

Inspection of Oaklands College

Inspection dates: 19 to 22 September 2023

Overall effectiveness	Good
<hr/>	
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Education programmes for young people	Good
Adult learning programmes	Good
Provision for learners with high needs	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Information about this provider

Oaklands College is a large general further education college, based on two main campuses in St Albans, Welwyn Garden City and a smaller campus in Borehamwood. The largest site, at St Albans, teaches programmes across all subject sector areas, including land-based provision. St Albans site benefits from specialist resources, such as an animal management unit and a zoo, which is open to the public at weekends. The Welwyn Garden City campus, based in the town centre, teaches programmes, including health and social care, hair, beauty, computing, performing arts, engineering and construction. The provision at Borehamwood teaches predominantly adult courses, including English for speakers of other languages, (ESOL) business, and adult short courses, such as level 2 in understanding mental health and understanding autism. The largest provision at Borehamwood is ESOL.

At the time of the inspection, there were 1,675 learners on entry level and level 1 programmes, 1,797 learners on level 2 programmes and 1,867 learners on level 3 programmes. A small proportion of learners were studying level 4 qualifications. The college works with one subcontractor on short courses for adult learners who are not in education, employment or training. This provision had eight learners studying employability skills and horticulture, to help them to secure employment.

There were 3,416 learners on Education Programmes for Young People and 1,446 learners on Adult Learning Programmes, of which 91 attend distinct adult learning courses. There were 39 adult learners on access to higher education programmes.

There were 337 learners with high needs, most of whom were taught in a specialist facility on the St Albans site; 58 learners with high needs were taught within the mainstream provision and 16 learners were on a supported internship programme.

The college has recently started to teach T-level qualifications in engineering and manufacturing, education and childcare and business management and administration. There were 38 learners enrolled onto T levels. T-level qualifications were not in scope for inspection. The college has secured funding for skills bootcamps in digital and construction, which are due to commence early in this academic year. There are 80 students on sport academies, who are residential at the college.

What is it like to be a learner with this provider?

Learners enjoy studying at the college, they feel included and value highly the support they receive from their tutors. They enjoy working in calm and productive learning environments and value the positive experiences they have at college. Learners on education programmes for young people benefit from the opportunity to work in specialist classrooms and practical settings, such as an animal unit and the zoo. The high-quality resources that they work with reflect the workplaces in which they plan to secure employment. This prepares them thoroughly for their future job roles.

Learners arrive at lessons ready to work and they study together collaboratively. They work together on tasks, share thoughts and ideas about relevant topics and challenge each other respectfully. Most learners contribute willingly to group discussions, respond to tutors' questions and feel confident to ask questions about anything that they are not clear about.

Learners on adult learning programmes value the experiences that they have at college. Those learners on access to higher education courses, many of whom have not studied academically for several years, feel well supported to return to learning. They value the expert tutors and support staff, who help them to organise their work, carry out academic research and write well-structured essays. They enjoy meeting new people with shared interests and value the opportunity to study a qualification that will enable them to progress to higher education.

Those adult learners who are studying ESOL at St Albans and Borehamwood become more able to integrate into their communities. They feel confident in their daily lives and can visit shops or speak to professionals, such as doctors and teachers. Adults who are seeking employment, benefit from a friendly job club, where they can practise their interview skills and update their curriculum vitae. These adults are well prepared for future job applications and interviews.

Learners with high needs benefit from an effectively planned transition into college, so that they settle into their learning promptly. Staff work effectively in multi-disciplinary teams and with families and carers to ensure that learners' needs are understood and met swiftly. Learners have timely access to therapies, such as physiotherapy and other specialised support. Learners with high needs become more confident in managing social situations and can integrate effectively with their peers.

Those learners on supported internships learn swiftly to adhere to the standards of behaviour expected in the workplace. They learn to dress appropriately for work, develop relevant customer service skills and understand the importance of good timekeeping when at work.

Learners gain confidence during their time at the college. Learners with high needs become more independent and ready to progress into vocational areas assuredly. Those learners with high needs who are taught in vocational areas enjoy college life and are supported appropriately by their tutors. Learners become more resilient as they work in groups, learn new skills and experience constructive feedback.

Learners on education programmes for young people, who are residential at the college, have a positive experience. They benefit from high-quality support from a team of wardens, who they feel confident to discuss issues with. They take part in social and recreational activities and have opportunities to develop valuable skills, such as cooking. Residential learners feel safe within their accommodation.

Learners feel safe at college. They understand how to stay safe and know how to report any concerns that they might have. Staff support learners who experience life challenges well. Tutors and trained mentors ensure that learners are supported swiftly to overcome barriers to learning.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The college makes a reasonable contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders and managers have secured a range of successful partnerships with employers, education providers, and other stakeholders locally and regionally. As a result, leaders have a clear understanding of the priorities for Hertfordshire, and in nearby localities, such as the north of London. Leaders have a productive relationship with the local enterprise partnerships and work closely with them on specific projects, such as sustainable construction, retrofit technologies and a new facility for the creative sector.

Leaders prioritise specific skills shortage areas within the courses that they offer at the college. The largest areas include construction, engineering, film and television. They maintain a high priority and significant investment in sports skills. Leaders assure themselves that those areas they do not currently offer are met effectively by other providers within the region. For example, they do not offer specific

programmes for life sciences due to the specialist hub locally that provides learning in this area. They work closely with the local university to provide progression to higher level courses in four priority areas.

Leaders contribute to helping adults retrain and upskill, which is a priority for the affluent area in which the college is situated. However, the proportion of adults in technical training is low. Leaders have in place several specific projects to identify and meet the needs of adults furthest from employment.

Leaders have made considerable changes to their management structure and have rapidly improved the way in which they work with stakeholders. However, much activity around contributing to meeting skills needs is early in its development. In most subject areas, managers' emerging relationships with stakeholders and employers have informed course design, including crucial employability skills. However, too few programmes involve stakeholders and employers in teaching and assessing.

What does the provider do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders and managers have constructed a well-planned and ambitious range of courses to meet the needs of learners and stakeholders in the local and regional areas where they work. Access to higher education courses in medicine and medical science, for example, meet the regional shortages for dentists and physiotherapists within the national health service. The college provides extensive high-quality learning for learners with complex high needs, which enables more local learners to be taught within the county.

Leaders have high aspirations for staff and learners. Since the previous inspection, leaders have revised the governing body and the senior leadership team to enable them to align their curriculum strategy to meet identified strategic priorities. The newly formed governing body has a detailed and accurate understanding of the college performance. Governors are highly experienced and well qualified to carry out their roles. They use their skills effectively to support and challenge senior leaders to secure improvements.

Senior leaders take on roles on relevant boards and committees to secure strategic partnership links. The strong relationship with local employers and stakeholders enables leaders to plan qualifications and programmes that are effective in meeting current and future needs. Leaders have established an ambitious capital build programme, which is well developed to help meet these needs. Leaders manage their subcontracted provision well. They have recently reduced the number of subcontractors they work with. They monitor the performance of subcontracted provision closely.

Tutors structure learning sequentially, so that learners gain a sound understanding of basic knowledge and skills swiftly. As a result, they are prepared well to progress

on to more complex and challenging activities. In level 3 sports programmes, learners understand basic anatomy and physiology early in the course, so that they can apply this knowledge to more complex concepts, such as coaching and fitness training. On entry-level courses for learners studying ESOL, tutors teach speaking skills before progressing to verbs, tenses, and grammar.

Managers have planned appropriate courses to meet learners' career aspirations. This enables learners to progress confidently into employment or higher levels of study. Partner universities contribute to the selection of study skills units within the access to higher education programmes, so that tutors can prepare learners appropriately for higher levels of academic study. Tutors have ensured that learning is accessible to adult learners. Level 2 hairdressing is taught over two evenings following requests from learners, and a short business course helps adult learners to understand how to become self-employed.

Leaders ensure that tutors are well qualified in their areas of vocational expertise and have appropriate teaching qualifications. In a few subject areas, such as level 2 hairdressing, tutors continue to work in the sector, as a result, they have up-to-date knowledge of the industry. Tutors use their knowledge and experience skilfully to provide learners with a good understanding of the skills they need to work in those sectors. They provide learners with real-life examples, scenarios and relevant case studies, so that learners can apply their knowledge to more complex and realistic work situations.

Tutors benefit from a comprehensive and relevant staff development programme. They participate in activities to improve their teaching practice and managers receive training in management skills. Staff in animal management have access to specific training related to the animal unit and the zoo. They benefit from access to specialist courses, such as primate keeping, data and records systems and they have access to other zoos and animal technician conferences. As a result, learners gain professional skills and knowledge related to managing a zoo.

Leaders and managers value staff at the college. Leaders provide free breakfasts and lunches to support staff who require them. Staff feel well supported with their workloads and the positive culture that they work in.

Tutors use appropriate assessments to identify learners' skills and knowledge at the start of their course. They use this knowledge skilfully to plan learning. In practical subjects, such as level 1 carpentry and level 2 art and design, tutors use thorough skills assessments to establish learners' knowledge and skill levels. On ESOL courses, tutors swiftly identify gaps in learners' knowledge and support them to improve those skills, for example pronunciation. As a result, teachers ensure that learners are enrolled on appropriate courses that allow them to swiftly develop their knowledge and skills.

Tutors use helpful teaching strategies to ensure that learners understand what they have learned before they move on to the next topic. They use probing questioning expertly to check learners' understanding. In level 2 hairdressing, tutors ask learners

to carefully explain their answers, so that they demonstrate a deep understanding of subjects and can consider and correct their responses. Adult learners on hairdressing courses use online videos usefully, so that they can revise their hairdressing skills at home. Tutors frequently start and finish lessons with recap activities, such as quizzes, to check learning. In access to higher education courses, learners mark their tests with peers, so that they can discuss and check their responses. As a result, learners can readily recall their prior learning.

Most teachers explain topics clearly and thoroughly. They break down complex tasks into manageable components, so that learners gain those skills sequentially. In level 2 art and design, tutors provide clear demonstrations and use visual prompts, so that learners know how to complete tasks. In A-level English literature, teachers support learners to recall mood, themes, and language using songs. As a result, learners can remember what they have been taught, apply it to new situations and improve the standard of their work. However, in a small minority of lessons, tutors do not provide clear explanations and do not check learners' understanding carefully. In functional skills mathematics, a few teachers do not teach foundation topics thoroughly enough. As a result, learners find it difficult to complete more challenging questions.

Learners develop new knowledge and skills swiftly. Adult learners on level 2 hairdressing, learn to complete skills such as fishtail braiding and on level 1 carpentry, learners master mortice and tenon joints accurately, so that they can produce boxes and bird tables. On level 3 animal management, learners develop their technical skills confidently across a range of activities in the animal management centre. They prepare food, feed animals and complete welfare checks competently. Students can describe why they are doing specific tasks and answer technical questions about the type of feed being used and the nutrients it provides.

Tutors ensure that learners understand and use sector-relevant vocabulary accurately. Learners in level 3 mechanical engineering at Welwyn understand terms, such as microcircuits and water pump controllers. Learners who study ESOL extend their vocabulary, so that they can communicate effectively within the local communities in which they live.

Tutors provide learners with a range of useful activities that help them to develop their experience in work-related activities. For example, in level 3 sports, learners gain industry-recognised qualifications, such as sports massage, dodgeball and boccia coaching qualifications to enhance their wider skills, experience and employability. Learners on level 2 animal care, complete qualifications in animal first aid and benefit from using high-quality resources to further their understanding of topics, such as biodiversity and countryside management. In level 3 mechanical engineering, learners gain relevant employability skills by working in teams. They take on roles of responsibility such as managing health and safety or quality assurance, so that they appreciate the importance of teams in ensuring a project is successful.

Learners on education programmes for young people have relevant well-planned work placements, where they develop and improve their work-related skills. Students find their work placements interesting and challenging. Learners on level 3 public services, gain confidence in liaising with members of the public and learning how to deal with challenging situations. Learners benefit from trips and visits to help them understand the industries they plan to work in, for example level 3 public services learners visit the Royal Courts of Justice.

Staff have established a comprehensive careers advice programme that benefits most learners throughout their courses. Learners attend careers events, have individual careers advice and employment mentors provide learners with opportunities for industry tasters. As a result, most learners have a good understanding of the careers available to them.

Tutors have high expectations of learners' behaviour. Adult learners and those on education programmes for young people, demonstrate good behaviour in classrooms. They are respectful to each other in lessons, they listen to each other's views and opinions. Tutors ensure that learners understand the behaviours required of them in the workplace. On level 3 animal care, students demonstrate professional behaviours when working in the animal management centre. Learners know safety requirements in the workplace and wear the personal protective equipment that is needed in the animal management unit or engineering workshops.

Most learners attend their lessons well. Tutors have high expectations for learners to attend their taught sessions. Learners with high needs attend their lessons very well. However, too few attend their English and mathematics lessons.

Tutors support learners carefully on their courses. They understand their learners' needs well and can support individual learners. In level 1 carpentry, tutors check carefully that learners with specific needs understand instructions fully before they move on to the task. Staff at the college create an inclusive culture. Learners with high needs are involved in events with learners from other subject areas, such as sporting events. In the animal management centre, managers have made enclosures appropriately accessible, by adapting doorways and providing dimensions that allow wheelchair users to move around the enclosures independently.

Learners gain a good understanding of a broad range of well-being and citizenship topics taught by trained staff. Learners appreciate the importance of values such as respect for each other. They learn about tolerance through activities, such as the student conference. Animal management learners discuss democracy in college, such as voting for a course representative.

Most learners on education programmes for young people and adult learning programmes produce work of a high standard, achieve their qualifications and progress on to positive destinations. Learners on access to higher education programmes achieve very well and a high proportion achieve distinctions. They feel well prepared to progress on to higher education and into their chosen careers. Most access to higher education learners progress on to their first-choice university. Adult

learners studying ESOL, and those studying with a local subcontractor achieve very well. Learners with high needs make good progress towards their targets and most progress on to the next level of course or into vocational learning. However, too few learners achieve their GCSE English and GCSE mathematics qualifications.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Attendance and achievement of learners in English and mathematics at all levels.
- Involve employers and stakeholders in planning, teaching and assessing programmes, so that learning is linked appropriately to the skills needs of those stakeholders.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130723
Address	Oaklands Campus Hatfield Road St Albans Hertfordshire AL4 0JA
Contact number	01727737000
Website	http://www.oaklands.ac.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Andrew Slade
Provider type	General further education college
Date of previous inspection	21 to 24 September 2021
Main subcontractors	Groundwork London (East)

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the interim deputy principal curriculum, performance and student experience, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. The inspection was carried out using the [further education and skills inspection handbook](#) and took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence to inform judgements including visiting learning sessions, scrutinising learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

Lynda Brown, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Penny Fawcus	His Majesty's Inspector
Claire Griffin	Ofsted Inspector
Franki Williams	Ofsted Inspector
Matt Gower	Ofsted Inspector
Zoe Ibbotson	His Majesty's Inspector
Nikki Brady	His Majesty's Inspector
Ann Potterton	His Majesty's Inspector
Rebecca Perry	His Majesty's Inspector
Ruth Harrison	Ofsted Inspector
Chris Bealey	Ofsted Inspector
Robert Bamford	His Majesty's Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2023