

# Inspection of Skills for Independence and Employability Ltd

Inspection dates: 3 to 5 May 2023

## Overall effectiveness

**Outstanding**

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|--|--------------------------|
| The quality of education                     | <b>Outstanding</b>       |
| Behaviour and attitudes                      | <b>Outstanding</b>       |
| Personal development                         | <b>Outstanding</b>       |
| Leadership and management                    | <b>Outstanding</b>       |
| Provision for learners with high needs       | <b>Outstanding</b>       |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Not previously inspected |

## Information about this provider

Skills for Independence and Employability Ltd (known as The Oaks) is an independent, not-for-profit specialist college based in Kent. They work with 19- to 25-year-olds living in Kent, East Sussex and the surrounding London boroughs. All learners have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), including complex social, emotional and mental health needs, autism spectrum disorder and profound and multiple learning disabilities.

The Oaks provides training and support to prepare young people for adulthood, help them to become more independent and ready them for employment or further education.

At the time of the inspection visit, there were 109 learners, of which 23 were studying at pre-entry level, 69 were studying at entry level and 18 were studying at level 1 and level 2. All learners study English and mathematics at an appropriate level to their needs.

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

Learners are very positive and proud of their education. They share the exceptionally high ambitions that leaders, trustees and staff have for them to achieve. Learners benefit from early discussions about their aspirations and ambitions with staff, who work with them effectively and consistently to achieve their goals through the course of their studies. As a result, learners make excellent academic and personal progress.

Learners are rightly enthusiastic about the calm, welcoming and age-appropriate environment where they are encouraged to behave as independent adults. Leaders set high expectations for learners' behaviour, which they follow consistently well. Learners demonstrate exemplary behaviour. They grow in confidence and independence in an environment of inclusion and care.

Learners have access to exceptionally high-quality resources which help them to thrive in their learning. For example, the college works closely with a renowned international software organisation which enables staff and learners to access the most up-to-date skills, knowledge and technology to support their access to communication, independence and the world around them. Learners benefit from access to real-life resources to learn and practice the skills they will need in the future such as the on-site retail store and supported living flat.

Learners benefit greatly from activities to promote their character, confidence and resilience. Learners benefit from taking an active part in their communities with the effective support of college staff and their strong links with community groups. All learners take part in providing feedback to leaders and many learners are supported to represent their peers helping them to develop an understanding of fundamental British values such as democracy. As a result, learners influence the curriculum and have planned a range of interesting activities and clubs which help them to explore their interests and talents and build their social and communication skills.

Learners feel safe at the college. They are confident to report their concerns and know who to talk to if they are worried.

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

Leaders and managers have developed a highly appropriate and ambitious curriculum that develops learners' independent living skills and employability skills to prepare them for adulthood successfully. They tailor the curriculum expertly to meet learners' aspirations and needs and to build learners' skills to prepare them well for their next steps.

Leaders have formed exceptionally useful partnerships to enhance the curriculum for learners. They work with a range of appropriate organisations to support learners' needs such as social services, therapists and supported living and employment organisations. Leaders provide beneficial training for employers and stakeholders

which champions young people with SEND and the benefit they can have in a workplace or community. For example, leaders ensure that employers gain from disability awareness training so that they can support learners effectively on work experience placements.

Highly-skilled and qualified staff plan teaching to seamlessly meet the often complex needs of learners. They sequence learning carefully so that learners with very different starting points build their skills and knowledge over time successfully. For example, in English, learners benefit from using the basic components of English such as sound and letter recognition, moving on to applying these components using different skills such as reading, speaking and listening in different settings such as the workplace or preparing for their annual review meetings. Learners benefit from opportunities to apply their learning in a wide range of meaningful situations such as travel, shopping, socialising and accessing community groups. As a result, learners make excellent progress towards their aspirations and goals.

Teaching staff ensure that learners benefit from thoughtfully planned, interesting and useful learning activities. They use assessment expertly to check learning and ensure learners improve their work. All staff ensure that learners gain knowledge and practical skills in using technology to support their learning and their engagement in the communities around them. Staff teach learners to use apps on their mobile phones to help them to access the world around them. For example, learners can now use alarms to remind them of daily tasks, use mobile technology to access signs and information in the community and read texts independently and discreetly. As a result, learners gain more independence and confidence in accessing education and the world around them.

Leaders know the key strengths and weaknesses of the college and carefully plan effective actions to ensure continuous and sustainable improvement. They provide useful and appropriate information to the board of trustees who challenge and support leaders effectively to ensure that they continue to maintain high-quality education for learners. As a result, leaders and managers plan effective actions and appropriate and valuable training that enables staff to develop and maintain their skills and knowledge. For example, staff highly value the 60-second virtual training sessions which helps them to access and use new teaching resources, administration support and teaching methods.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have ensured that the designated safeguarding leads (DSLs) are suitably qualified and experienced to ensure that learners are kept safe. The DSLs have developed an inquisitive culture of professional curiosity across the college in which all staff are highly vigilant to concerns and know very well how to report concerns.

DSLs ensure that learners are very well supported through their relationships with multi-disciplinary teams and work tirelessly to ensure incidents are resolved

promptly and a positive outcome for learners and their families.

Trustees ensure that leaders and DSLs are supported effectively and that they meet the requirements of the 'Prevent' duty.

## Provider details

|                                     |  |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Unique reference number</b>      | 146546   |
| <b>Address</b>                      | Cage Green Road<br>Tonbridge<br>Kent<br>TN10 4PT         |
| <b>Contact number</b>               | 01732207950  |
| <b>Website</b>                      | <a href="http://www.theoaks.ac.uk">www.theoaks.ac.uk</a> |
| <b>Principal, CEO or equivalent</b> | Gordon Tillman, CEO<br>Ros Leach, Principal              |
| <b>Provider type</b>                | Independent specialist college                           |
| <b>Date of previous inspection</b>  | Not previously inspected                                 |
| <b>Main subcontractors</b>          | Not applicable   |

## Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the principal, 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

|                             |                         |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| Emma Leavey, lead inspector | His Majesty's Inspector |
| Penny Fawcus                | His Majesty's Inspector |
| Louise Rowley               | Ofsted Inspector        |

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