# Section 2

# Sector summaries: Independent mainstream schools

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## Context

In January 2019, there were 38 independent mainstream schools in Wales, three more than in January 2018. These schools educate about 8,500 pupils. This is around 2% of pupils in Wales. This year, we inspected six independent mainstream schools. One of these schools is an all-age school, two educate pupils aged 3 to 16 years, one educates pupils aged 3 to 14 years, one educates pupils aged 9 to 18 years, and one provides education for pupils aged 10 to 20 years. This sample reflects the diversity of schools within the sector, with some catering for pre-statutory school age children and others extending into post-16 provision. The findings from all inspections have informed this report.

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### Compliance with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003

In independent schools, we inspect the extent to which the school complies with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003 (National Assembly for Wales, 2003). This year, five of the six schools inspected met all of the regulations. In one school, we identified shortcomings in compliance with a few regulations relating to the quality of education provided and the welfare, health and safety of pupils. We will monitor this school to ensure that it makes the required improvements to maintain registration. We carried out follow-up monitoring activities with the two schools that had not met all of these regulations in 2017-2018. Both of these schools have taken appropriate actions and now comply fully with the regulations.

### Standards

In half of the six independent schools inspected this year, standards are good or better. While this appears weaker than last year's position, the sample size of schools inspected is too small to draw conclusions from this about the sector as a whole.

There are excellent features in pupils' standards in two of the schools. In these schools, pupils develop a particularly secure understanding of subject knowledge and make strong progress in improving their skills and applying their understanding of key principles and concepts to new contexts. Pupils ask thoughtful and pertinent questions to extend their understanding or to challenge others' views. Older pupils read and respond confidently to an increasingly complex range of texts. Many are able to analyse the use and impact of language particularly well, for example when drawing inferences from 'Pride and Prejudice' to explore gender stereotypes. As they progress through the school, pupils become extremely secure in their mathematical skills. They apply these skills effectively to support their learning in subjects across the curriculum, for example when employing their measuring skills in science or making calculations in astronomy.

Where standards are unsatisfactory, pupils do not make enough progress in developing their knowledge and skills. Pupils do not read with expression or always understand what they have read and, in their writing, pupils make frequent spelling and punctuation errors. This includes repeated mistakes in spelling commonly used words and subject specific terminology. In addition, pupils do not apply their mathematical skills accurately in numeracy tasks across the curriculum.

### Wellbeing and attitudes to learning

In five of the six schools inspected this year, wellbeing and attitudes to learning are good or better. There are excellent features in two of the schools. In these schools, pupils are exceptionally eager to succeed and develop key attitudes and behaviours that will help them to learn throughout their lives. Pupils participate enthusiastically in a wide range of learning opportunities and develop increasing confidence as ambitious, independent learners. They demonstrate a curiosity in their learning and a tenacity in overcoming challenges, and they fully understand that errors are useful learning opportunities.
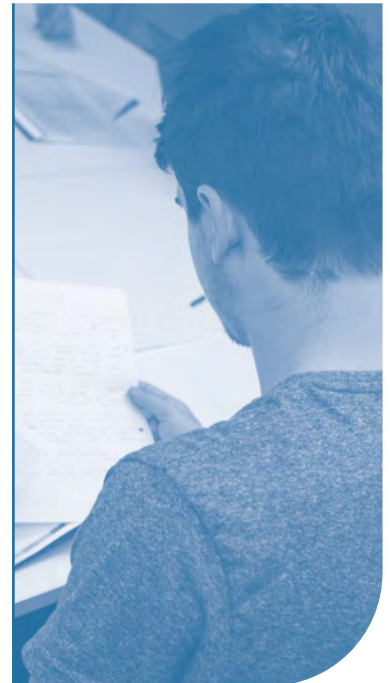
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Pupils enjoy and value highly their participation in activities and extra-curricular clubs, including innovative learning opportunities through the outdoors programme in one school. Pupils develop strong resilience and beneficial personal and social skills through participating in this programme.

In the best practice, pupils develop valuable leadership skills through their involvement in a worthwhile range of roles and responsibilities. For example, pupils become sports ambassadors, establish a science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) society or organise community events.

Where wellbeing and attitudes to learning are not a strength, pupils rely too heavily on adult support when they find tasks challenging, rather than thinking things through for themselves. In addition, they do not have positions of responsibility or leadership roles and therefore do not influence the work of the school.

## Teaching and learning experiences

In two of the schools inspected, teaching and learning experiences are good or better. In these schools, the curriculum is tailored to the needs of pupils well and builds systematically on pupils' knowledge and skills as they move through the school so that they become confident, ambitious, aspirational and well-informed learners. Pupils have extensive opportunities to extend their learning additional activities, such as field trips, sports events, design challenges and foreign exchange visits. These opportunities develop pupils' personal and social skills as well as providing opportunities to demonstarte their imagination and creativity.

In five of the six schools inspected, one of the recommendations relates to improving teaching. Where teaching is strong, teachers convey their passion and enthusiasm for the topics taught, which in turn inspires their pupils. Teachers provide clear explanations and target questions precisely to assess pupils' learning. Extremely helpful verbal and written feedback ensures that pupils understand how to improve their work.

In the schools where teaching is less successful, this is often because learning activities do not meet the needs of all pupils and the teaching lacks pace and challenge. In these schools, the quality and impact of teacher feedback vary too much and do not contribute well enough to improving the quality of pupils' work.

## Care, support and guidance

In five of the six schools, care, support and guidance are good or better, with excellent features in one school. Where practice is exceptional, committed staff provided extremely high levels of support within and beyond the classroom to help pupils to develop their self-confidence and important life skills, such as self-reliance. The extensive arrangements to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development foster values such as respect, tolerance, kindness and compassion. These values are evident in practice across the whole school community.

**Myddelton College**

To interest pupils in the outdoors and physical activity, Myddelton College created a 'Learning Through the Outdoors' programme. Activities include mountain walking, navigation, climbing and water sports, making use of their proximity to Snowdonia.

For more information, please read our **case study**

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