

Sector summary

Independent special schools

2022-2023



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Teaching and learning

What's going well

- Many schools provide a broad and balanced curriculum.
- Many pupils make sound progress in their learning.
- Staff across the majority of schools know their pupils very well and make good use of this to engage them in learning.
- A minority of schools enrich the curriculum offer with a range of engaging experiences outside the classroom.

What needs to improve

- In a few schools, learning experiences were not matched well enough to the needs of pupils.
- Assessment processes are under-developed in around half of the schools visited.
- Schools generally provide limited opportunities for pupils to develop their ICT skills progressively.
- The low attendance of pupils at a few schools hinders their progress.

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Care, support and well-being

What's going well

- Around half of the independent special schools inspected or visited as part of annual monitoring visits during 2022-2023 provide a nurturing environment for pupils.
- Many pupils settle quickly to their learning and engage well with their classmates and staff.
- Staff know their pupils very well and develop positive working relationships with them.
- Safeguarding is a strong aspect of the work of these schools.

What needs to improve

- There is an inconsistent provision of careers education and workrelated experiences across the sector.
- In a few schools, leaders do not ensure that policies related to safeguarding reflect Welsh Government guidance and the specific context of the school in Wales.
- In a few schools, leaders do not monitor the application of policies related to safeguarding well enough.

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Leading and improving

What's going well

- The majority of schools visited this year benefit from support and challenge from their wider organisation as part of quality assurance and improvement planning processes.
- Leaders at many of the schools visited have a clear understanding of their school's strengths and areas for development.
- At two of the three schools inspected, leaders have a clear vision for the school.

What needs to improve

- The majority of schools visited have had recent changes to leadership personnel. These have led to additional challenges in terms of communicating a clear vision for the school and establishing consistent goals and objectives, as well as developing strategies to achieve long-term improvements.
- In a minority of schools visited, self-evaluation processes lack rigour, and improvement planning does not focus sharply enough on the most important areas for improvement.
- Professional learning arrangements across a majority of schools visited do not have a suitable focus on teaching and learning.
- Learning environments sometimes restrict learning opportunities.

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Overview of recommendations from inspections and monitoring visits

28

Twenty-eight independent special schools were inspected or visited during 2022-2023

22

In 22 (79%) of the inspections and visits, recommendations were left in relation to leadership.

17

In 17 (61%) of the inspections and visits, recommendations were left in relation to teaching and learning experiences.

11

In 11 (39%) of the inspections and visits, recommendations were left in relation to care, support and guidance or well-being and attitudes to learning.

- Where recommendations were provided regarding teaching and learning experiences, the majority focused on the need to improve assessment processes, ensuring that they informed planning and supporting skills development, as well as improving the overall quality and consistency of teaching.
- Where recommendations were left in relation to care support and guidance, around half related to the need to improve the tracking and monitoring of individual pupil targets.
- Around half of those schools who received a recommendation related to leadership were given more than one recommendation in this area. Of the recommendations left in relation to leadership, a minority focused on strengthening quality assurance activity to focus consistently on the impact of teaching on learning.
- Three leadership recommendations were in relation to strengthening resources and the learning environment to ensure that it meets the needs of all pupils.

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Reflective questions

Questions to help independent special schools **reflect on their self-evaluation and improvement planning**

- How effectively do the school's arrangements to evaluate the quality of teaching and assessment capture the key strengths and areas for improvement across the full range of provision?
 - How well do quality assurance processes focus on the impact of provision on pupils' progress and well-being? How well do leaders use a range of information to identify areas for improvement?
 - When evaluating teaching, how effectively do leaders focus on how well it helps pupils make progress in their knowledge, skills and understanding?
 - How well do leaders use the results of quality assurance processes to monitor and evaluate pupils' progress, to improve teaching and learning?
 - How effectively do leaders plan for improvements in teaching? How clearly do plans for improvement set out aims and objectives, timescales and success criteria to evaluate progress in learning and arrangements for monitoring?
 - How effectively do leaders monitor plans for improvement? How well do leaders revise and adapt improvement plans in light of evidence from quality assurance processes?
 - How well do leaders link priorities for improvements in teaching to professional learning? How effectively do they evaluate the impact of professional learning on teaching and pupils' progress?
 - How well does the school allocate resources, including staff members' time, and input from partner organisations, to ensure the success of its improvement work?
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Effective practice

To read about individual providers that are working effectively in specific aspects of their work, visit our [effective practice summary page for 2022-2023](#)