

Oakwood Court College

Partial reinspection report

Unique reference number: 131947

Name of lead inspector: Joyce Deere HMI

Last day of inspection: 10 March 2010

Type of provider: Independent specialist college

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Introduction

At the inspection of Oakwood Court College in January 2009, overall effectiveness was satisfactory but leadership and management and equality of opportunity were found inadequate. These two inadequate areas were reinspected on 9 and 10 March 2010.

The outcome of the reinspection is as follows:

Aspect of the common inspection framework	Original grade	Reinspection grade
Leadership and management	4	3
Safeguarding	N/A	2
Equality and diversity	4	3

Context

Oakwood Court College, based in Dawlish, Devon, is owned by Phoenix Learning and Care and is an independent specialist college for students aged 16 to 25. Currently 35 students with a range of learning difficulties attend Oakwood Court College. The college provides three types of programmes at foundation level: vocational training, pre-vocational training and experiential training. The learning needs of the students who attend the college are becoming increasingly complex.

Key Findings

- Senior managers and directors have shown good leadership in improving areas of concern found at the last inspection. Data about outcomes for students are more useful as indicators of progress, with a much clearer focus on recording students' final destinations. The college recognises that more work is needed to develop the curriculum as the cohort of students who attend the college have more complex needs.
- The college has taken swift and effective action to implement safeguarding requirements, and the arrangements are now good, with staff training and guidance outstanding. The college is well prepared for the implementation of the Independent Safeguarding Authority's vetting and barring scheme. Students feel safe. However, although planned, the college has yet to develop a sexual relations policy.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Policies reflect national requirements, and staff training has raised awareness of these requirements. The college has taken action to identify reasons for the low representation of students from minority ethnic backgrounds. Staff have a good understanding of working with students with different abilities, but have not yet had specific training in using the curriculum to develop students' understanding of all aspects of equality.

- The college has rectified most of the weaknesses in the areas identified for improvement, through the implementation of its quality improvement plan. The curriculum and quality group has made a good start in monitoring the curriculum and intervening in order to improve performance. A full review of the curriculum is planned for the end of the academic year
- The grades in the self-assessment report are realistic, but teaching staff did not have sufficient input into the 2008/09 report, and some strengths and areas for improvement were not given sufficient prominence. This academic year, teaching staff are more involved in the process, with team meetings planned throughout the year as part of the quality cycle.
- The college has developed satisfactory partnerships. A useful local peer review and development group has been formed with four other specialist colleges. Employer links have been extended and a partnership with a local social enterprise, offering supported employment opportunities, is helping the students to prepare for employment. Links with local further education colleges are being developed.
- Engagement with students is satisfactory. A student council meets weekly. A range of questionnaires seeks the views of students in relation to their studies and during house meetings. Students have recently been included in staff appointment panels. However, the closed questions used in questionnaires do not encourage open responses and suggestions for improvements from students.
- The college provides satisfactory value for money, and has particularly good specialist resources. Staff are appropriately qualified and they have access to a range of external disability expertise. Specialist aids, adaptations and accessible software are of very high quality. However, not all staff have received specific information about the best way to support individual students.

What does Oakwood Court College college need to do to improve further?

- Continue the work of the quality and curriculum group and involve all staff in reviewing the curriculum, so that programmes of learning meet the needs of students with more complex needs, as well as the changing requirements of funding bodies.
- Develop a sexual relationships policy so that all staff and students are clear about what is expected of them.
- Provide more training in equality and diversity so that staff can develop the curriculum to help students gain a greater understanding of equalities.
- Ensure that all staff understand how best to support students by cascading specialist information to everyone who works with individual students.
- Make greater use of open questions in surveys so that students can provide more reflective answers and have greater involvement in decision making.

Additional Themes

Inspectors explored the following themes as part of this reinspection.

Outcomes for learners

How much progress has the college made in improving outcomes for students?	Reasonable progress
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The college continues to make reasonable progress in improving outcomes for students. The college has implemented a thorough review of students' destinations over the past three years and is currently collating a summary and evaluation of the data. Of the twelve leavers in 2008/09, four entered employment of some type and four are continuing their training with a local-based social enterprise organisation. Half of the leavers are now in supported living accommodation, in line with their long-term goals. The range and levels of courses offered in information and communication technology have increased significantly over the past three years, with many more students achieving a qualification in this area. The number of students successfully completing short courses such as manual handling, food safety, and health and safety has increased, as has the number achieving modules on life skills courses. Links with local colleges are maintained. Students are now involved in half-day link programmes at an earlier stage, during their second year at Oakwood Court. However, students are not yet able to integrate into mainstream courses. There continues to be only a small number of students gaining level 1 and 2 vocational qualifications.

Quality of provision

How much progress has the college made in improving the effectiveness of the scheme for the observation of teaching and learning?	Reasonable progress
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The rigour of the observation of teaching and learning was an area for improvement at the last inspection. The college has revised its observation scheme and is making reasonable progress in improving its effectiveness. The college evaluated the effectiveness of the observations that took place in 2008/09 and revised the policy and procedures ready for the autumn term 2009. Revised criteria for grading have been developed and implemented. However, not all the findings have been communicated to staff. The college has developed a calendar for formal observations as well as developing informal peer observations to support staff in the embedding of literacy and numeracy. Formal observations have taken place with thirteen members of staff so far this academic year. Of these, ten are graded satisfactory and three judged to be good. The college plans to undertake short, unannounced, observations within the next few weeks for those staff who were judged to be satisfactory, to see how well they have implemented the changes. The observers are more realistic in the grades they award and the curriculum and quality group is more rigorous in its moderation of the report contents and the grades of observations.

Leadership and management

How much progress has been made in using self- assessment and improvement planning to improve the consistency of the provision across all subject areas? Reasonable progress

In its self-assessment report, Oakwood Court identified the lack of consistency across all subject areas as an area for improvement. Since then, the newly established curriculum and quality group has taken responsibility for the management of the curriculum and has introduced a new system for monitoring the work of tutors. This includes termly lesson observations and supervision, and an end-of-year appraisal. Following the identification of common areas for improvement, such as the lack of targets that reflect students' final goals; the ineffective use of learning support staff; and the patchy implementation of embedding literacy and numeracy, the college has provided training for staff in these areas and is monitoring progress. All lesson plans and evaluations are completed on-line so members of the curriculum and quality group have immediate access to the information they need. The early signs are that progress is being made. The college plans a full review of the curriculum at the end of the academic year to reflect the external changes and the growing complexity of the students attending the college.

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