

National Star College

Focused monitoring visit report

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Type of provider: Independent specialist college

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FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

The National Star College is situated in a rural area on the outskirts of Cheltenham. It is an independent, specialist college for residential and full-time day learners, all of whom are aged between 16 and 25, and have physical disabilities and/or acquired brain injuries, alongside associated learning, behavioural, sensory and medical difficulties. The college also offers access to its services to 200 local disabled adults through a contract with Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) and a further 200 learners on a variety of short or specific programmes. The college provides flexible part-time courses and works with local schools. Programmes are offered in visual and performing arts, information and communication technology, business administration, health and social care, sport and recreation and preparation for life and work.

At the last inspection, National Star College was good overall as well as in all other aspects. This report focuses on the themes explored during the visit.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has been made to include all stakeholders' views in the self-assessment and quality improvement process?	Significant progress
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Comprehensive guidelines and procedures for seeking the views of all stakeholders and feeding back to them are well established. The process is now more consultative with less reliance on quantitative data. Information about improvements is routinely communicated to stakeholders following feedback. Students feel fully consulted about life at college. They show a very good understanding of how their views feed into the self-assessment process. Systems established to improve a two-way communication with stakeholders include use of the college intranet to provide information to staff and students. An on-line parent/carer forum, recently introduced, provides a resource for both feedback to the college on its provision and for the college to respond. To date 33 parents and carers have made use of this to communicate with the college. A face-to-face parents' forum meets once a term. Ex-students have access to an on-line resource to give feedback about what has gone well and recommendations about improvements relating to transition. Analysis of feedback is used well to inform self-assessment and actions identified in the college's quality improvement plan where appropriate. Thorough analysis of student perception surveys feeds into the self-assessment process effectively.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has there been for students moving into appropriate destinations when they leave college?

Significant progress

The college has made significant progress in helping students to move into appropriate destinations. The college has introduced a range of actions to increase the number of students moving into, and sustaining, work or further education placements. Vocational areas of the curriculum are more work based. A well-developed transition programme meets the needs of students with more complex difficulties. More students are entering employment of some kind including voluntary work. In 2009/10, the number of students gaining voluntary work matched college predictions and 48% of leavers entered further education. Of those students who left the college in 2010/11, the number entering work-related activities was 22% and after six months the majority had maintained their work placement or had added work-based learning opportunities. The college has made significant progress in tracking students' destinations, with reviews shortly after leaving and again after six months and two years. Response rates to tracking questionnaires have improved significantly from just over half returning questionnaires in 2008 to 84% in 2010. The college makes good use of destination data to analyse and identify trends relating to ethnicity, gender and disability with clear actions recorded to improve.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made to improve the management, use and performance of learning support staff?

Significant progress

The college has made considerable changes to the way it deploys support staff and to the monitoring of their performance. The college identifies and designates single or dual roles for prospective support staff during employment interviews that may entail, for example, assigning them to work in an educational support role alongside residential or leisure support duties. Clear development routes are available for support staff including developing specialist interests, acting as job mentors and gaining teaching qualifications to enable them to cover for tutors. Training events to raise the skills of support staff have been a real focus over the past few years. A third of support staff has been involved in a new 'effective support training' programme. An externally accredited course has been trialled this year with continuing use of units as part of the training programme for all support staff whether working in education, residences or leisure. An on-line programme, aimed at staff who support people with disabilities, was piloted in February this year with 59 certificates attained to date. The take-up of training is monitored well. Arrangements for monitoring the performance of support staff have improved significantly. Teaching and learning observations include judgements about the management and performance of support staff. However, observers also plan and identify, prior to an observation, a named learning support member of staff and complete a separate evaluation of their performance.

What progress has been made to improve the promotion of information, advice and guidance services?

Significant progress

Since the last inspection, the college has strengthened its transition team through the appointment of a fully qualified and experienced careers officer. The college has developed a much improved and coordinated approach for students to access information, advice and guidance. The careers officer, personalised learning mentors, occupational therapists and other staff work closely together to ensure a thorough and coordinated service for students. There are productive links with the local Connexions personal advisers and the careers officer represents the college through a regional guidance network. Out-of-area Connexions personal advisers and Careers Wales advisers are generally not able to support students through face-to-face visits while they are at college. The college's careers officer ensures that communications with students' home personal advisers effectively supports transition arrangements. A college governor, with expertise in advice and guidance, has a link responsibility with the transition team. Students report that they receive impressive support and guidance to assist with their transition out of the college.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made to improve the formal recording of analysis of data?

Significant progress

The college has made significant progress in collating, analysing and using management information. Revised procedures are now well established and linked to value and impact, with much formal recording of analysis now in place. A new manager has overall responsibility for collating management information. All data are now centrally stored. Overall analysis of data supports easy access to a detailed evidence database. Analysis of data formally identifies and records actions to improve where necessary. The management information manager closely monitors progress on actions. Monthly management information summaries usefully report information on trends in relation to student attendance, retention and admissions, as well as trends for staff retention and absences. Managers ensure that governors have regular updated information about trends within the college. The college has developed its procedures to record students' progress more thoroughly. For example, clearly written records of individual students' progress ably back up a comprehensive analysis of progress by students against the themes for every citizen matters.

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