

# Skills for Independence and Employability Ltd

Monitoring visit report

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<b>Name of lead inspector:</b>	Joanna Walters, Her Majesty's Inspector
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<b>Address:</b>	Cage Green Road Tonbridge Kent TN10 4PT

## Monitoring visit: main findings

### Context and focus of visit

From autumn 2019, Ofsted undertook to carry out monitoring visits to independent specialist colleges newly Education and Skills Funding Agency funded from August 2018 onwards. This monitoring visit was undertaken as part of those arrangements and as outlined in the 'Further education and skills inspection handbook', especially the sections entitled 'Monitoring visits' and 'Monitoring visits to providers that are newly directly publicly funded'. The focus of these visits is on the themes set out below.

Oakley College is the trading name for Skills for Independence and Employability Ltd in Tonbridge, West Kent. The college was established in September 2018. Skills for Independence is a specialist post-19 provision for learners who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) living in Kent, East Sussex, and the surrounding London boroughs. The college is a registered charity and a not-for-profit organisation.

At the time of the monitoring visit, Oakley College had 73 learners who have high needs. Learners follow programmes that are tailored to their individual needs. The aim of the programmes is to teach learners skills to gain employment and live independently, in order to lead fulfilling and productive lives.

The impact of COVID-19 (coronavirus) has been taken into account in the findings and progress judgements below.

### Themes

#### **How much progress have leaders and managers made in designing and delivering relevant learning programmes that are clearly defined and tailored to suit the individual needs of learners?      Significant progress**

Leaders have a clear rationale for the curriculum they offer. They have developed the provision to meet the need for local education places for learners who have high needs. The provision enables young people who have complex learning and physical needs to continue their education within their local communities. The curriculum that learners follow incorporates their individual education, health and care (EHC) plan outcomes.

Leaders and managers have high aspirations for learners. Learners benefit from a curriculum that is ambitious and highly individualised. The curriculum provides a vast number of opportunities for learners to develop essential skills required for day-to-

day life and employment. These skills help learners become independent young adults, who are active in their local communities.

Leaders and managers ensure that learners receive effective careers advice and guidance from specialist careers advisers. Learners have a personal career development plan that enables them to develop the new skills and knowledge they need for the world of work. As a result of the advice and guidance, a few learners have successfully secured part-time paid employment.

Leaders ensure that staff are appropriately qualified and experienced to work with young people who need extra help and support. Leaders ensure that staff benefit from extensive training and development opportunities. This includes specialist SEND training, such as the use of sign language and behaviour management. This ensures that staff provide high-quality teaching and support for learners.

The board of trustees has detailed oversight of the college and learners. It uses its knowledge and expertise to challenge and support leaders. This ensures that learning programmes are challenging. As a result, learners successfully progress to destinations that are meaningful, such as employment, attending day centres and further learning.

Leaders ensure that learners benefit from access to high-quality learning resources, such as a café and supermarket. Leaders worked in partnership with a supermarket chain to install a replica shop on site. This enables learners to develop the skills they need in the supportive college environment before undertaking external work placements with employers.

**How much progress have leaders and managers made to ensure that learners benefit from high-quality learning programmes that develop independence, communication and skills and help them to achieve their personal and/or work-related goals?**      **Significant progress**

Tutors plan a well-sequenced and ambitious curriculum for learners that builds in complexity over time. They take into account the short- and long-term aspirations of learners, for both their career and personal goals. At the start of the programme, tutors identify what learners can do and design the curriculum based on areas the learner needs to develop. For example, in the college café, learners first learn how to use a knife safely to chop vegetables, before progressing to use a grill to cook food.

Tutors and support staff create calm and purposeful learning environments. Tutors skilfully teach topics through practical activities which make learning fun and interesting for learners. The activities successfully challenge learners with the most complex needs to communicate with each other, follow instructions and take turns. For example, learners work together to follow instructions to build and fly a paper aeroplane.

Tutors and support staff have high expectations of learners. Learners make good progress towards their overall goals and EHC plan outcomes. Tutors set targets for learners that challenge them to be able to advance their knowledge and skills. Learners develop new skills at college that they apply at home, such as being able to independently dress themselves and take their plate to the kitchen and wash it up.

Tutors ensure that learners have opportunities to further develop their English, mathematical and digital skills in practical lessons. In cooking, learners develop their understanding of how to apply mathematics in real-life situations, such as when calculating quantities of ingredients. In art, learners use different types of digital cameras to take photographs to make a display.

Staff at the college communicate well with parents and carers. They celebrate learners' successes and achievements through weekly newsletters that they share with parents. Parents highly value the support their sons and daughters receive from staff.

**How much progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that effective safeguarding arrangements are in place? Significant progress**

Staff, including the board of trustees, place a high priority on safeguarding learners. There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the college. Leaders have effective safeguarding processes and policies in place. Leaders adhere to safe recruitment practice. This ensures that staff are suitable to work with vulnerable young people.

Staff create an extremely safe and supportive environment for learners. Learners very much enjoy their time at college. Staff are highly responsive to the needs of learners. They recognise slight changes in learners' behaviours and use effective strategies to help calm anxious learners.

Tutors ensure that learners develop a secure understanding of how to be happy, healthy and safe through the personal, social, health and economic lessons. Topics such as county lines, drugs awareness, well-being and safety prepare learners for life as an adult in society. Learners develop helpful strategies, such as listening to music, to maintain positive mental health.

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