

Oaklands College

Report following a monitoring visit to a 'requires improvement' provider

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| Unique reference number: | 130723 |
| Name of lead inspector: | Lynda Brown, His Majesty's Inspector |
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| Type of provider: | General further education college |
| Address: | Oaklands College Hatfield Road St Albans Hertfordshire AL4 0JA |

Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

Oaklands College was inspected in September 2021. At that time, inspectors judged the overall effectiveness of the provision to require improvement.

The focus of this monitoring visit was to evaluate the progress that leaders and managers have made in resolving the main areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection.

Oaklands College is a large general further education college based in St Albans, Hertfordshire. It has a site in Welwyn Garden City and further provision in Borehamwood. It offers courses for young people, adults, apprentices and students with high needs. Most students are 16 to 18 years old. It offers provision in all 15 subject sector areas, including land-based provision.

Themes

Theme 1: How effective have leaders and managers been in ensuring that adult students benefit from ongoing high-quality careers advice and guidance, so that they understand and know how to achieve the job roles and careers they seek on completion of their courses?

Significant progress

Managers have ensured that staff are well qualified and have appropriate expertise to help adult students to understand the careers options that are available to them. Most students know their next steps and what they need to do to gain qualifications for specific job roles. For example, students on level 2 electrotechnical know what they need to do to become qualified electricians and that they can work on building sites or follow a domestic fitting route. Students on access to higher education courses understand the different skills needed to work in adult nursing or in mental health settings. As a result, students can make appropriate career decisions around their personal interests and circumstances.

Managers provide students with relevant industry experiences. A guest speaker from a major television studio adapted their talk to suit adult students and arranged a specific follow-up with the employer. Consequently, adult students on performing arts and film courses understand the skills that they need to pursue careers in this field.

Staff support students on courses for speakers of English as a second language effectively. They help them to know how to apply for employment in the United Kingdom and to understand their next steps onto vocational courses which meet

their career ambitions. Students on access to higher education courses know how to apply to university or how to find out about activities that they might take part in during a year away from their studies.

Theme 2: To what extent do leaders ensure that Significant progress students on the supported internship course benefit from meaningful work experience placements that reflect their needs and interests? How well do staff enable them to develop the skills they require to gain sustainable jobs that interest them?

Leaders and managers have established a strong and sustainable working relationship with the local university. Through this relationship, they secure effective work placement opportunities for students on supported internship programmes from the start of their course. Leaders ensure that planning of placements is thorough. They have put in place a work placement officer to oversee the arrangements for placements and job coaches provide helpful support to students while on their placements.

Where students have a clear career aim, for example, to work in childcare, they have access to a range of suitable placements associated with that sector. If students are not sure about their career plans, they start their placements at the university, where they swiftly learn new transferrable skills, such as working in teams and dealing with customers.

Staff on supported learning programmes ensure that students' placements are relevant and purposeful. Staff use students' education, health and care (EHC) plans and their vocational profiles to secure appropriate placements. They conduct planning visits prior to the start of the placement to discuss the support needs of the individual student and to carry out a comprehensive risk assessment. As a result, employers support students very well so that they become more independent and well prepared for future employment.

Employers plan placements carefully. At the university, students are provided with shirts and ID badges and given front of house roles. Students are taught to gather relevant information from visitors and to take photos for student badges. As a result, students feel a part of the team, they become competent in their roles and can work with minimal supervision. Students enjoy their placements and become more confident to carry out their roles.

Theme 3: How effectively have leaders ensured that students who require occupational and physiotherapy services have access to them in a timely way and become independent?

Significant progress

Specialist therapists provide student support assistants with relevant training, such as Makaton and the use of augmentative communication devices, so that they can support the students that they work with confidently. Consequently, students benefit from frequent and appropriate support.

Managers have created a strong culture of multidisciplinary working to meet the needs of individual students. Leaders have streamlined recruitment procedures and now advertise vacancies in specialist forums. The broad range of therapists, including some directly appointed by the college and others recruited by the local authority, work together effectively to plan transition arrangements and review EHC plans to ensure that students have support in place when they start their programme. Managers ensure that student support assistants have sound baseline and specialist training to meet students' needs. As a result, student support assistants ensure that students receive the interventions and physical exercise that they need to support their development. If staff absences occur, the other team members can carry out the necessary physical exercises.

Students and parents highly value the therapies that they receive. Students feel more confident to perform daily tasks independently, such as climbing the stairs, and can integrate better with their families. Students now have greater potential to access further education and employment.

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