

National Star College

Independent specialist college

Inspection dates

24–26 January 2018

Overall effectiveness		Outstanding	
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding	Provision for learners with high needs	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Outstanding		
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding		
Outcomes for learners	Outstanding		
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection		Outstanding	

Summary of key findings

This is an outstanding provider

- Senior leaders and managers have successfully sustained the culture of high standards, innovative working practices and excellent involvement of students in the life of the college. As a result, leaders and managers have maintained or further improved the strengths identified at the previous inspection.
- Resources for learning and the effectiveness of staff development are outstanding. Teachers and therapists carefully assess the needs of each student and put the necessary learning, therapeutic or physical resources in place. The strong investment in professional development ensures that all staff have the necessary skills, expertise and confidence to help students succeed.
- Governors are highly involved in the daily life of the college. They know their students well, listen to their views and act on their suggestions where appropriate. They scrutinise the work of senior leaders very effectively and use their experience and expertise well to support further improvements.
- Teachers and managers have very high expectations and ambitions for students that result in them becoming more independent and able to influence their future lives.
- Learning staff, therapists and other professionals work together exceptionally well; they ensure that all students receive a fully personalised programme where care, physical, emotional and learning needs are fully integrated for each individual.
- Students develop and maintain excellent communication skills. Staff ensure that a highly individual approach results in students improving their ability to express their choices and determine how they want to live their lives.
- Teachers, learning support assistants and other staff prepare students for adult life very effectively and, consequently, the quality of their lives improves. Students recognise their potential to develop and follow their interests.
- Students make excellent progress towards achieving their learning goals. In a minority of cases, this progress is not sufficiently clear in monitoring or termly review documents.

Full report

Information about the provider

- National Star College (NSC) is a large independent specialist residential and day college based in southwest England for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Approximately two thirds of the students are residential. A high proportion of students have complex physical disabilities and medical conditions; others have autistic spectrum disorder or other learning, behavioural, sensory or physical disabilities. The college provides a wide range of personal development and vocational courses from pre-entry level to level 2.
- The college was established in 1967 and is part of the wider National Star registered charity and company limited by guarantee. NSC recruits students from over 45 local authorities in England and Wales and, since the previous inspection, it has established further education provision in Hereford and Wales.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Leaders and managers should ensure that the progress students make and the new skills they develop are accurately and clearly recorded in termly reviews so that parents, carers and local authority funding commissioners can understand how well students are progressing towards their learning goals and aspirations.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- Senior leaders and managers have built on the strengths identified at the previous inspection very effectively. The nature and complexity of the student group have changed significantly over recent years. Leaders and managers have managed this change by careful planning, an ambitious vision and adapting the college's educational and residential environment very successfully. Leaders responded well to requests to develop educational facilities in other areas by establishing provision in Hereford, enabling students in this area to benefit from high-quality non-residential provision.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the college is very high. Senior leaders have invested heavily in excellent professional development for all staff. They support staff at all levels and encourage them to develop their skills and progress to higher levels of responsibility or new roles within college. For example, senior leaders have started a programme of supporting non-qualified nurses to gain a qualification. They will be working with a local hospital to offer nursing apprenticeships following the identification of a potential shortfall in the number of nurses in the college.
- Performance management is excellent. The recent restructuring of the senior management team has strengthened their individual roles and responsibilities. As a result, the principal is able to concentrate on continuing to raise standards and further improving the quality of the educational provision. She provides very good support and challenge to other managers.
- NSC offers a wide and very responsive range of learning programmes. Managers have created new programmes or adapted existing programmes as the complexity and severity of students' disabilities have increased. They ensure that students with the greatest barriers to learning make good or better progress. The most able students have a wide range of personal development and work-related opportunities to help them achieve their goals and to progress to the next stage.
- Students' involvement in influencing the work of the college and contributing to national activities is outstanding; for example, NSC students helped to establish the student parliament for members of the independent specialist colleges' representative body Natspec. They work closely with the National Union of Students, giving advice on how to involve disabled students more effectively. The student union provides very good representation for all students and makes a strong contribution to improving the college. For example, members of the union contribute to the induction of all new staff. They explain what life is like at the college and ask new staff how they will help students to be successful.
- All relevant staff promote and reinforce students' understanding of their rights and responsibilities very strongly; as a result, students develop a very good sense of fundamental British values. Activities to develop an understanding of fundamental British values are adapted well to meet the varied needs of individual students. All students are involved in electing members of the student council. Individual differences in the college and wider society are respected and celebrated.
- All staff promote and reinforce a culture of mutual respect and tolerance across the college. Students support each other well and have an excellent understanding of their

rights and responsibilities. Students' extensive contact with visitors and members of local communities helps them understand the importance of cooperation and consideration. They use local leisure facilities, libraries and shops; they also take part in cultural events.

- Managers monitor and report on students' progress, achievement and, where appropriate, participation in work-related activities well and ensure that no group underachieves or is disadvantaged.
- Resources to support learning are outstanding. The college invests significantly in each student, ensuring that they receive the medical, learning or physical resources they need to be successful. For example, students who find it difficult to use their wheelchairs all day continue to take part in learning by using a multi-positional learning station. This enables them to lie in a straight or supported position and still have access to their learning equipment. Staff work effectively with national and international organisations to create adaptations to commercially produced resources to increase their accessibility.
- Leaders and governors make very effective use of high-quality management information to set ambitious targets for the college, review students' progress and monitor the performance of staff.

The governance of the provider

- Governors provide a high level of support and challenge to senior leaders. They use their wide range of experience and expertise very effectively. During the period of restructuring, governors worked hard to ensure that all decisions were in the best interests of students.
- Governors are actively involved in the life of the college; they observe lessons, talk to students regularly and take part in professional development activities with staff. As a result, they make accurate judgements about the college's strengths and areas for improvement.
- The two student governors provide useful briefings for other governors and have a good level of involvement in governors' meetings. The recently revised advisory board includes students, ex-students and experts in disability. Following recommendations from students, the board is reviewing transport arrangements and has recommended that the college maintain better links with former students.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- A relentless focus on working and living safely and healthily ensures that students are protected appropriately in education, residential and community settings. Risk assessments are practical, strongly related to the needs of the individual and easy to understand. Students are involved in developing their own risk assessments, where possible.
- Senior leaders and all staff continue to give safeguarding a very high priority across the college. Recent developments include creating resources and strategies to help students gain a good understanding of sex and relationships; as a result, students know the importance of agreeing boundaries in relationships. Students know how to keep themselves safe.
- All relevant staff have an excellent, practical understanding of the Mental Capacity Act and, in particular, the implications for the students who are subject to Deprivation of Liberty

Safeguards (DoLS). College safeguarding experts have advised other specialist colleges on the use of DoLS and have usefully contributed to the parliamentary policy group reviewing relevant legislation. Staff make very good use of the Department for Education's guidance on keeping children safe in education to ensure that current practice is up to date and takes account of relevant developments.

- Members of the safeguarding team work closely with the Gloucestershire Domestic Abuse Support Service to improve its awareness of the needs of vulnerable young people who may be at risk of domestic abuse. College staff work very effectively with the local police authority, providing them with training on how to interact with people who have autistic spectrum disorder and avoiding causing additional stress or anxiety when they meet them.
- All staff understand the implications of the 'Prevent' duty for students at NSC, following good training and regular updates. Staff know which students are at greatest risk and the measures that need to be in place to protect them.
- The human resources team follows safer recruitment practices meticulously. Specialists or relevant experts attend recruitment interviews when leaders or managers do not have the necessary professional knowledge to judge the competence of candidates.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- Teachers and managers have very high expectations and encourage challenging ambitions for students. Teachers design and deliver engaging and demanding activities at a range of appropriate levels. Staff empower students to gain independence and establish their own individuality. Many students actively promote disability rights and participate in local and national campaigns for disability awareness.
- The comprehensive and thorough assessment of students' needs and interests ensures that students make a very positive start to college life. College staff often visit potential students at home or at their school. The very well planned taster days and residential assessment periods successfully help students prepare for college life. Students participate in a highly effective, wide-ranging, extended induction period over the first term to establish their needs and aspirations and to create a starting point so that teachers and therapists can measure progress.
- Teaching is very effective in stimulating students to learn and extend their skills. Students, where appropriate, successfully develop skills for employment by taking part in a range of enterprise activities; for example, specialised printing, producing works of art, greetings cards, coasters, tiles and other decorative items, and cakes and snacks. Students sell these items in the college shop and other retail outlets in the local community. Other students with the greatest barriers to learning successfully focus on developing their understanding of the world around them.
- Teachers effectively ensure that students understand and can apply the skills they have learned. In music sessions, students work very well together to develop a musical performance. Students use computer tablets linked to amplifiers with musical applications to generate the sound of different instruments. They grow in confidence, develop an understanding of others, and increase their ability to follow instructions, take turns and work with others.
- Education staff and therapists make very good use of adaptive technology to provide

solutions for students to gain access to their learning and their environment. Tablet computers, smart speakers and switch technology enable students to use the internet easily and safely and to interact with their environment. For example, teaching and therapy staff used a virtual reality headset to enable a student to simulate skiing. They designed a programme that successfully developed strength in his neck muscles and improved control of his head movements.

- Students make excellent progress from their starting points. Many progress to undertake work experience and gain an understanding of employment. Teachers and learning support staff record video diaries for students with profound and multiple learning difficulties. The diaries show significant progress over time in social interaction, turn taking and facial expression. However, in a minority of cases, teachers do not clearly record the progress students make in the termly reviews that parents, carers and the local authority representatives attend.
- Teachers integrate the development of English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT) very well into sessions. Creative and imaginative learning experiences develop students' confidence and competence in these areas.
- Overall, feedback to students on their classroom work is very good, highly constructive and supportive and clearly indicates what students need to do to improve.
- Staff manage challenging behaviour within the classroom very effectively. A team of professionals develops comprehensive management plans following a rigorous assessment of behaviour. These plans include early warning signs of poor behaviour, issues to avoid and strategies for calming students and minimising disruption. Staff are very confident in challenging inappropriate language; students know what language is unacceptable.
- The working together of therapy and education staff is exceptional; they develop very good strategies, aids and adaptations to develop students' independence and communication skills.
- Staff encourage and enable students to support each other. For example, a group of students worked together to develop sensory maps of a college residence for a fellow student with a sight loss. The map, printed on a 3-D printer enabled the student to find their way around the building. Another student identified an aid needed to help them hold and turn pages in a book; technology staff designed a modification for the aid and produced it for the student on a 3-D printer.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

- Students make enormous gains in confidence during their time at college. They improve their body posture, become less introverted and more determined in their learning. They gain new skills and realise their potential to take part in a wide range of activities, including learning how to ski, playing football, dancing, horse riding and swimming.
- Students improve their communication skills exceptionally well. For example, students with significant communication difficulties learn to use eye movements to signal choices or operate switches to use their communication devices. Where appropriate, students develop very good English skills, including reading, comprehension and spelling. They develop their speech well, including their use of social phrases, and extend their vocabulary. Many students become skilled at writing poems and develop skills of creative writing by using

technology.

- Students gain excellent skills in making personal choices and decisions. They gain a very good understanding of their individual value and of their rights and responsibilities. For example, a student now chooses to initiate personal care routines and only asks for help when necessary; previously, that student was completely dependent on others.
- Students respond well to the excellent information, advice and guidance they receive from the very knowledgeable transition team. All students have challenging and realistic plans for their next steps that relate to their interests well.
- Students make significant improvements in their health and well-being. They become calmer, reduce their levels of anxiety and improve their ability to concentrate on learning. Excellent well-coordinated support reduces students' stress levels and their behaviour improves. Students with epilepsy often find that during their time at college the number of seizures decreases and their lives become less dominated by the condition.
- Students' behaviour across the college is exceptional. They are able to manage their feelings and behaviour at work and in learning sessions. Therapists, nurses, care and learning staff are extremely well coordinated. Staff regularly share information and strategies that have a positive impact on students' achievements and well-being. For example, by using positive behaviour therapy, students who become agitated resume a calm state very quickly and are able to focus on learning, with minimal disruption to the rest of the group.
- Students gain valuable knowledge about healthy lifestyles, including dental care and personal hygiene. They learn to initiate or manage their own personal care very well. Students enjoy taking part in sport activities; for example, many improve their swimming skills and grow confident in the water.
- Students develop very good customer service skills through taking part in a range of realistic work settings within the college, including the college reception, the shop and the visitors' restaurant. Where they are able, students undertake challenging work tasters within the local community, including working on reception at the college, in a café in Cheltenham, at the local abbey, working with the police and at a national hotel chain.
- Students improve their mathematics skills well. For example, they learn to recognise coins and do simple addition. They can read and understand travel timetables, and work out when buses are due to arrive; they are proud of their ability to travel independently.
- Students learn the importance of fundamental British values and gain an excellent understanding of what living in a diverse society means. They improve their communication skills well and know the importance of listening, making eye contact and being polite. They become aware that everyone has different needs, and they learn to be tolerant of others and respect differences. Students are given the freedom to be themselves and develop at their own pace.
- Students feel safe and know whom to contact if they have any concerns. E-safety is promoted and reinforced very effectively through on-screen messages that appear at the start of every computer session and by staff discussing potential risks with students. Students feel nurtured and safe to express themselves honestly and in their own way. Where appropriate, they know how to keep themselves safe from radicalisation or extremist groups.

- Students develop very good personal safety skills. They gain confidence to go out in public places, negotiate their way through busy pedestrian areas, decide when it is safe to cross a street and, where appropriate, learn personal emergency strategies to ensure that they keep calm if a difficult situation arises.
- Attendance continues to be very high. Managers closely monitor attendance data and act swiftly to address any concerns. For example, a few students were late or absent from classes because they were waiting for someone to repair their wheelchair. Managers now ensure that wheelchair repairs are prioritised; consequently, these students are seldom late for lessons.

Outcomes for learners

Outstanding

- Almost all students make excellent progress from their starting points because of highly effective teaching and outstanding support. Students' targets are challenging and clearly linked to their long-term goals and aspirations. The vast majority make consistent and sustained progress towards achieving these targets. The very large majority of students achieve specific qualification units or awards linked to their learning programmes that prepare them well for independent living and/or employment. Nearly all students taking accredited qualifications achieve and, where appropriate, progress to the next level of learning.
- Outcomes for students have maintained the very high level achieved at the previous inspection. Many students with the most complex needs, with few or no communication skills, gain the ability to make choices, express preferences and make decisions about their care arrangements. They learn how to explain to medical staff where they feel pain or discomfort or indicate to college staff the best way to provide support.
- Education, residential and therapeutic staff prepare students for adult life very well. Students quickly become confident in using community facilities and develop the necessary skills to live as independently as possible. Students quickly learn that activities they previously thought were beyond their ability can be achieved with motivation, determination and the right level of support. For example, students quickly gain confidence and competence in driving their electric wheelchairs, having previously been restricted to manual chairs.
- Students with high levels of anxiety or poor mental health thrive at college. They learn to manage their anxieties and improve their mental well-being as a result of working with highly effective therapists, other specialists and sensitive staff who provide the right level of support and challenge.
- Students enjoy learning and get great pleasure in activities such as music, drama and sport. They develop new skills and make very good progress. For example, they enjoy expressing their emotions through playing instruments and singing.
- The most able students achieve a range of additional qualifications, including food hygiene, a sports leadership award, volleyball refereeing, first aid and managing personal finance. All students involved in the Duke of Edinburgh's award successfully completed their awards and a high proportion achieved a gold award.
- A high proportion of students, for whom it is appropriate, secure paid or voluntary work when they leave college as a result of a highly effective team of staff who work with local

and national employers, local authorities and organisations providing job coaches.

Provider details

Unique reference number	131944
Type of provider	Independent specialist college
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	192
Principal/CEO	Pauline Bayliss-Jones
Telephone number	01242 527631
Website	www.nationalstar.org

Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 or above	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
	14	159	3	13	1	-	-	-
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	-	-	-	-	-	-		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	-				-			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	None							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	190							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	None							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the head of learning programmes, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of students, parents and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning session, assessments and work-based activities. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

Inspection team

Nigel Evans, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Alun Maddocks	Ofsted Inspector
Penny Mathers	Ofsted Inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Raising concerns and making a complaint about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-ofsted. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Learner View

Learner View is a website where learners can tell Ofsted what they think about their college or provider. They can also see what other learners think about them too. To find out more go to www.learnerview.ofsted.gov.uk.

Employer View

Employer View is a website where employers can tell Ofsted what they think about their employees' college or provider. They can also see what other employers think about them too. To find out more go to www.employerview.ofsted.gov.uk.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/ofsted.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2018