

# National Star College

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique reference number:</b>	131944
<b>Name of lead inspector:</b>	Joyce Deere HMI
<b>Last day of inspection:</b>	15 June 2012
<b>Type of provider:</b>	Independent specialist college
<b>Address:</b>	Ullenwood Cheltenham Gloucestershire GL53 9QU
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## Information about the provider

1. The National Star College is a larger-than-average independent specialist college of further education for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The college is operated by The National Star Foundation (formerly known as The National Star Centre for Disabled Youth), a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee. The college’s governing body reports to the board of trustees. Most students have physical disabilities and/or acquired brain injuries, alongside associated learning, behavioural, sensory and medical difficulties. The number of students with complex learning difficulties and disabilities is increasing year on year. In 2011/12 56% of the students were male and 8.5% (13) were from Black and minority ethnic communities, including 10 Welsh students who were funded by the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills of the Welsh Assembly Government. A small number of local students follow a specific work skills programme, funded by the Education Funding Agency.
  
2. The college curriculum offers four core pathways: entry, foundation, vocational and employment. Each learner has an individual learning programme outlining their goals for learning, living and work which is developed in partnership with their personal learning mentor. The college’s mission is ‘to enable people with disabilities to realise their potential through personalised learning, transition and lifestyle services’.

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2011/12
<b>Provision for young learners:</b> Further Education (16 to 18)	20
<b>Provision for adult learners:</b> Further education (19+)	125

## Summary report

Grades: 1 is outstanding; 2 is good; 3 is satisfactory; 4 is inadequate

<b>Overall effectiveness of provision</b>	<b>Grade 1</b>
<b>Capacity to improve</b>	<b>Grade 1</b>
	<b>Grade</b>
Outcomes for learners	1
Quality of provision	1
Leadership and management	1
Safeguarding	1
Equality and diversity	2

## Overall effectiveness

- This is an outstanding college. Over the last six years all aspects of the provision have improved significantly. Exceptional leadership has resulted in the college meeting its ambition to be outstanding. The progress made by students from the time they start at the college until they make the transition to their chosen destination is outstanding. The contribution that students make to the college and the community is exceptionally good. Students enjoy their time at college, and the college is highly effective in preparing them for future life and encouraging them to lead healthy and safe lifestyles. The quality of provision is outstanding because of the exceptionally good specialist care and support that students receive to enable them to participate in learning. Teaching and learning are good overall, with instances of outstanding practice. The range of provision offered by the college and its partnership work throughout the country are exemplary.
- College leaders have had considerable success in developing a culture that is focused on enabling students to meet their potential. Staff understand and subscribe to the college's ambitious strategic priorities and the managers are constantly seeking ways to improve the provision for the students. Quality assurance and self-assessment are firmly entrenched in planning for improvement, and the college accurately assesses its teaching and learning as good. The college recognises that the promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding in respect of disability, but more needs to be done to raise other aspects to the same level. Arrangements for the safeguarding of young people and vulnerable adults are outstanding.

## Main findings

- Students make outstanding progress in the development of their independent living skills and personal effectiveness. They talk powerfully about the significant improvements they have made in their ability to communicate with others and to monitor and manage their own behaviour. The standard of students' work is extremely good and students are able to engage with staff and visitors with poise and self-assurance.
- The college has established very effective strategies for tracking and demonstrating students' progress. Students make outstanding progress from the pre-entry assessment through to their planned destinations, developing skills across all aspects of their programme.
- Students feel safe and enjoy their time at the college. They play an active part in local arts; their work with a professional theatre company has led to students performing a show in a number of primary schools. Students encourage a culture of environmental awareness among their peers by successfully implementing self-sufficiency projects in the college.
- Teaching and learning are good. Outstanding lessons are lively and stimulating. Excellent assessment and planning ensure learning programmes are highly individualised and students make significant progress. Students are very aware of their progress and are involved in target setting. In the weaker sessions some students are not consistently challenged or tasks are not suitably matched to their abilities.
- The college provides exemplary contexts for students to practise and develop their skills in realistic environments. Tutors develop students' literacy and numeracy skills particularly well when they are integrated into the curriculum.
- The range of programmes and resources available to students is outstanding. All students have flexible and personalised programmes which are highly effective in meeting their individual needs. Work experience opportunities are good and the development of living skills for independence is highly effective. Students plan an excellent enrichment programme.
- Partnership work is exemplary. Students increase their independence and their confidence to communicate and interact with an extensive range of partners in the local community and further afield. These fruitful partnerships have a significant impact on students' learning and their ability to make choices.
- Care, guidance and support are outstanding. Thorough initial and baseline assessments support students to identify and develop strategies to manage their own learning, to become more independent and to develop greater autonomy. All students benefit significantly from an extensive range of excellent therapeutic support. Transition planning is highly effective.
- Outstanding strategic leadership, management and governance have focused relentlessly on continuous improvement for students. Quality improvement arrangements are highly effective. The college provides outstanding facilities and uses its management information exceptionally well to improve and capture

all aspects of outcomes for students. It has yet to find ways to use this rich information to capture annual trends in its performance.

- The promotion of safeguarding is outstanding. Managers and staff give a very high priority to safeguarding, which is evident throughout the college. Students benefit from a culture of well-informed risk taking, underpinned by thorough staff training. A well-produced staff guidance document provides readily available information for staff.
- The opportunities for students to have a voice in the college and the wider community are exceptionally good. The college has a large number of representative forums for students to express their views and they grow in confidence as a result of this experience. Parents and employers are also listened to through the use of perception surveys and individual contact, and their views are used in the college's self-assessment of its provision.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is good overall. The college has outstanding expertise in its work with students with disabilities, and the students benefit from the opportunity to advocate locally and nationally on behalf of people with disabilities. However, its promotion of other aspects of equality through programmes of learning is less well developed.

### **What does National Star College need to do to improve further?**

- Build on the examples of outstanding practice in teaching and learning so that all staff can provide stretch and challenge for all students.
- Further develop the promotion of equality and diversity through the programmes of learning so that all aspects are covered and students are better prepared for the next stages of their lives.
- Build on the excellent arrangements to capture students' progress at an individual level so that the college's overall performance can be evaluated on an annual basis.

### **Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors**

#### **What students like:**

- showing off increased independence and new skills to parents
- socialising with friends in the college and others in the community
- being valued and treated with respect by staff
- staff who are always keen to help and support learning
- the support provided to increase independence, especially mobility
- the leisure facilities
- the wide range of activities at the weekend
- the support for transition to independence
- taking managed risks.

**What students would like to see improved:**

- increased access to the pool at weekends
- a changing table in the swimming pool that is too narrow.

**Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors**

**What employers like:**

- the excellent support provided staff
- the excellent role models provided by the staff in the workplace
- very effective communication with the college.

**What employers would like to see improved:**

- no areas identified.

## Main inspection report

### Capacity to make and sustain improvement

**Grade 1**

5. The college has an outstanding capacity to improve. Since the last inspection the college has rectified all of the areas for improvement and made significant progress in all three monitoring visits. The governors and senior staff have a strong national presence, and focus keenly on meeting the Foundation's mission. The introduction of personal learning mentors and improved management information has enabled the college to monitor students' learning very effectively and to support students to make outstanding progress from the time they enter the college. Outcomes are now outstanding. Recent training has successfully concentrated on increasing staff specialist expertise to prepare them to work with the increasing numbers of students with very high levels of need. The substantially improved facilities enable the college to provide significant therapeutic interventions and also enable students to develop their independence skills in realistic settings. The college's self-evaluation is realistic and accurate, providing a good basis for sustained outstanding practice.

### Outcomes for learners

**Grade 1**

6. Outcomes for students are outstanding. Students achieve their planned vocational and functional skills qualifications and make very good progress towards achieving their targets. The college's analysis shows no gaps in performance between different groups of students. The college makes very good use of spider diagrams to demonstrate students' starting points and the significant progress achieved over their three-year programme. Students are well prepared during their three years at the college to meet their long-term destination goals, and most do so.
7. Standards of work are high. Students acquire specialist knowledge and skills in their vocational areas. Photography students are able to identify and use complex features of advanced digital cameras to create impressive images. Students make excellent progress in developing their communication and independent living skills, and use communication aids productively in social and vocational settings.
8. Students enjoy their learning and feel safe in the college. When they expressed concerns about poorly-lit pathways on site the college responded promptly to make improvements. Students make valuable contributions to the arts locally and are fully aware of making healthy choices. The 'Green Reps' successfully promote awareness of self-sufficiency and sustainability among their peers.

### The quality of provision

**Grade 1**

9. Teaching and learning are good, with instances of outstanding practice. Learning sessions are lively, and in some cases inspiring, with a good range and

variety of teaching and learning activities. Tutors and facilitators are skilled at responding to students imaginatively and flexibly. Tutors deploy well, with good use made of their skills. Staff make highly effective use of assistive technology in supporting learning, improving communication and enabling students to make choices. Tutors plan most lessons carefully to include a thoughtful and well-balanced range of activities that interest and motivate students. They use relevant vocational activities and examples to develop students' skills. In practical sessions in the college's enterprises, the staff are clear about what students can achieve unaided and where they need to direct other students or members of staff to help.

10. In less successful sessions not all students are fully engaged or sufficiently stretched. The focus is sometimes on the task to be completed rather than the skills to be developed. Students' understanding is not always checked sufficiently so that the students can benefit fully from the tasks set.
11. The assessment and recording of students' progress in learning sessions are very effective. In the best cases the excellent use of task and tracking sheets encourages students to take responsibility for identifying their own successes and areas for further development.
12. The development of literacy and numeracy skills is good where it is integrated into social, vocational or life skill activities. The reinforcement of literacy and numeracy in the residences is particularly strong. The college acknowledges that practice is less effective in the discrete group lessons and will only continue to offer these to students particularly assessed as requiring this approach.
13. The multi-disciplinary programmes meet the needs of students exceptionally well. The personalised programmes are designed to develop students' potential through a range of flexible pathways, which incorporate long-term planning for progression. The focus on transition from the start of the programme is very effective. Students can take part in an extensive range of internal and external work experience placements, and make good use of the college's enterprises and local partnerships. These provide exemplary contexts for learning in realistic settings. Enrichment activities are excellent and well attended. Students are involved in their planning through the students' union.
14. Students benefit exceptionally well from the broad range of partnerships. Partners include schools, churches, colleges, businesses, the police and a local theatre. These links provide good opportunities to enrich students' social interaction and participation in the community. They have a significant impact on their ability to make choices. Students improve their self-esteem, extend their experiences and skills, and increase their independence and confidence to communicate and interact. For example, creative and performing arts students work with professional actors and the production team of the local theatre to perform a commissioned play that tours local schools. Students also benefit from the wide range of business partnerships the college has developed, which provide work placements.

15. Multi-disciplinary care, guidance and support are outstanding. Students benefit greatly from the extensive range of therapeutic and nursing support, which contributes significantly to the outstanding outcomes. Facilitators have received high-quality specific training to provide additional support for students, enabling them to use their communication aids. Highly effective personal learning mentors act as 'super tutors', planning students' individualised programmes and monitoring their progression. The college provides a range of highly effective support and training programmes for the parents' and carers' forum. Students are fully involved in their transition planning.

## **Leadership and management**

## **Grade 1**

16. National Star College is led and managed exceptionally well. The Principal and senior management team are highly ambitious for their students and are well placed to respond to the national challenges facing the sector. The ethos and culture of the college stem from its strong emphasis on integrating its values into daily practice. Targets set for staff are challenging. The proportion of students with higher levels of need has increased significantly since the last inspection and the college has trained the staff and developed appropriate learning pathways to reflect that change. The college has yet to develop a way of using the rich data it has about the outcomes of individual students to capture their overall annual improvement.
17. The governors bring a wealth of experience to the college and hold it to account exceptionally well. They use their specialist knowledge well to challenge, monitor and guide college practice, through meetings and contact with staff and students. They receive timely updates on the college's performance. Students, parents and staff are well represented on the board.
18. Safeguarding has a very high profile and permeates all of the college's work. The well-developed policies, leaflets and a safe-practice guidance manual are well understood by staff, students and parents. The college works closely with the local authority's safeguarding boards, and college staff are accredited to provide staff training in safeguarding on its behalf. An experienced governor sits on the college's safeguarding strategy group. The most recent Care Quality Commission report on the residential provision is particularly positive about safeguarding practice. Students benefit from a culture of informed risk taking.
19. The college's response to equalities legislation is good. It is outstanding in its promotion of disability, with a strong culture of challenging bullying, harassment and discrimination, encouraging respect for differences in ability and providing strong advocacy for people with disabilities within the wider community and at national events. The college has increased slightly the proportion of staff from under-represented groups. Although staff plan well in sessions for differences in ability, they show less focus on other aspects of equality and diversity, such as cultural considerations related to students' backgrounds and future destinations.

20. The college makes excellent use of the views of its stakeholders. It provides a number of channels for listening to the voices of students, including a student council and a student parliament, where all of the representatives meet the senior college staff. Students have been to the House of Commons to have their voices heard. The college provides an online parents' forum and responds well to the views of employers.
  
21. The college is relentless in its drive for improvements, prioritising actions that have a positive impact on the experience of students and listening to stakeholders. The management information system is well developed, and managers are able to use 'real time' information to monitor performance. The college has significantly strengthened the arrangements to ensure multi-disciplinary working across all aspects of its work. The inspectors found the college's observations of teaching and learning, and its grading of this area, to be accurate.
  
22. The college's facilities for learning and residential provision are outstanding. Staff are well qualified and have very good specialist training. Financial management is sound and value for money is outstanding.

## Information about the inspection

23. Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI), an HMI from Estyn, and two additional inspectors, assisted by the college's assistant principal, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors took account of the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, the previous inspection report, reports from the inspectorate's monitoring visits, and data on students and their achievements over the period since the previous inspection.
24. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, case studies of individual students, telephone calls and emails. They looked at questionnaires students and employers had recently completed on behalf of the college. They also observed learning sessions.

**Record of Main Findings (RMF)**  
**National Star College**  
**Learning types: 14 – 16:** Young apprenticeships; Diplomas; **16-18 Learner responsive:** FE full- and part-time courses, Foundation learning tier, including Entry to Employment; **19+ responsive:** FE full- and part-time courses; **Employer responsive:** Train to Gain, apprenticeships

Grades <b>using the 4 point scale</b> 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall	16-18 Learner responsive	19+ Learner responsive
<b>Approximate number of enrolled students</b> Full-time students	146	20	126
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Capacity to improve</b>	<b>1</b>		
<b>Outcomes for students</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
How well do students achieve and enjoy their learning?	1		
How well do students attain their learning goals? How well do students progress?	1 1		
How well do students improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	1		
How safe do students feel?	1		
<i>Are students able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*</i>	1		
<i>How well do students make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	1		
<b>Quality of provision</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	2		
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	1		
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for students?	1		
How effective are the care, guidance and support students receive in helping them to achieve?	1		
<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	1		
<i>How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*</i>	1		
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of students?	1		
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	2		
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	1		
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for students?	1		
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	1		

\*where applicable to the type of provision

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