

Oakwood Court College

Focused monitoring visit report

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Name of lead inspector: Joyce Deere

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Type of provider: Independent specialist college

Address: Oak Park Villas
Dawlish
Devon
EX7 ODE

Telephone number: 01626 864066

FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

Oakwood Court College, based in Dawlish, Devon, is owned by Phoenix Learning and Care. It is an independent, residential specialist college providing further education for learners aged 16 to 25. Currently 35 learners with a range of learning difficulties attend the college. The college provides three types of programmes at foundation level: vocational training, pre-vocational training and experiential. Accommodation includes facilities on the main campus and in local houses and flats.

At the inspection in January 2009, the college was found satisfactory overall, with its capacity to improve, achievements and standards, and quality of provision all satisfactory. Leadership and management and equality of opportunity were judged to be inadequate. No subject areas were graded.

This report focuses on the themes explored during the visit, which include the two mandatory themes of outcomes for learners and self-assessment and improvement planning.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has been made in meeting the milestones on the improvement plan and in improving the rigour of self-assessment? Reasonable progress

The college has made reasonable progress in meeting the milestones on the improvement plan. The plan is detailed and accurately identifies areas for improvement. Progress is closely monitored. Inspectors found the plan broadly accurate in detailing progress in relation to the themes that were the focus of the monitoring visit.

The draft self-assessment report is less helpful. It is descriptive with insufficient evaluation. It contains descriptions of actions taken, but does not always evaluate their effectiveness. The basis for judgements made is not clear. The college has not yet arrived at a baseline for evaluating the progress of learners and the effectiveness of the systems to support them, and is not sufficiently clear about what needs to improve. It did not accurately identify that the monitoring of equality and diversity was not yet effective.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has been made in improving the outcomes for learners, in particular the availability of external awards and the opportunity to study in local colleges? Reasonable progress

The college has made reasonable progress in improving outcomes for learners. Of the 12 learners who left the college during 2008/09, 69% successfully entered either work-based training or part-time employment and 75% moved into supported independent living. A three-month follow up procedure to confirm the destination status of learners is now being operated. Learners have an extended range of opportunities to achieve external awards through links with two training providers who visit the college to deliver training. Arrangements are being developed with a general further education college for learners to attend for half a day a week. However, this is currently only open to third year learners, although the college is considering including second year learners. Learners continue to achieve well in internal certification of information technology subjects. More learners achieved external awards. A small number of learners achieved level 1 qualifications and the college had its first learner achieve at level 2.

Guidance and support

<p>What progress has been made in developing the transition programme and providing careers advice and guidance?</p>	<p>Reasonable progress</p>
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The arrangements for transition were an area for improvement at the last inspection. The college has made reasonable progress in implementing a range of improvements to develop cohesive transition arrangements that include careers, work preparation and work experience. Communication between the different departments has significantly improved since the last inspection. A transition and work group, implemented in February 2009, meets regularly to share information. A new admissions panel is planned for the enrolment of learners this year. All learners in years 2 and 3 access external work experience placements, and those first year learners who are considered ready are also given this opportunity. The link with the local Connexions service has developed further and is providing the college with the opportunity to work towards its Investor in Careers award. The service has also helped the college to identify and build an appropriate range of paper and computer-based careers resources for learners. A dedicated careers resource library is now available for learners. One member of staff is currently working towards a level 4 qualification in advice and guidance.

Observation of teaching and learning

<p>What progress has been made in developing the observation of teaching and learning scheme so that the quality of teaching and learning is improved?</p>	<p>Reasonable progress</p>
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The teaching observation scheme was found to require further improvements at the last inspection. Since then, the college has made reasonable progress in developing its procedures to judge the quality of its teaching and learning. A teaching and learning observation policy clearly details arrangements for observing the different groups of staff as well as its procedures for new staff. However, the criteria used for grading are overly complex and do not sufficiently focus on learning. The scheme

links appropriately to the staff appraisal process. The majority of the lesson observation team, consisting of senior staff, has still to receive training. A timetable for 2009/10 is in place and three new members of staff have so far been observed. During 2008/09, the analysis of the nine observations that took place did not provide managers with sufficient information to plan improvements. Other themed observations take place but the records of these are not held centrally. It is too early to judge the impact of the new scheme on raising the standard of teaching and learning.

Safeguarding

What progress has been made in meeting safeguarding requirements? Reasonable progress

At the last inspection the college was not meeting the requirements of the safeguarding legislation. Since then it has taken reasonable steps to put appropriate arrangements in place. Three members of staff have been trained to level 3 and the principal is now a facilitator. The Criminal Records Bureau process is more rigorous, with a rolling programme of three-year updates. Plans are in place to meet the new requirements for October 2010. The recruitment of staff follows safer recruitment practice. All teaching and care staff have been trained in child and adult protection procedures and are aware of their responsibilities. Learners feel safe.

Equality and diversity

What progress has been made in the arrangements to implement and monitor equality and diversity requirements? Insufficient progress

At the last inspection managers and the board were not giving sufficient priority to the monitoring of equality and diversity. In particular, the monitoring of the race equality plan was inadequate. Since then the college has developed a single equality plan and has undertaken a detailed review of its systems and processes. It has developed training for staff that is focused on understanding the basis of issues such as stereotyping and discrimination. However, despite progress in developing policies, the college has made insufficient progress in monitoring the impact of these. It has not monitored the recruitment, participation and achievements of learners in order to identify and respond to any shortfalls in performance. The destinations of leavers in 2008/2009 have been recorded by race and gender but none of the other performance indicators, such as achievements of qualifications, has been adequately monitored. The college has not arrived at a basis from which to analyse performance and develop improvement targets for different groups of learners. It is in the process of developing ways of doing this.

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester, M2 7LA

T: 08456 404040
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