-developed and feedback from teachers informs learners what they need to do to improve. Assessment practice on work-based learning programmes is not as effective and reviews do not set useful targets to help learners progress.

19. The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is well monitored and the approach to improvement is rigorous. Teachers receive targeted support to improve their practice following lesson observations and the proportion of good or better teaching has improved significantly since the last inspection; it is especially high on entry level courses. A new strategy for the teaching and assessment of key and functional skills has been introduced to improve learner outcomes on these qualifications but it is too early to judge the effectiveness at this early stage of implementation.
20. The college meets the needs and interests of learners well. The learner voice within the college is strong and learners' representatives on all full-time and substantive part-time courses, together with an elected student council and two student governors, ensure students' views are taken seriously and acted upon. The college offers a wide range of courses including an increased number at entry level. Progression routes are well defined and are available from level 1 to level 3 in most curriculum areas. Learners can access courses by attending full-time or part-time and many courses are offered in the evenings. The curriculum is flexible and enables good opportunities for learners who are re-engaging with, or have barriers to learning to participate in further education or training to improve their life or employability skills. The college has arranged free bus travel between the widely spread campuses.
21. Following extensive consultation with learners a wide range of enrichment activities are available and participation rates are high. The college monitors participation well. Following an equalities analysis of attendance, the college has introduced additional activities to specifically appeal to female learners. Learners comment very positively about the many enrichment activities that significantly enhance their enjoyment of college life. Curriculum enrichment is also good and enables learners to develop further skills needed to enable them to progress successfully into employment or onto further or higher education courses.
22. Partnerships are good. The college creates and maintains productive links with the communities it serves. Curriculum planning takes account of local needs including establishing courses in beauty therapy, public services and equine studies. The college has been particularly responsive to a request from the Jobcentre Plus to develop a successful programme to support recently redundant executives back into employment.
23. The college has close links with 25 schools in the local area and offers a flourishing range of courses, including Diplomas across 10 strands, to provide additional learning opportunities for pupils in Key Stage 4. A range of AS and A level programmes in subjects such as photography, law and sociology are also

offered by the college. These subjects are not available at local schools. An innovative partnership, Habitat, brings school children into the landbased area of the college, to develop National Curriculum skills through exploring sustainability.

24. Partnerships with employers are improving and the college successfully increases employment opportunities for learners with significant barriers to learning. Work experience placements are available for over 650 learners whose course requires it, although as reflected by the many learners that requested the opportunity to participate in some form of work experience activity, placements numbers are insufficient. Partnerships with employers to improve the skills of the existing workforce are underdeveloped and whilst many employers are engaged through Train to Gain and apprenticeships learning programmes, the level of support and contact the college gives is inconsistent.
25. Guidance and support are good. Most learners receive good information, advice and guidance before they arrive at the college, at induction, on programme and to help them progress to work and other education and training. Learners have ready access to advice and guidance at all campuses, as well as in community venues. The college produces well-designed leaflets to guide learners through job seeking activities and application for higher education courses. Tutorials offer good personal and pastoral care and advice on a range of topics related to the Every Child Matters agenda.
26. Tutors have very thorough information about the prior achievement and learning needs of all their learners. They keep records well, and a new electronic individual learning plan brings all information about learners, including their progress and needs, into one place. However, it is too early to judge its impact on improving learner outcomes. Many records and profiles of learners identify learning and behavioural needs but do not indicate appropriate strategies for supporting them to improve. In a few cases, similar behavioural problems are repeated over several concern forms, without any obvious resolution to the problems. Support for work-based learners is more inconsistent.

Leadership and management

Grade 2

27. The principal, governors and senior managers provide strong strategic leadership and direction. The college has a clear vision, well understood and supported by staff, with four strategic aims that provide a good basis for the college's planning, monitoring and improvement. Since the last inspection, the college has been very successful in re-shaping its offer and has substantially grown 16 to 18 year old provision in response to Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and government priorities. The college has engaged in significant organisational change and has effectively re-organised management structures to support these changes. Communication is good throughout the college and is well supported by an open management style and strong team working. Staff morale and motivation are high.

28. Governance is good. Governors set managers challenging improvement targets, which they monitor closely through a range of pertinent key performance indicators. Governors reflect well the make up of the college and local community and bring a wide range of experience to the board. Student governors make a valuable contribution and are well supported in their role. Governors have a good awareness of the quality of provision, of both the strengths and areas for improvement and the actions managers are taking to address them. Governors are scrupulous in observing the demarcation between governance and management.
29. Arrangements for safeguarding are good. The college provides good training for all staff and enhanced training for designated child protection officers and key staff. Good links have been established with the relevant external agencies, including the local children's safeguarding board. The college's policies and procedures for safeguarding are detailed and appropriate. Learners feel safe and there are good examples of safeguarding issues being dealt with swiftly and professionally. The college has good arrangements to address bullying, including cyber-bullying, and sound arrangements for criminal record bureau checks for all staff, governors, and volunteers. A single central register records the relevant details of all staff and the college assures itself that the necessary checks have taken place for agency and contracted staff.
30. The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory overall. The college has appropriate policies and plans in relation to race, gender and disability. It is currently consulting its stakeholders on a single equality scheme, which incorporates required legislation. The college has made a satisfactory response to implementing the requirements of equalities legislation but has been particularly slow in carrying out equality impact assessments on college policies. The college has completed some impact assessments on some key human resource policies and has identified a timetable to complete all other assessments throughout the next year.
31. The college has an inclusive ethos and celebrates diversity well. It monitors the participation rates of all learners in college activities especially those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The performance of different groups is routinely monitored with regular reports to senior managers and governors. The promotion of equality and diversity in teaching is generally satisfactory although there are examples of exemplary practice in arts, media and publishing and health and social care. Most staff have received recent training in equality and diversity.
32. The college's engagement with users to support and promote improvement is good. Learner views are represented particularly effectively through over 250 course representatives who report to the 22 elected members of the student council and two student corporation members. Council members are enthusiastic about the fact that their requests often lead to changes. For example, at their request, the college introduced a concern form about staff, which matches the student form. Students are involved in interviewing staff; they have representation on the equality and diversity sub-committee and sometimes

attend self-assessment validation panels. Student views are valued highly at all levels of the college and regular meetings with curriculum heads and senior managers result in improvements which reflect learners' needs. Engagement with employers is less well developed.

33. The self-assessment report is detailed, judgemental and self-critical. The college has a well-established self-assessment process which involves staff well. A rigorous moderation system involving the principal, external agencies and some users ensures realistic outcomes. The report is supported by sound evidence and identifies intended improvements in well thought out action plans which are monitored closely by senior managers. Some curriculum areas utilise user views better than others in their self-assessment reports.
34. Financial management is good. The college monitors staff costs closely and pays careful attention to the use of resources. Arrangements for budget allocation are sound. Despite some ageing buildings, investment in learning resources is good. Given the high success rates, the increase in learner numbers and the way the college manages its finances, the college provides good value for money.

Subject areas

Health and social care

Grade 2

Context

35. Approximately 200 learners are on full time programmes at levels 1 to 3 and the vast majority are aged 16 to 18. In addition, 131 adult learners are on part-time counselling courses. The significant majority of learners on the courses inspected are female and 54 are from minority ethnic heritage.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are good. Success rates are high on most courses and learners aged 16 to 18 achieve well with a substantial proportion gaining high grade passes. Success rates on key skills courses are low and very few learners achieved a key skills qualification. Attendance and punctuality to lessons are good.
- Learners develop good personal, work, and social skills and contribute well to both the college and local community. The majority of learners progress to courses at a higher level or into employment following the completion of their programme.
- Teaching and learning are good. In the better lessons, the well-planned teaching uses a wide range of methods to motivate and engage learners. Teachers make good use of scenarios and case studies to link theory with practice. Learners work well individually and in groups and challenge the views of each other.
- A minority of less effective lessons are not always effective in developing learners' knowledge and understanding. Planning does not always take account of individual learning needs and occasionally the challenge for learners is not sufficient.
- Resources and accommodation for learning are satisfactory overall. Teachers are suitably qualified and experienced; they make good use of technology to promote learning. Students use the virtual learning environment extensively to complete learning activities
- Courses meet the needs and interests of learners well. The development of new courses in partnership with local schools provides opportunities for pupils aged 14 to 16 to access the college. Partnerships with employers and social care agencies improve learners' experience and enhance the curriculum.
- Support for learners is good throughout their time at the college. Support for learners with additional learning needs is also good and learners receiving support contribute confidently in lessons.
- Academic support is highly effective in helping learners to improve their performance and level of attainment. However, individual learning plans are overly complex and targets are not well understood by the majority of learners.

- Leadership and management are good. Safeguarding arrangements are robust and widely understood by learners and placement providers. The promotion of equality and diversity is good with staff and learners working together to create an inclusive learning environment where everyone is valued and respected.
- Performance is closely monitored and good practice is effectively shared. Staff work well together as part of a team. Self-assessment is rigorous and identifies the main strengths and areas for improvement.

What does Oaklands College need to do to improve further?

- Raise key skill success rates by developing the knowledge and understanding of staff responsible for the teaching and assessment of these qualifications so they are better equipped to ensure learners achieve.
- Share best practice in teaching and learning to ensure all lessons provide sufficiently challenging learning activities that meet the needs of each individual learner to ensure all reach their full potential
- Ensure learners understand the information recorded on individual learning plans and that the targets set are useful in helping them to make progress and achieve.

Construction (learner responsive provision)

Grade 2

Context

36. The college offers provision in building craft, building services and on technical and professional courses from level 1 to level 3 with learners able to study full or part-time. At the time of inspection, 423 learners aged 16 to 18 and 120 adult learners were on full-time courses and a further 121 learners aged 16 to 18 and 174 adult learners were on part-time courses. The vast majority of learners are male and most are from a white British background.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are good. Success rates on most courses are high, and especially on courses such as the Foundation Certificate in Building. Key skills success rates are at a satisfactory level for learners on technical and professional courses but are very low for learners on building craft courses.
- Learners produce work of a high standard and develop good practical skills that contribute to their future economic well-being. Some learners have progressed onto work-based learning programmes or into employment on completion of their full-time course.
- Learners feel safe at the college and most adopt safe working practices during practical activity. However, there are inconsistencies in the application of health and safety practices between the different trades within the curriculum area.
- Teaching and learning are good. Lesson plans and schemes of work are very detailed and specify clear learning aims and objectives. Teachers make good use of their industry experience when demonstrating or explaining construction theory.
- Teachers use a wide range of teaching methods to motivate, challenge and engage learners. Classrooms contain subject specific displays and teachers use high quality materials and resources including extensive use of the virtual learning environment.
- Partnerships with construction companies and with manufacturers and suppliers improve the curriculum and benefit learners. However, while some students do undertake work experience, too many progress from one full-time course to another without benefiting from construction site experience.
- The range of provision is unusually extensive and provides progression routes from entry to degree level. Many learners take advantage of the pathways that are available and internal progression rates are high. However, the analysis of destination data is not sufficient to establish how many learners progress from full-time course into industry related employment.
- Guidance and support are good. Additional learning support is effective and assists learners in achieving their qualification aim. The monitoring of learners progress is good and records are well kept.

- Leadership and management are good. Some good initiatives to challenge stereotypical recruitment patterns make construction accessible to female learners. However, the promotion of equality and diversity within the curriculum is an area for improvement.
- The quality of accommodation and resources is good. There is a new facility at Alban Park and the accommodation at Smallford has significantly improved; it now provides a good learning environment. Tools and equipment learners use in most workshops replicates those in industry.
- The self-assessment report is accurate and correctly identifies the main strengths and areas for improvement. However, analysis is insufficient on how effective provision is in helping learners progress into employment. Quality assurance arrangements are robust. The area has an active employer forum.

What does Oaklands College need to do to improve further?

- Apply the same health and safety practices in all college workshops that are required within industry.
- Raise key skills success rates by developing the knowledge and understanding of staff responsible for the teaching and assessment of these qualifications so they are better equipped to ensure learners achieve.
- Further develop partnerships with employers to enable learners on full-time courses to take part in industry related work-experience.
- Develop the knowledge and understanding of teachers to enable them to better promote equality and diversity to learners within the curriculum
- Collect destination data more systematically to establish how many learners progress into industry related employment and use this information to inform the self-assessment report and improvement planning.

Construction (employer responsive provision)

Grade 4

Context

37. Some 223 apprentices and 35 advanced apprentices are on work-based learning programmes. Four learners are on Train to Gain programmes. Provision includes brickwork, carpentry and joinery, plumbing, electrical installation and refrigeration and air conditioning. Most learners are on courses at level 2 and approximately 60% of learners are aged 16 to 18. The majority of learners are male and most are from white British backgrounds.

Key findings

- Most learners enjoy their off the job training and develop satisfactory or better skills. They thoroughly engage in learning and relate learning well to their developing job roles.
- Outcome for learners are inadequate. Success rates are low on work-based learning courses and exceptionally low on Train to Gain courses. Learners that do achieve make slow progress and take longer than the planned time for the programme.
- Learners feel safe both at college and in the workplace. However, they have insufficient understanding with regard to their personal responsibility for health and safety. Most apprentices spoken to by inspectors stated that the responsibility for their health and safety rested with either their employer or tutor.
- Teaching and learning enables the good development of practical skills. Staff have appropriate experience and expertise and relate learning at the college to industry. Staff encourage learners to share their experiences and learn from each other.
- Teaching and learning resources at the college are good. Learners use tools and equipment that are of industry standard and most college workshops provide a realistic working environment.
- Progress reviews are inadequate. Learners do not receive sufficiently clear feedback on their progress. Staff do not provide clear and dated learning targets. Many learners are unaware of what they have achieved or what activities they have yet to complete.
- Reviews do not sufficiently develop learners' understanding of health and safety and do not adequately promote equality and diversity. Many reviews are completed late.
- The range of provision satisfactorily meets learners and employers' needs. The range of courses is appropriate with progression available to higher level courses in most areas.
- The monitoring of learners' progress is poor. New monitoring systems and quality management processes are in place and staff have received training.

However, there is very little evidence of any positive impact of these systems in managing learners' progress.

- Leadership and management are inadequate. Despite recent actions to improve provision the quality of the learner experience remains poor and actions are not impacting quickly enough to improve outcomes for learners.
- Employers are not sufficiently involved in reviewing the progress of apprentices or in coordinating on and off the job training. Whilst employer views are sought and employer feedback is acted upon communication with employers remains an area for improvement.

What does Oaklands College need to do to improve further?

- Provide additional health and safety and equality and diversity training for staff that complete learners' progress reviews so they are able to develop, promote and reinforce these aspects with learners when completing reviews.
- Use progress reviews and classroom based learning to further develop learners' knowledge and understanding of equality and diversity and ensure they are aware of their personal responsibility with regard to health and safety legislation.
- Raise success rates on work-based learning programmes and Train to Gain courses by implementing robust quality assurance arrangements to monitor the quality of training and assessment activity and through providing more effective support to learners during progress reviews.
- Complete progress reviews at regular intervals, within contractual requirements, and ensure learners know the extent of their achievement. Set targets that are specific and time bound to ensure learners know what to do to progress and achieve in a timely manner.
- Involve employers in the review process and better coordinate on and off the job training by improving communication with employers.

Performing arts and media

Grade 2

Context

38. Around 240 students follow either full or part-time vocational courses in performing arts and media at levels 1 to 3 with just over 100 further students enrolled on GCE A and AS level courses in film and media. The vast majority of students are aged 16-18 and study full time. The proportion of learners from minority ethnic backgrounds is similar to that within the college as a whole.

Key findings

- Success rates are high and increasing on the majority of courses. A substantial proportion of learners achieve high grade passes on most courses, particularly for the first and national diploma in media. Key skills success and participation rates are very low.
- Students produce work of a high standard. It is characterised by a thorough understanding of sometimes quite complex concepts and a maturity of approach. Students develop very good evaluative skills and there is some excellent practical work completed in response to briefs from external clients.
- A high proportion of learners progress to higher education particularly those studying on media and music courses where over 75% go on to university or the college's own level 4 provision. Internal progression is good with around 66% of learners progressing from level 2 to level 3.
- Teaching and learning are good. Lesson planning is excellent with clear detailed learning outcomes and a good range of activities to engage students. Teachers' enthusiasm and commitment motivates learners to do well.
- In a minority of lessons delivery lacks pace, energy and an appropriate level of challenge. Teachers do not always make sufficient use of students' profile information to effectively challenge and support individual progress. In a few instances, the use of interactive technologies is unimaginative.
- Enrichment activities are excellent. Learners benefit from a very wide range of planned curriculum enrichment that supports the development of personal, specialist and employability skills. Activities promote equality and diversity well and include health and well-being themes. GCE A and AS level students have fewer enrichment activities than those on vocational courses.
- The range of provision is good and includes courses from level 1 to level 3 with good and well used progression routes. However, the introduction of new media, animation and games development courses into the curriculum is limited.

- Partnerships are extensive and varied providing learners with excellent opportunities to develop their skills. Productive links have been forged with local schools, community groups, employers and charities. Vocational learners have produced professional quality products in response to commissions from external clients.
- Tutorial support is good, as is the support learners receive from teachers in lessons. The tutorial programme contains a well integrated mix of pastoral and academic support. Learners find these sessions valuable and relevant to their needs.
- Leadership and management are good. Managers have created a high performance culture clearly focused on quality improvement. They support and challenge staff to improve the learners' experience. Success rates have increased, attendance rates are high and retention on two courses causing concern has improved.
- The promotion of equality and diversity in the curriculum is outstanding. Promotion is evident in lesson planning, assignment content, schemes of work, enrichment activities and day to day practice in the classroom. Learners have an excellent understanding and are extremely respectful and considerate to the views of others.
- Managers take effective action to improve provision in response to learners' comments. They thoroughly seek learners' views at the regular minuted meetings.

What does Oaklands College need to do to improve further?

- Develop and implement strategies to improve participation and raise success rates for key skills by ensuring learners have the skills they need to be successful
- Improve learning and learners' progress by providing higher levels of challenge in lessons, increasing the pace of learning and sharing good practice on the effective use of interactive technologies
- Further develop the skills and experience of GCE A level learners through increasing enrichment opportunities
- Explore and consider the feasibility of introducing new media, animation and games development courses into the curriculum to respond to the national skills agenda

Context

39. Of the 576 learners attending full and part-time courses 386, are on ESOL courses, 81 are on literacy courses and 109 on numeracy courses. Learners are able to study courses from entry level to level 2 at all of the college's main campuses and community venues. A high proportion of learners are from minority ethnic backgrounds with the majority of learners being female.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are good overall. Success rates are high on entry level courses in ESOL. Learners make good progress in acquiring social and employability skills and some learners gain employment as a result of improving their language skills.
- Success rates on literacy and numeracy courses are low and have declined over the last three years. However, recent changes in curriculum management have impacted positively on attainment levels in literacy and numeracy and learners are now achieving well.
- Attainment of skills is good. Entry level ESOL learners develop IT skills to enable them to access e-learning materials and become independent learners. Literacy learners develop reading and writing skills through carefully developed lessons which build on their previous skills. Numeracy learners develop mathematical concepts and skills in real life contexts which help understanding.
- Safeguarding arrangements are good. Posters on bullying and harassment are prominently displayed in corridors and learners report that they feel safe in the college.
- Teaching and learning are good overall. In most lessons, tutors use a variety of engaging and interesting tasks to develop learners understanding and skills. Lessons are very carefully planned to match the needs of individual learners. In the best lessons, learners enjoy their studies and develop relevant useful skills to apply in real life.
- In a few less successful lessons, the challenge for learners is not sufficient and the pace of learning is too slow. Teaching is largely tutor-led and to the whole group even when different individual needs are noted on the lesson plan. A few new tutors do not deal effectively with the individual needs of learners.
- Teachers use information and learning technologies effectively to improve learning and aid understanding. Teachers provide web-site addresses and passwords to help learners to work at home. Most learners gain in confidence to help their children with their homework whilst others become more confident to apply for employment or promotion.
- The range of provision is good. Classes are held at three campuses and in various community venues and schools. The area responds positively to work with employers who want to develop the literacy and numeracy skills of their workforce.

- Guidance and support are good. Targets set for learners are realistic and they receive good support to ensure they achieve. Staff monitor progress well and provide learners with frequent guidance and support.
- The ESOL curriculum is well managed. Staff monitor courses robustly for attendance and learners' progress. Managers analyse data to identify achievement gaps in different groups of learners. The observation of teaching and learning leads to additional support for staff
- Managers in literacy and numeracy have established a realistic agenda to improve provision and support staff. The sharing of some very good practice is having a beneficial impact on learners' outcomes.
- The focus on improvement is good. Self-assessment is broadly accurate and identifies the main strengths and areas for improvement. However, learners' progression and destination data are not collated or used to inform improvement planning. Pathways for progression to mainstream provision are only just developing.

What does Oaklands College need to do to improve further?

- Raise success rates on literacy and numeracy qualifications by ensuring all staff are suitably qualified and experienced, and understand the assessment requirements of the course.
- Share best practice within the area to enable all teachers to develop their skills to make teaching and learning more challenging, interesting and relevant to learners' needs and interests.
- Collate and analyse learners' destination and progression data and use the information to inform lesson planning and curriculum development to ensure courses meet the needs of learners and employers.
- Develop clear progression pathways to enable learners to progress onto mainstream courses in each sector subject area.

Information about the inspection

41. Four of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and five additional inspectors, assisted by the college's director of learner experience and quality improvement as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or other funding bodies, Framework for Excellence indicators, the previous inspection report, reports from the inspectorate's monitoring visit and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
42. Inspectors used group, individual interviews, telephone calls and emails to gather the views of learners. They looked at questionnaires learners and employers had completed on behalf of the college. They also visited learning sessions, assessments or progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in each of the subjects the provider offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Oaklands College

Learning types: 14-16: Young apprenticeships; Diplomas; 16-18 Learner responsive: FE full- and part-time courses, Foundation learning tier, including Entry to Employment; 19+ responsive: FE full- and part-time courses; Employer responsive: Train to Gain, apprenticeships.

Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall	14-16	16-18 Learner responsive	19+ Learner responsive	Employer responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners					
Full-time learners	3,312	0	2,832	480	0
Part-time learners	4,113	850	506	1,770	987
Overall effectiveness	2	2	2	2	3
Capacity to improve	2				
A. Outcomes for learners	2	2	2	2	3
A1. How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	2				
A1.a) How well do learners attain their learning goals?	2				
A1.b) How well do learners progress?	2				
A2. How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	2				
A3. How safe do learners feel?	2				
A4. <i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*</i>	2				
A5. <i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	2				
B. Quality of provision	2	2	2	2	3
B1. How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	2				
B2. How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	2				
B3. How well do partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	2				
B4. How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	2				
C. Leadership and management	2	2	2	2	3
C1. How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	2				
C2. <i>How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*</i>	2				
C3. How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	2				
C4. How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	3				
C5. How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	2				
C6. How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	2				
C7. How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	2				

*where applicable to the type of provision

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