

Sector summary

# Independent specialist colleges

2022-2023

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## Teaching and learning

### What's going well

- Many learners make steady progress from their individual starting points during their time at college.
- Learner progress is most notable in important skills such as communication, social, independence, independent living, and creative and physical activity.
- Many learners gain a range of relevant units of accreditation.
- Three colleges inspected make good use of their grounds to provide learners with meaningful practical activities.
- Staff develop strong and caring relationships with learners based on mutual trust and respect, which, alongside well-established routines, successfully underpins learning.

### What needs to improve

- Teaching is too variable across four of the five colleges inspected.
- Where teaching is less successful, it is not matched well enough to the needs of learners.
- At three colleges, teaching and the curriculum are constrained by the requirements of accreditation, or by an over reliance on set worksheets.
- At three colleges, assessment information is not consistently used to inform planning.
- Overall, provision to improve learners' skills is underdeveloped.

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## Care, support and well-being

### What's going well

- All five colleges inspected have a comprehensive understanding of their learners' needs, partly as a result of the therapeutic offer adopted by the colleges.
- Four colleges have appropriate person-centred transition processes to support learners when they join the college.
- Many learners develop important skills such as independence and social skills during their time at college.
- At each of the five colleges, staff have a strong understanding of their own roles in keeping learners safe.

### What needs to improve

- Arrangements for learners to develop important skills and knowledge to keep themselves safe are inconsistent.
- At three colleges, learner attendance rates are too low.

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## Leading and improving

### What's going well

- At three of the five colleges inspected, leaders have a clear vision which is well understood by staff.
- Each college benefits from valuable support from their parent organisations in important areas such as safer recruitment, quality assurance and ICT.
- All five colleges inspected provide a range of professional learning opportunities for their staff members focused on meeting the needs of learners, for example training on autism spectrum condition or trauma.

### What needs to improve

- Due to the specific circumstances of each college, there has been instability or a change in leadership at each of the five independent specialist colleges inspected this year.
- As a result of leadership changes, all five colleges have made inconsistent or slow progress against recommendations from recent inspections or monitoring visits.
- Too often, leaders do not make effective use of data at a whole-college level to evaluate their work.
- Four of the colleges have an insufficient focus on the specific Welsh context of the college.
- They generally make inconsistent use of Welsh Government guidance.
- At four settings, the professional learning offer does not focus strongly enough on teaching and learning.
- Two colleges have made improvements to resources and their learning environments since their previous inspection or visit. Despite this, three of the five inspections found that improvements were still required in these areas.

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## Overview of recommendations from inspections

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**Five independent specialist colleges were inspected during 2022-2023**

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All five colleges were given at least one recommendation in relation to teaching and learning experiences as well as at least one recommendation for leadership.

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Three colleges inspected had a recommendation in relation to care, support and guidance. Two colleges had a recommendation specifically addressing concerns about safeguarding or health and safety and, as a result, inspectors issued well-being letters.

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Two colleges had a recommendation specifically addressing concerns about safeguarding or health and safety and, as a result, inspectors issued well-being letters.

Other recommendations were related to improving attendance, the professional learning offer, strengthening approaches to personal and social education, strengthening communication strategies to meet the needs of learners, and improving the learning environment.

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## Reflective questions

Questions to help providers **improve the quality of teaching and learning**:

- How well do self-evaluation processes focus on the quality of teaching and learning?
  - How do you ensure that assessment information is used effectively to inform teacher planning?
  - How do you ensure that teacher planning meets the needs of all learners?
  - How do you ensure that teachers deliver a range of activities to develop learner skills across the curriculum?
  - How do you evaluate the effectiveness of teaching and the curriculum in helping learners to develop the skills and knowledge they will need in their future lives?
  - How are the results from the monitoring and evaluation of learner progress used to improve teaching and learning?
  - To what extent does professional learning provide opportunities for teachers and support staff to improve the quality of teaching?
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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](#)