



National Star College



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Better
education
and care

Inspection report

Audience
Post-sixteen

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50004

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Basic information about the college

Name of college:	National Star College
Type of college:	Independent specialist residential
Principal:	Helen Sexton
Address of college:	Ullenwood, Cheltenham, Glos. GL53 9QU
Telephone number:	01242 527631
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Chair of governors:	Keith Anderson
Unique reference number:	50004
Name of reporting inspector:	Joyce Deere
Dates of inspection:	22-24 November 2005

Background of the organisation

1. The National Star College is part of the National Star Centre for Disabled Youth, a registered charity and company limited by guarantee. A board of governors, who are also trustees and directors, oversees the college. The college is situated in a rural area on the outskirts of Cheltenham. It is an independent, specialist college which provides for 148 residential and 12 full-time day learners, all of whom are between 16 and 25, and have physical disabilities and/or acquired brain injuries, alongside associated learning, behavioural, sensory and medical difficulties. At the time of inspection 156 learners were attending the college of whom eighty-five were male and 13 were of black or minority ethnic heritage. The college also offers part-time adult education classes to 200 local adults with disabilities and is currently offering a pre-modern apprenticeship programme for 14 students, including 9 former students.
2. The full-time educational provision includes a range of pre-vocational and vocational programmes at foundation and intermediate level, and a few at advanced level. 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. Almost half of the learners are studying on programmes that are at entry and pre-entry levels. Residential accommodation is offered in student houses at the main site and in Gloucester and Cheltenham. The Principal manages the vice principal and a team of seven departmental directors. Specialist staff include speech and language therapists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, assistive technology specialists and nursing staff. The college employs 461 staff.
3. The college's mission is 'to enable students to prepare for the best that adult life can offer through cost effective, innovative programmes of education, training and personal development'.

Scope of the inspection

4. In deciding the scope of this inspection, inspectors took account of: the college's previous inspection report (www.ofsted.gov.uk); the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans; comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC); reports from the inspectorate annual assessment visits; and data on enrolments and learners' achievements over the period since the last inspection. This inspection focused on the following aspects:
 - overall effectiveness of the college and its capacity to improve further
 - achievements and standards
 - quality of provision
 - leadership and management

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Good : grade 2
Capacity to improve	Good : grade 2
Achievements and standards	Good : grade 2
Quality of provision	Good : grade 2
Leadership and management	Good : grade 2

Note: Where contributory grades have been awarded, they are shown in the relevant sections of the report. Contributory grades represent the judgement of the team that the quality of the aspect of provision indicated by the grade differs from the grade overall.

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Good : grade 2

5. Achievements are good. Learners achieve their primary learning goals and a range of additional awards, although pass rates in literacy and numeracy have been low. Learners show a marked growth in self confidence and make excellent progress in communications. They contribute well to their local communities by raising awareness of disability issues. Rates of retention and attendance are very good and learners are punctual. The college does not collect sufficient data on learners' long term destinations.
6. Most lessons are good or better. The use of alternative and augmentative communication (AAC) and other therapies enables learners to participate well in classes. Lesson planning is good overall, although not all teachers plan well to meet the wide variety of learners' abilities. Improvements have been made to individual learning plans, but not all targets are meaningful. Imaginative project work continues to be good or outstanding. Teaching resources are mainly good. Pre-entry assessment is good, and the baseline has improved. Formative assessment needs further development. Members of staff focus well on learner safety.
7. The college's approach to social and educational inclusion is outstanding. The wide range of courses and the residential arrangements take full account of the diverse needs of learners. The promotion of equality of opportunity and diversity underpins all college activities and the college is compliant with relevant equalities legislation. The representation of staff from black and minority ethnic groups, and those with disabilities is good. Eleven per cent of learners are from minority ethnic backgrounds. Arrangements for providing learners with adaptive equipment are excellent. Arrangements for key skills and literacy and numeracy support are generally satisfactory, although progress in implementation has been slow. Comprehensive procedures are well established to promote the safety, well being and protection of individual students.
8. Multi-disciplinary support is outstanding. Therapists work together very effectively, and multi-disciplinary meetings ensure that staff are fully informed about individual learners. The quality of personal support is good with regular meetings between students and their personal tutors and key workers. The college has developed productive links with the local Connexions partnership and provides an easily accessible careers resource area.
9. Strategic leadership and planning are excellent and the quality assurance framework is rigorously applied to all areas of the college's work. Improvements in a few areas have been slow in demonstrating their impact on learners. The residential facilities meet the requirements of the Commission for Social Care Inspectorate (CSCI) for previously registered providers. The

college is outstanding in its promotion of awareness of disability within the local community. Governors are well informed and rigorously monitor the college's performance.

Capacity to improve

Good : grade 2

10. The college shows a good capacity to improve still further. The quality assurance framework is comprehensive and is applied across all areas of the college's work. Targets are set for continued improvement and plans for achieving these are detailed and realistic. Improvement planning is routinely monitored and, in most areas, is very effective, although improvement in a few areas has been slow in its impact. The self-assessment report is evaluative, and clear. It identifies many of the key strengths and areas for improvement.

The effectiveness of the steps taken by the college to promote improvement since the last inspection

11. The college has made good progress in addressing the key issues from the last inspection. Individual learners' communication systems have improved and these are used well to enable them to become increasingly independent. There have also been successful developments in educational and residential accommodation. Recording of learners' progress is more effective. The quality of provision for students who have complex needs has improved significantly. Implementation of the literacy and numeracy strategy has been slow.

Key strengths of the college

Strengths

- good achievements
- good focus on developing social and communication skills in classes
- good range of programmes
- outstanding multi-disciplinary support
- outstanding strategic planning
- outstanding promotion of disability awareness
- very effective governance

Areas for improvement

The college should address:

- the need for more information and analysis about learners' destinations
- the weakness in planning to meet fully the diversity of learners' needs in some lessons
- improving opportunities for realistic work-based activity
- the slow implementation of the college strategy for literacy and numeracy

Main findings

Achievements and standards

Good : grade 2

12. There are no differences between the achievements of different groups of learners. Learners make very good progress during their time at college. They gain a wide range of appropriate qualifications from entry level to level 3, and also gain additional awards. Seven former learners took part in a local employability programme and gained employment. However, too many learners have not achieved literacy and numeracy qualifications.
13. There are good opportunities for learners to progress between levels of courses in the college. Around 40% of learners progress in this way each year.
14. Learners show a marked growth in self confidence. They learn to work with, and alongside other learners and show sensitivity and respect for others. They learn to take more responsibility for themselves, and develop very good awareness of personal safety issues. Learners with behaviour that challenges are helped by the behaviour strategy team to deal with difficult issues, develop self control, work with others, and remain on task. Many learners make excellent progress in using a wide range of alternative and augmentative communication (AAC) devices to communicate with others, express themselves and become fully involved in college life. For some learners, the specialist equipment enables them to communicate effectively for the first time in their lives.
15. Learners make an important contribution to their local communities by supporting local firms in raising awareness of disability issues. They have taken part in a valuable project to provide advocacy for their peers and produced an informative newsletter for new learners.
16. Rates of retention and attendance are very good and learners are punctual. Of those who left in 2005, 60% moved into general FE colleges and 43% to independent living. However, the college does not collect sufficient data on learners' destinations over time, in order to measure the impact of the college programmes on learners' life chances.

Quality of provision

Good : grade 2

17. Inspectors found the college's judgement that most teaching and learning is good or better to be accurate. A key feature of the teaching and learning is the way in which all learners are treated with respect by the staff and show respect to each other and an awareness of each other's needs. The emphasis across the college on the improvement of social and communication skills is very effective. The use of AAC and other therapies enables learners to participate well in classes. ICT is well used by many learners as a routine part of teaching and learning, with adaptations for learners as required. The college

- has responded well to 'every child matters', which is used as a framework both for the personal development programme, which includes daily living skills, and the pre-entry and citizenship programmes. Lesson planning is generally good, although not all teachers plan well for the wide variety of ability in classes. Improvements have been made to individual learning plans, and the revised format has brought together the range of plans and guidance from the residential staff and the therapy teams. Learner targets have been reduced to a minimum. However, the college recognises that not all targets are meaningful. Practical and imaginative project work continues to be good, and learners participate well in these activities. Inspectors found the grades awarded in lessons to be mainly accurate, and agreed with the college that insufficient differentiation is a common key weakness in the less effective teaching. They also agreed with the college that the integration of literacy and numeracy is not yet fully developed, particularly where the targets are not owned by the staff in vocational areas.
18. Teaching resources are mainly good, particularly those that the staff have generated. Interactive white boards and equipment such as digital cameras are well used. Inspectors agreed that teaching accommodation for creative arts continues to limit activities. Pre-entry assessment is good, with an improved focus on requirements for therapeutic interventions and equipment. Inspectors agreed that the baseline assessment has improved, and provides a more reliable basis for measuring improvement. In many vocational areas, project-based assessments, are used which provide a good introduction to the courses to be studied. Assessing and reviewing of progress are satisfactory. Inspectors agreed with the college that formative assessment needs further development. Staff focus well on learner safety.
 19. The college provides a good range of courses, with levels appropriate to learners' needs and abilities. Additional subjects, some of which are externally accredited, are also available, as is a full range of therapeutic programmes. The college offers an excellent range of extended curriculum activities, organised on the main campus, in the off-site residences as well as in the local community. These activities are set as personal targets for learners. The college contributes well to learners' capacity to stay safe and healthy, and regularly plans workshops and training days to raise learners' awareness of issues such as drugs awareness and safeguarding. The work-experience placements are well-planned and of good quality. However, there are too few work placements for learners on vocational courses. The college recognises that the entry level provision needs a greater focus on realistic work-based activities.
 20. The college's approach to social and educational inclusion is outstanding. The promotion of equality of opportunity and diversity underpins all college activities. The representation of staff from black and minority ethnic heritage and who have a disability, is higher than in the local area. The representation of learners from black and minority ethnic backgrounds is good. There is a very clear and successful focus on enabling all learners to achieve their

maximum potential. Arrangements for providing learners with adaptive equipment, particularly for augmentative and alternative communication solutions, are excellent. Arrangements for key skills and literacy and numeracy support have improved, but are not yet fully embedded. Comprehensive procedures are well established to promote the safety, well being and protection of individual students.

21. Multi-disciplinary support is outstanding. The number of therapeutic staff has risen significantly. Therapists work well together, and are involved in all aspects for learners' progress, from pre-entry assessment to transition. Learner issues are discussed regularly in multi-disciplinary meetings that include personal tutors and key workers. Communication between all staff is good. Transition planning is satisfactory. A portfolio is prepared for each leaver, detailing his/her support needs and providing guidance about how these can best be met. This is useful for those working with learners when they move on, and continue to require assistive aids and adaptations. Inspectors agreed that the quality of personal support is very good. There are regular meetings between learners and their personal tutors and key workers. Targets are set and reviewed regularly. This support contributes very effectively to the progress learners make in their personal and social development. The college has developed very good links with the local Connexions partnership. Learners have good opportunities to make appointments with one of two personal advisers who are available to give careers advice and guidance. The college provides an easily accessible and dedicated careers resource area.

Leadership and management

Good : grade 2

22. Leadership and management are good. Strategic leadership and planning are excellent and the college's mission 'to enable learners to prepare for the best adult life can offer' underpins all aspects of development. The college contributes very effectively to local, regional and national initiatives, and has a very clear understanding of its role in the development of provision for learners who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. However, the implementation of a literacy, numeracy and language strategy has been slow. Communication within the college about plans and developments is very good.
23. The quality assurance framework is comprehensive and rigorously applied to all areas of the college's work. Observation of teaching and learning is routinely undertaken and is successfully used in planning for individual members of staff and wider aspects of college work. Overall, these observations match the findings of inspectors. The self-assessment process is effective and largely accurate. All staff are routinely involved in evaluating their own work, as well as broader aspects of college activities. A wide range of targets are set, particularly for learners' achievements and their progression to more advanced programmes. There are detailed plans to address any areas where further improvements can be made. The implementation of these plans is regularly monitored and most are successful. However, a few important

aspects, such as the expectation that all teachers should plan to meet the needs of all learners, and a greater emphasis on work-based activity for learners, have not yet led to anticipated improvements.

24. The induction of new staff is thorough and comprehensive. Particularly innovative is the use of both colleagues and learners as mentors to help new staff understand the requirements of their role. Appraisal and other aspects of performance management are well established and valued by staff. There are many opportunities for staff to develop further their skills and knowledge, including taking additional qualifications and sharing good practice across the college.
25. Staff are well qualified and their skills and expertise meet the needs of the learners well. There is a careful audit to ensure there is a good match between the requirements of the individual learners' schedules and the available staff. This has led, for example, to an increase in specialist support staff to meet the changing needs of students who enrol at the college. Teaching and learning accommodation and resources mostly match well with learners' needs, though the accommodation for creative arts limits possibilities for development. The residential facilities meet the requirements of the Commission for Social Care Inspectorate (CSCI) for previously registered providers.
26. Comprehensive procedures are well established to promote the safety, well being and protection of individual students. Learners have good access to advocacy and complaints systems. An excellent initiative has been the development of a peer advocacy service. Managers ensure that the student union makes an effective contribution to college developments.
27. The college meets the requirements of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 (RRA) and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 (SENDA). It is outstanding in its promotion of awareness of disability within the local community. Learners and staff provide very valuable information for other colleges and local businesses, to enable them better to meet the needs of people who have physical disabilities.
28. The college has good links with other local colleges, and with local business. Governors are well informed and rigorously monitor the college's performance. They regularly undertake training to improve their understanding of its work, for example, through shadowing students. Financial planning is good and the college provides good value for money.