

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: National Star College

Date of visit: 24 April 2008

Context

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, oversee the college. The 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 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.

Achievement and standards

What judgements can be made about success rates in 2006/07?	Significant progress
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Achievement of full and part awards is very good at 90% achievement of full awards and 100% achievement of part awards in 2006/07. All programmes perform well. Literacy and numeracy achievement was also 100%. The college has more closely focused on part awards this year and will report them more fully in its next self-assessment report. Achievement of additional qualifications such as photography, pottery, sports leader awards and swimming awards is also good.

What information does the college hold about the destination of leavers in 2006/07? What impact has the Lift off Log had on destinations?	Significant progress
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There were 53 leavers in July 2007 and 81% went on to mainstream further or higher education, or employment. This is an increase of 6% on the previous year. There is also an 8% increase in learners gaining employment in 2006/07. The other 19% of leavers were either in supported residential care or had returned home. Some of these learners have applied to local further education colleges to start courses in 2008.

Quality of provision

What evidence of impact is there of the embedding of literacy, numeracy and communication skills across the extended curriculum?	Significant progress
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College managers have significantly improved the way literacy and numeracy is embedded within the curriculum. The annual staff training programmes have included a strong focus from specialist literacy and numeracy staff on individual learner needs including how to work effectively with learners who are dyslexic. Extensive training has covered the development of strategies to embed literacy, numeracy and communications effectively. Training has been extended to include residential staff. More staff have successfully taken qualifications. Staff who support learners in their residential settings are able to do so more effectively. For example, when learners take part in trips they can link their learning in numeracy lessons to handling and managing money. If they have difficulties their facilitators know how to support them more specifically.

Since the last monitoring visit the newly introduced 'buddy' system has been developed well. Education staff are able to discuss specific issues with a literacy and numeracy specialist to gain appropriate advice and guidance. The co-ordinator for literacy, numeracy and communications has developed very good tailored and well designed learning materials for units within qualifications that are accessible for both staff and learners through the virtual learning environment. Teachers are better at planning and developing learners' functional skills alongside their learning for specific qualifications. The college formal observations of teaching and learning show that since last year the percentage age of teachers observed who had areas for development around embedding literacy and numeracy has reduced significantly.

What progress has the college made in improving the support for learning activities at weekends to help extend social and leisure skills?	Significant progress
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Since the last visit the college has made significant progress in the both the number of activities available and the way these are organised. Activities that take place at the weekend have increased by 50%. These include new activities such as a disc jockey club and a significant increase in the availability of swimming. A new Christian church service every Sunday is well attended. The student bar, which acts as an important meeting place, has increased opening hours at the weekend. The college has recruited a new team of leisure facilitators who support learners during any non-structured or timetabled lessons. This has enabled more trips from the college campus to activities within the local community. Trips further away from the college are becoming common place. The college has effectively enabled and supported learners involvement in developing these extended leisure activities. Some learners have recently registered on a volunteering programme that credits them with a

qualification following involvement in clubs and activities. Currently 45 learners have registered and 22 are actively engaged in supporting clubs.

What progress has the college made with the development of work-placement programmes?	Significant progress
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The college has made significant progress in developing work-placement opportunities and work related learning. There has been a 30% increase in work-placements in 2007/08. Learners now have work related targets on their individual learning plans and learners have an expectation that they will have work-placements. The breadth and focus of work related learning has improved. The college is making good use of a wider range of internal work experiences and there is good progression to external work-placements.

Good links have been made with employers and some employers are involved in the delivery of the preparation for employment programme. The college has also brought together the pre-entry and entry level programmes so life skills and work skills are covered by all learners across the whole course. Future plans include developing work experience in animal care and horticulture with a local college and the development of social enterprises. The college is also in the process of developing an employer engagement strategy.

Leadership and management

How effective is cross team training and what has been the impact for learners?	Reasonable progress
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There has been some good training for all staff on team working this year. The training emanated from some staff being unclear about their roles and responsibilities within teaching sessions. The outcome of the training has led to much improved staff relationships and better working between staff teams. Residential staff particularly are now more closely involved in the development and recording of learning in teaching sessions and in the residences. Therapy staff now work in the residences as well as in the college, thus ensuring learners have access to the therapies they need on a more frequent basis. The college has also introduced a new role of Personalised Learning Mentor (PLM) this year. There are three PLMs in post and there are plans for 11 more to be in post by September 2008. The PLMs have responsibility for around 12 learners and their personalised programmes. From September it is intended that the timetable for each learner will be better personalised and the PLM will have responsibility to ensure the programme is followed and that appropriate targets are set, monitored and recorded across the whole curriculum. The work of the PLMs, and the new model of personalised learning, are in the interim stages of development, and will be fully implemented across the college from September 2008.

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