



Arolygiaeth Ei Fawrhydi dros Addysg a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru  
His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales

**A report on the specialist college provision of**

**National Star in Wales - Mamhilad**

**Star College- National Star Mamhilad**

**Ground floor**

**Block A**

**Caerleon House**

**Mamhilad Park Estate**

**Pontypool Torfaen**

**NP4 0HZ**

**Date of inspection: October 2022**

**by**

**Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education**

**and Training in Wales**

## About National Star in Wales - Mamhilad

Name of provider	National Star in Wales - Mamhilad
Proprietor	National Star Foundation
Local authority	Torfaen County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of provider	Independent specialist college
Residential provision?	No
Number of learners on roll	11
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	
Start date of inspection	03/10/2022
National Star in Wales is a non-residential specialist further education college. It provides placements for 11 learners aged 19 to 22 years with a range of needs, including complex learning difficulties, physical disabilities and autistic spectrum disorder (ASD). This is the college's first core inspection.	

## Overview

National Star in Wales is committed to providing a calm, happy and nurturing environment that supports the well-being of its learners effectively. Staff support learners with sensitivity and develop valuable working relationships based on respect and trust. Nearly all staff develop a strong understanding of their learners and how to meet their complex needs well.

Learners benefit from a therapeutic team comprising speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, physiotherapy and well-being support. These staff work effectively with the wider staff team to ensure they develop an extensive understanding of each learner.

Most learners make strong progress in their learning from their starting points and in relation to their needs and abilities. They make effective progress in a range of important skills such as communication, social skills, and independent skills.

Recently, learning experiences have improved at the college to meet the needs of learners more appropriately. However, the college provides learners with a limited range of learning activities outside the classroom.

Staff use well established routines to promote learners' progression in important skill areas. However, the limited learning environment at the college restricts learners' ability to develop a sufficiently wide range of skills, including independent living skills.

Staff encourage learners to take interest and enjoy their learning. However, overall, the quality of teaching is too variable. Where teaching is good, staff have high expectations of learners. Where teaching is less effective, activities are not purposeful and are not matched well enough to the needs of learners.

The college has highly effective arrangements to ensure the safeguarding of learners and to promote a robust culture of safeguarding at the college.

The college is very effective in supporting learners to develop their own self-advocacy skills. They enable learners to contribute meaningfully to making decisions about what and how they learn, their well-being and how to keep themselves safe. This is a notable strength.

Leaders at the college have a clear sense of purpose. They communicate a clear vision for the college that focuses on providing an integrated approach to meeting learners' needs. The college is developing a worthwhile culture of professional learning, which is helping staff to understand and support learners' needs. However, opportunities for staff to develop their practice in relation to teaching and learning are at an early stage of implementation.

## Recommendations

- R1 Ensure that learning activities are purposeful and in line with learner need and aspiration
- R2 Broaden the range of learning experiences to ensure that these provide learners with meaningful opportunities to develop their independent living skills
- R3 Strengthen the professional learning offer in relation to teaching including opportunities for staff to observe practice in other settings

## What happens next

Estyn advises the proprietor to amend its current development plan to show what actions the college intends to take in response to the recommendations. It is also advisable to circulate this plan, or a summary of it, to all parents/carers at the college.

Estyn will invite the college to prepare a case study on its work in relation to empowering learners to contribute meaningfully to making decisions about how and what they learn, their well-being and how to keep themselves safe, for dissemination on Estyn's website.

## Main findings

### Learning

Most learners at National Star in Wales make worthwhile progress in their learning from their starting points and in relation to their needs and abilities. They develop a suitable range of skills that help to prepare them for their future lives. In addition, most learners achieve their personal targets. This is due to the valuable support and encouragement learners receive from staff.

Many learners make suitable progress in developing their communication skills. They pay attention, listen carefully, and respond suitably. Learners follow instructions and co-operate well with staff, for example when making snow globe baubles. A minority of learners, where appropriate, strengthen their communication appropriately by using resources and communication systems such as switches and symbols to express their needs and wishes. Learners who use speech develop appropriate oracy skills and the confidence to use these successfully in a range of situations. These include speaking assuredly to visitors at the college.

Many learners develop their social skills well during their time at the college. They work alongside each other, and, with skilful staff support, they transition confidently between activities around the college and, where opportunities arise, within the community.

Many learners improve their reading and writing skills in line with their ability. For example, learners match words and pictures to identify emotions, a few learners read adeptly from the board and can read simple instructions. Learners' writing skills range from prewriting skills such as mark making and overwriting to independent writing where learners write lists of party food or complete an application form with single words and short sentences.

Learners use their developing numeracy skills in a range of activities across the curriculum. Where tutors' planning identifies suitable opportunities, these skills gradually become more relevant to real life contexts. These activities include measuring and weighing ingredients to cook a healthy pizza and practising coin recognition when shopping.

Where appropriate, learners make sound use of information and communication technology (ICT) to support their communication and learning. They improve their digital skills suitably in ways that are relevant to their needs and abilities. For example, learners prepare attractive invitations to a party that they are planning. However, learners' wider progressive ICT skills are underdeveloped.

Many learners develop important independent living skills in areas that help them to move on the next stage of their lives. For example, they improve their ability to take responsibility to move independently from one part of the college to another. Most learners develop independent living skills in cookery sessions and visits to the college café and local supermarket. The majority of learners benefit from worthwhile opportunities to develop these skills during their work experience at Café Seren on the college grounds.

Most learners develop their creative skills well. They engage enthusiastically when experimenting with percussion instruments and actively participate in the dance club at lunch times. They work creatively with a range of materials such as clay, glitter and glue and create attractive decorations to sell at the Christmas fayre.

Many learners improve their physical skills suitably which helps them to keep fit and healthy. These activities include throwing a bean bag into a hoop, pushing a ball down a ramp and taking part in daily walks across the college site. The majority of learners benefit from access to a local gym.

Where appropriate many learners attain externally accredited courses in areas that generally reflect their needs and abilities well. This includes units on English, mathematics and independent living skills.

Over the last three years, when they leave the college, many learners have progressed to carefully planned placements, which include a local college, adult learning courses and day service providers.

### **Well-being and attitudes to learning**

The college provides a calm, supportive and nurturing environment that promotes the well-being of its learners effectively. Nearly all learners settle well when they join the college. They make beneficial progress in important skills such as independence and the development of social skills due to the skilled support that they receive from staff. Where appropriate they learn to manage their behaviours and emotions well, for example by accessing the college's relaxation areas or designated resources independently. Learners are tolerant of one another and are respectful of each other and visitors. They are confident to sit down and resolve disagreements positively, where these arise, through staff supported mediation.

Nearly all learners have positive and enthusiastic attitudes to learning. They respond well to activities and work happily and confidently with staff. Learners behave well in sessions and engage with their work effectively. They respond positively to encouragement from staff who understand the social and emotional needs of learners well. In the very few cases where learners become disengaged, they co-operate well with staff and return to their learning activities in a timely manner.

Most learners enjoy college life and participate well in sessions. They understand and follow routines appropriately and work positively with their peers to complete tasks independently or as part of a group. For example, they collaborate enthusiastically to discuss how they keep safe when walking in the community and discuss how walking is a worthwhile exercise when trying to stay healthy.

Learners enjoy participating in a range of activities at the college and in the community. These activities include film club, dance club, Tai chi and yoga.

Many learners develop a sense of responsibility and are eager to help others. Recently learners have raised money for charitable organisations and have donated items at the local food bank as well as helping to package items to share with families locally.

Learner voice is a notable feature at the college and a highly successful aspect of the college's work. Learners contribute meaningfully to a range of meetings that involve them, such as the risk assessment process for a new work experience placement. In addition, nearly all learners are involved in the creation of their care plans. They are asked to review the information included, and to express their opinions in ways that are appropriate to their ability. Nearly all learners have beneficial opportunities in the weekly "Chill and Chat" sessions to make decisions about aspects of life at the college, for example improving the environment and acquiring new resources such as a gaming chair for the college common room. In addition, learners contribute suitably to the development of the college through the newly formed student parliament. Learners are proud of their different roles and responsibilities and discharge them passionately.

### **Teaching and learning experiences**

Staff at National Star in Wales put learner well-being at the heart of their work. They support learners with sensitivity and develop valuable working relationships based on respect and trust. Nearly all staff develop a strong understanding of their learners and how to meet their complex needs well.

The college places a beneficial focus on learner well-being and behaviour. Staff are responsive to learners' emotional and behavioural needs. As a result, the college achieves a calm atmosphere, classes are well managed and nearly all learners engage positively in their lessons.

Leaders recently undertook a curriculum review, with the aim of developing learning experiences to better meet the needs of learners. As a result, upon entry to the college learners are allocated into teaching groups linked to their future aspirations. For example, one group benefits from work experience at a local foodbank. However, despite recent improvements the college provides learners with a limited range of learning activities outside the classroom. As a result, there are missed opportunities for learning, particularly developing those independent living skills necessary for future life.

The use of learning support staff is a strength of the college. They plan effectively alongside tutors and have a clear understanding of how to support learners' needs. They are positive role models and are active participants in learning.

Across the college, staff use well established routines to promote learners' independence throughout the day. For example, learners collect their own resources to complete sensory circuits sessions. Further, staff provide learners with appropriate opportunities to develop their independent living skills across the curriculum. For example, cooking meals in the college kitchen or shopping in the local community. However, the limited learning environment at the college and the narrow range of planned learning opportunities restrict learners' ability to develop a sufficiently wide range of skills, including independent living skills.

College staff provide learners with encouraging and informative verbal feedback. They correct misconceptions sensitively and use questioning effectively to support learners to recall their prior learning and apply it in new contexts. For example,

learners recognise colours and shapes whilst out on a walk or recognise important safety signs in the workplace and community.

Overall, the quality of teaching is too variable. Where teaching is good staff have high expectations of learners. They plan engaging sessions, work at an appropriate pace and provide learners with a range of opportunities to practice important skills. Where teaching is less effective, activities are not matched well enough to the needs of learners. A minority of sessions do not have a clear purpose. In these sessions activities and learning objectives do not link well enough and there is an over-reliance on worksheets. Further, in a few sessions staff do not consistently use learners' preferred communication methods to support their learning.

The college has appropriate assessment processes in place. However, the use of these assessments to plan progressively for learners' skill development over time is underdeveloped.

Reports to parents are a positive record of learner progress and link well to future aspirations. These are strengthened with the addition of important detail about learner progress across the curriculum as well in therapeutic sessions.

### **Care, support and guidance**

National Star in Wales is a nurturing community that meets the individual and complex needs of learners, including a wide range of healthcare needs, highly effectively. Nearly all staff demonstrate exceptional skill and sensitivity in meeting these needs throughout their work.

The college has developed an inclusive culture based on the values of tolerance and respect. Staff support learners to develop positive relationships with staff and their peers, showing mutual understanding and compassion.

The college has highly effective transition processes in place. Staff use an individualised approach to ensuring that learners feel safe at college and that staff are able to meet their needs well. Staff begin these processes at an early stage, collecting valuable information from learners, their families and previous schools. As a result, learners arrive at college feeling welcomed and understood and settle quickly into college life.

The college provides therapeutic assessments for all learners upon arrival, regardless of their placement agreement. This is a strength of their work. Learners benefit from a therapeutic team comprising speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, physiotherapy and well-being support. These staff work effectively with the wider staff team to ensure that they develop an extensive understanding of each learner.

College staff use information from the therapeutic assessments and transition arrangements effectively to create beneficial and comprehensive care and support plans for all learners. These detailed and highly personalised plans provide helpful information about how to support learners' needs whilst maintaining their independence and developing important skills. For example, they contain scripted



responses for staff to use when learners are feeling anxious. As a result, learners learn to manage their own behaviours and emotions well.

Learners have appropriate opportunities to learn how to stay safe and healthy. For example, they learn about people they can trust, public services and how to cook healthy meals. However, the college personal, health and social education curriculum is newly established, and it is too early to evaluate its impact.

Work to prepare learners for adult life is in the early stages of implementation. The college currently provides a limited range of work experience placements for learners.

The college has highly effective arrangements to ensure the safeguarding of learners and to promote a robust culture of safeguarding at the college. Experienced staff provide strong leadership on this aspect of the college's work. The college benefits from valuable support in this area from the National Star Foundation through access to shared training, high level expertise and well-established procedures across a wide range of safeguarding-related areas. As a result, all staff have a strong understanding of their own roles and responsibilities.

The college is particularly effective in enabling learners to have worthwhile opportunities to make their own contribution to arrangements to keep them safe, for example in the writing of risk assessments for visits outside the college, or to support their access to work experience placements. Weekly sessions with the college's safeguarding co-ordinator enable learners to explore aspects of safeguarding in ways that relate to them directly, and to identify their own strategies to keep themselves safe. This highly beneficial emphasis strengthens learners' understanding of these important matters and supports the development of their own self-advocacy skills.

### **Leadership and management**

Senior leaders provide effective leadership for the college. They place the college's core mission of enabling 'people with disabilities to realise their potential through personalised learning, transition, and lifestyle services' at the heart of the college's work. This shared understanding on the part of all staff permeates all aspects of the provision and ensures the college provides a supportive and nurturing environment. As a result of the college's close team working and effective multi-disciplinary approach, all staff have a strong understanding of the needs and abilities of learners.

The college is part of the National Star Foundation, and the college benefits from a range of services provided by this organisation and from its close links with National Star College in Ullenwood. This valuable support includes technical services, estate management, human resources, health and safety management, staff training and development, and financial support.

The strategic and operational leadership for the college in Wales is provided by the director of services and leadership team at the campus in Mamhilad. This experienced team provides secure leadership for the college, particularly in regard to meeting learners' physical, medical and emotional needs. In addition, leaders promote a highly successful culture of safeguarding across the college that emphasises suitably learners' own contributions to keeping themselves safe.

However, since the college opened in 2016, there have been four different education managers in post. This disruption, together with the challenges posed by the pandemic, has meant that the progress the college has made against the recommendations from previous inspections and its own strategic priorities has been inconsistent over recent years.

Leaders have a strong understanding of how best to use the college's resources. They ensure that learners are well supported, according to their needs, and that all learners, regardless of their agreed funding, have access to the full range of valuable therapeutic and specialist support provided by the college. The college has taken worthwhile actions to develop the learning environment to better meet learners' needs since the last monitoring visit. However, overall, the accommodation limits opportunities for tutors to plan successfully for learners to develop their independent living skills or to enable them to transfer these skills and develop them progressively in a range of meaningful contexts.

The college has reliable arrangements to evaluate its work and set purposeful and ambitious priorities for improvement. Self-evaluation and quality assurance procedures are well-established, and there are rigorous and suitably self-critical processes to quality assure its work. Leaders, supported by the quality lead for improvement for the wider organisation, have a clear understanding of the college's strengths and what needs to improve. In a few respects, self-evaluation does not take sufficient account of recent education reforms and approaches in Wales.

There are appropriate opportunities for staff to contribute to arrangements for self-evaluation, and staff are suitably aware of the college's priorities. These processes have helped to ensure that staff well-being remains a high priority for leaders. The college has taken beneficial steps to promote staff well-being, for example by promoting a staff well-being day and improving staff's terms and conditions. In turn, these actions have helped the college address challenges around recruitment and retention faced by education providers nationally.

The college's professional learning offer ensures that staff have a strong understanding of their roles and responsibilities and how to meet the physical and emotional needs of learners. However, opportunities for staff to develop their practice in relation to teaching and learning are at an early stage of implementation. The college enjoys strong relationships with other settings within the National Star Foundation and meets regularly with other colleges within the Welsh specialist college forum. Partnerships with other schools and colleges that work with a similar profile of needs in Wales are at an early stage of development. This means that staff have limited opportunities to extend their learning through partnerships with external providers outside the National Star organisation.

The college has effective systems to communicate with parents and carers on a day-to-day basis and to support the health and well-being needs of learners. These arrangements mean that parents and carers have worthwhile opportunities to contribute to their provision for their children and feedback on important aspects of the college's work. Formal arrangements to engage with parents after learners have joined the college and to consider their views strategically are underdeveloped.

The governing body and trustees provide valuable support. They draw on a wide range of relevant skills and experience and have a strong commitment to supporting the college's work. The link governor visits regularly and has a clear understanding of what the college does well and what needs to improve. As a result, governors and trustees fulfil suitably the role of holding the college to account as a critical friend.

## Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from parent/carer and learner questionnaires and consider the views of teaching and support staff through their questionnaire responses

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

- meet proprietors, college leaders and individual members of teaching and support staff to evaluate the impact of the college's work
- meet learners to discuss their work and to gain their views about various aspects of their college
- visit sessions and undertake a variety of learning walks to observe learning and to see staff teaching in a range of settings, including classrooms and in outdoor areas
- look closely at the college's self-evaluation processes
- consider the college's improvement plan and look at evidence to show how well the college has taken forward planned improvements
- scrutinise a range of college documents, including information on learner assessment and progress, records of meetings of staff and the supervisory body, information on learners' well-being, including the safeguarding of learners, and records of staff training and professional learning

After the on-site inspection and before the publication of the report, Estyn:

- review the findings of the inspection alongside the supporting evidence from the inspection team in order to validate, moderate and ensure the quality of the inspection

## Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the provider and from the Estyn website ([www.estyn.gov.wales](http://www.estyn.gov.wales))

The report was produced in accordance with Section 77 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000.

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Publication date: 06/02/2023