

Inspection of National Star College

Inspection dates: 31 January to 2 February 2023

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Apprenticeships	Good
Provision for learners with high needs	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

Information about this provider

National Star College is a large independent specialist residential and day college for students with high needs that is part of the National Star registered charity. The college recruits students from 48 local authorities and has sites in Cheltenham, Hereford and Wales. At the time of the inspection, there were 208 students in scope, attending the Cheltenham and Hereford sites. Students are aged 16 to 25, with most being 19 years or over. Students at National Star College have complex physical disabilities and medical conditions, including autism spectrum disorder and other learning, behavioural, sensory or physical disabilities.

Students with high needs follow one of four pathways: 'personal development for active citizenship', which includes therapeutic interventions and experiences to help students develop their communication, sensory and physical skills; 'personal development for making a positive contribution', with a curriculum that develops new knowledge, skills and behaviours through applying what students have learned to real-life situations; 'engaging with the world around you', which is for students with the most complex needs who follow a curriculum that provides access to a broad range of subjects and significant therapeutic input; and 'work outcome and personal development', which focuses on developing new skills and knowledge through practical experiences and employment outcomes.

National Star College recently began to deliver the level 3 diploma in adult care apprenticeship. At the time of the inspection, there were 15 apprentices enrolled on this programme. All apprentices are aged 19 years and over.

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

Staff have very high expectations of students' and apprentices' behaviour and conduct, both at college and in the workplace. Students and apprentices reflect these high expectations positively. They are highly respectful of each other, of staff and of visitors. Students are taught about what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable behaviour and understand why positive behaviours are important.

Students who are being prepared for entering employment benefit from developing behaviours that will support them when at work. They are taught about time management and the importance of punctuality, as well as health and safety practices to keep them safe at work, such as how to clean equipment safely. Staff encourage students to reflect on their behaviours and experiences and how these relate to the workplace.

Students and apprentices attend well and participate actively, and most arrive punctually to their lessons. Staff carefully monitor attendance and ensure that students and apprentices are supported to catch up on any work they have missed.

Students and apprentices communicate politely and are friendly and welcoming in their interactions with each other. They work collaboratively with others, and when students find this difficult, support staff use effective strategies to help them. Many support staff work individually with students and know them well.

Students benefit from a nurturing and safe environment in which the level of support is high. They feel valued as individuals. Students and apprentices have positive attitudes to their learning and are proud of their achievements.

Staff at all levels in the organisation promote a culture that encourages students and apprentices to respect equality and diversity, embrace differences and ensure inclusive practice. As a result, students and apprentices rarely experience bullying, harassment or discrimination, and staff take appropriate and swift actions to address any concerns that arise.

Students are aware of potential dangers and understand why listening to adults is important. They understand the risks related to the independent living skills activities they carry out in the community, such as crossing the road and talking to strangers. Apprentices feel confident to discuss safeguarding issues and can explain the many ways in which they have developed their safeguarding practice to keep themselves and the students they work with safe.

Students benefit from an effective personal development curriculum through which staff support them to develop an appropriate understanding of British values. For

example, students have a good understanding of democracy through the work of the student union, where they can vote to make decisions affecting them. However, apprentices do not have a sufficiently well-developed understanding of British values and their importance in society.

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

Leaders and managers have a clear vision for students with high needs, which is to enable them to realise their potential and become active citizens in control of their lives. They provide four learning pathways to meet the needs of a wide range of students, including those with very complex needs. Leaders and managers provide an individual curriculum for most students, focusing on developing skills for a more independent and active life after college.

Leaders and managers have a clear rationale for delivering apprenticeships. They deliver the level 3 diploma in adult care programme to develop the knowledge and skills of staff supporting students with high needs in the college. This is part of a wider strategy to support staff in their career progression, including achieving teaching and leadership and management qualifications.

Leaders, managers, governors and trustees have invested significantly in resources for students with high needs. Students benefit from a highly effective specialist therapy team and an emotional and well-being team. They also have access to a range of facilities that enhance their learning experience, such as a golf course, a farm, a swimming pool, a hydrotherapy pool, a rebound room and polytunnels. Leaders, managers, governors and trustees have recently secured significant income from charitable donations to improve student living accommodation on the Cheltenham site.

Leaders, managers, governors and trustees have accurate oversight of the quality of the provision that they deliver to students and apprentices. Leaders and managers carry out a range of activities, such as visiting sessions, reviewing students' and apprentices' work, and talking to students and apprentices. They rightly recognise that too many students on the 'engaging with the world around you' pathway do not benefit from a good quality of education.

Too many students on the 'engaging with the world around you' pathway do not benefit from sufficiently high-quality teaching and assessment. Teachers do not provide a sufficiently aspirational and well-sequenced curriculum that builds on what students already know and can do. Teachers and support staff have not attended appropriate training to develop their specialist knowledge in planning an effective and stretching curriculum for students with profound and multiple learning disabilities. Support staff have completed training in using technology and communication aids. However, too many of them do not apply this training effectively in using technology and communication aids. As a result, most students

on the 'engaging with the world around you' pathway do not make the progress of which they are capable.

Teachers and therapists work collaboratively to identify accurate starting points for students on most programmes. They use this information to develop individual timetables that include therapies, life skills and enrichment to meet students' education, health and care plan outcomes and long-term aspirations. Apprentices complete initial and diagnostic assessment at the start of their programme to enable trainers and assessors to identify their existing knowledge and skills. Trainers and assessors use this information to plan individual learning programmes for apprentices.

Students and apprentices on most programmes benefit from a well-planned and sequenced curriculum. For example, students who can write very short and simple sentences practise this over and over and then gradually progress to writing longer and more complex sentences. As a result, students and apprentices progressively develop their knowledge, skills and behaviours.

Teachers on most programmes use an effective range of instructions in word and symbol format to ensure that students can fully access learning and engage with activities. They use a range of assessment strategies well to check students' understanding. For example, they ask questions, and students answer verbally or use pictorial symbols to demonstrate their understanding. Teachers give useful feedback to students to help them to improve further.

Staff are well qualified. Leaders and managers have implemented a useful training programme for staff on most programmes to enhance their skills in providing effective teaching and support to students and apprentices. For example, staff attend training in supporting students with sensory needs and autism spectrum disorder.

Students on most programmes make expected progress towards the outcomes in their education, health and care plan. For example, they improve their communication and confidence to engage with the wider world. They learn to use communication aids effectively, which enables them to have a greater influence in the choices they make. Most teachers set realistic targets, and staff accurately assess the progress that students make. A few teachers set targets that are too generic, such as 'communicate with others', and do not monitor students' progress well enough against these targets.

Trainers and assessors deliver a curriculum that focuses on developing apprentices' leadership skills within their workplace effectively. As a result, apprentices build confidence quickly and are able to demonstrate many ways in which they apply new knowledge to benefit their colleagues and the students with whom they work. For example, apprentices now lead team meetings and mentor their peers, as well as implementing new handover processes to benefit their team.

Teachers support most students well to develop their understanding in English and mathematics. Students working below entry level 1 develop their skills through a wide range of activities at college and in the residential homes. Students who study functional skills English and mathematics benefit from sessions taught by teachers who are appropriately qualified to teach these subjects. However, the very small number of apprentices who are working towards functional skills qualifications do not benefit from a well-planned curriculum.

The transitions team in the college provides useful support and information to help students plan their next steps. The team works with external agencies to plan a smooth transition, including identifying where students will live when they leave college and how they can continue to carry out activities in the community, such as swimming. Students also work with an external careers adviser, who meets with them to discuss their long-term career aspirations.

Job coaches work with students to identify their employment aspirations and to arrange work placements and other work-related activities. Students attend internal work placements, such as in the bistro, the shop and the farm, and external work placements in venues such as cafes and shops in the community. Students undertake volunteering activities such as checking the golf course and clearing away leaves.

Staff provide helpful careers information to apprentices to help them plan their next steps while working at the college. Apprentices on the level 3 diploma in adult care have very clear ambitions to progress within the college. However, apprentices do not receive information about opportunities outside of the college and, as a result, are not aware of the wider options available to them.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The designated safeguarding lead and their deputies have carried out appropriate training to be effective in their roles. They implement comprehensive safeguarding policies to keep students and apprentices safe, including an appropriate safe recruitment process to ensure that staff are suitable to work with young people and vulnerable adults.

Most students and apprentices benefit from useful training about online safety and recognise that they should tell someone if they see anything that concerns them. For example, students who have experienced 'catfishing' discussed this with staff and decided to withdraw from the site. However, too many students and apprentices do not have a well-developed understanding of the potential risks of radicalisation and extremism. They cannot explain the signs to look for when someone is being radicalised or displaying extremist behaviour.

Most students learn about healthy relationships and consent through life skills or relationship and sex education classes. They learn about personal care, such as bathing, and know what to do if anyone touches them inappropriately.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Ensure that teachers and support staff who work on the 'engaging with the world around you' pathway attend training to enable them to teach and support students with profound and multiple learning disabilities effectively.
- Ensure that teachers who work on the 'engaging with the world around you' pathway deliver a well-sequenced curriculum that builds on what students already know and can do.
- Ensure that all teachers set targets for students that are specific so that they can identify the progress that students make.
- Ensure that all students and apprentices develop an appropriate understanding of the potential risks of radicalisation and extremism.
- Ensure that apprentices develop an appropriate understanding of British values.
- Ensure that apprentices learn about career opportunities available to them outside of college.
- Ensure that apprentices who need to study towards functional skills English and mathematics qualifications benefit from a well-planned curriculum.

Provider details

Unique reference number	131944
Address	Ullenwood Manor Ullenwood Lane Cheltenham GL53 9QU
Contact number	01242 527631
Website	https://www.nationalstar.org/
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Simon Welch
Provider type	Independent specialist college
Date of previous inspection	24 to 26 January 2018
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the interim director of learning support, 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

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