

Sector summary

# Maintained special schools

2022-2023

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## Teaching and learning

### What's going well

- Each of the special schools inspected provided a broad and balanced curriculum that develops pupils' independence and enquiry skills well.
- In the most successful schools, they adapt provision and approaches to teaching to meet the changing needs of pupils.
- Overall, staff know their pupils well and use this information to plan effectively.
- Where practice is effective, teachers and support staff work well to plan and deliver a curriculum that takes account of a range of purposeful assessment information. This supports pupils well to make progress from their initial starting points.
- Overall, there are effective systems in place to track the progress that pupils make over time.

### What needs to improve

- The consistency and quality of teaching is too variable across three of the schools inspected.
- Where teaching is less successful, the purpose of feedback is not clear enough and it does not support pupils to make progress.
- In a few schools, communication strategies are not matched well enough to pupils' preferred means of communication.
- Tracking systems do not always allow schools to gauge the progress that pupils make.

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## Care, support and well-being

### What's going well

- Overall, maintained special schools continue to provide highly effective support for pupils.
- Person-centred approaches contribute effectively to pupils' well-being, engagement, and personal development.
- The well-established cultures and practices of strong partnership working, including supporting parents, ensure that the care, support and guidance provided by schools is generally highly effective.

### What needs to improve

- Schools generally had secure arrangements to support regular attendance. However, despite their best efforts, overall attendance remained below pre-pandemic levels.

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## Leading and improving

### What's going well

- In the most successful schools, leaders are capable and ambitious and set high expectations for both pupils and staff.
- Where the skills and capabilities of governors are used well, they act as highly effective critical friends to school leaders and are effective in using those skills to support improvement priorities.

### What needs to improve

- In a few cases, quality assurance and self-evaluation activities do not identify well enough how teaching could be improved. Where these activities are less successful, they do not focus well enough on the progress pupils make.
- Individual staff targets do not always link well enough to the whole-school priorities for improvement.
- Recruitment and retention of suitably qualified or experienced staff remains a challenge.

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## Overview of recommendations from inspections

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**Seven maintained special schools were inspected during 2022-2023**

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Six of the seven schools inspected received a recommendation in relation to improving self-evaluation and school improvement processes.

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Two schools were asked to ensure that their self-evaluation processes focused on the progress the pupils were making and the standard of teaching.

3

Three of the seven schools received a recommendation related to improving the consistency in the quality of teaching. One school has also been asked to ensure that feedback is relevant to pupils and helps them improve.

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In addition, three schools received a recommendation relating to the planning for the development of skills, for example digital and reading skills and Welsh language skills.

4

A further four schools received recommendations related to literacy, including appropriate approaches to communication.

In addition, schools were given recommendations to strengthen their tracking systems to clearly show the progress pupils make over time.

In one school, attendance was identified as requiring improvement. Across each of the schools inspected during the year, attendance had not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels.

Recommendations were made in two schools in relation to improvements to the learning environment, which included ensuring that these were appropriate for the needs of all learners.

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## Reflective questions

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

- Irrespective of the model of delivery, how well does the school's curriculum build systematically on pupils' existing knowledge, understanding and skills as they move through the school?
  - How effectively do teachers' planning and practice take into account the needs and interests of individual learners? Do they have clear objectives for pupils' learning? Do they use a range of approaches and resources to engage pupils' interest and plan effective and stimulating tasks for pupils?
  - To what extent do teachers analyse the outcomes of assessment to inform their future planning of lessons and the next steps in pupils' learning.
  - How meaningful is the feedback that teachers provide to pupils? Does this feedback address individual development needs and clearly explain their next steps?
  - How well does the school track the progress of pupils with additional learning needs against the targets of their individual plans taking into account their individual starting points?
  - How well do leaders and managers gather and analyse first-hand evidence of standards and provision, including the quality of teaching, the standards of pupils' work and the progress pupils make?
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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](#)