

Special schools

A briefing paper for section 5 inspectors

Age group: All

Published: September 2009

Reference no: 090162

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester M2 7LA

T: 08456 404040
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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Introduction

Inspectors should have received additional training provided by Ofsted based on the 'learning difficulties and/or disabilities/special educational needs and/or disabilities' training materials¹ **before inspecting special schools**. This guidance is for quick reference only and is based on issues that are frequently identified through retrieval.

Background

What is a special school?

Special schools are schools that cater wholly or mainly for children with statutory statements of special educational needs (SEN) or they may be hospital schools catering for pupils with medical needs. This guidance is for maintained and non-maintained special schools. Independent special schools are inspected using the independent school framework S162a.

There are many different types of special school. Schools are asked to categorise their pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities into four groups based on the SEN Code of Practice (2001). It is worth remembering that there are no national criteria for the definitions used to identify need, and a pupil assessed to have moderate learning difficulties in one school or area may be deemed to have severe learning difficulties in another school or local authority. Qualified teachers, employed by a school to teach a class of pupils who are hearing impaired, visually impaired or both hearing and visually impaired must, in addition to holding QTS, obtain an additional Mandatory Qualification (MQ) approved by the Secretary of State.

In addition to this, some hospital schools are designated as special schools as they mostly provide education for pupils with medical needs. Some pupils are admitted for a short term but others have long term placements as their needs dictate. The pupils receiving education from hospital schools include those who are physically ill or injured, pupils with anxieties, depression and phobia, and those who require support from specialist mental health services. *More information is available in the training materials for inspectors.*

Specialist special schools

Specialist special schools specialise in a curriculum area or in one of the **four** specialist areas: communication and interaction; cognition and learning; behaviour, emotional and social difficulties; sensory and/or physical needs. Inspections should follow the same protocols as they do for specialist mainstream schools.

Comment [DP1]: Five specialist areas are listed.

Comment [j2]: There are 4 just had the wrong punctuation between behaviour and emotional

¹ Interactive training materials sent electronically to all HMIs and to additional inspectors via the ISPs.

Before the inspection

In order to check that the tariff and expertise on the team are appropriate for the inspection **find out:**

- the range of needs catered for by the school
- the type/s of language/communication systems used within the school
- the number of key stages at the school
- number of sites used including those that are co-located with mainstream
- if the school runs any outreach services particularly for dual registered pupils

All special schools have access to RAISEonline and those with pupils working on 'expected' National Curriculum levels for their age (around 40% of Key Stage 2 special schools, 60% of Key Stage 3 special schools and 70% of Key Stage 4 special schools) are able to make use of the majority of RAISEonline analysis tools to support school improvement and self evaluation. Further developments in the availability of data for pupils working below expected levels in RAISEonline are expected over the next few years.

Inspectors need to be aware that in 2008 and 2009:

- RAISEonline only reflects pupils working on 'expected' National Curriculum levels for their age, in a special school this may be all pupils, no pupils or any number in between
- RAISEonline scatter plots for VA and CVA may use compensatory APS scores for some pupils (this may or may not reflect an accurate level for the pupil)
- There is no statutory moderation of P-scales
- Data analysis of achievement will require further investigation with the school as schools use a variety of different commercial schemes (more information in the training materials) for those pupils attaining low National Curriculum levels and P-scales. The national strategies 'Progression Guidance 2009-10' offers some national analysis for the first time in 2009.
- If the school quotes DCSF performance data ask which pupils it includes. **Be aware this figure can be very misleading as it will not necessarily include all pupils in a year group.** Those that are attaining below certain levels are not included.

During the inspection

This section assumes inspectors have already given regard to usual inspection practice and have had additional training.

Outcomes for individuals and different groups of learners

Inspectors should:

- analyse the outcomes for different groups, they are often small but patterns over time can be a good indicator of differences in outcomes.
- if the school describes a change in population (usually that they are admitting pupils with more complex needs) ask what has the school changed in its provision to adapt to this increase in need? (A change in population may show a difference in the levels that pupils reach at the end of a key stage but should not necessarily reduce the rate of **progress** expected).

Judging attainment

It should not be assumed that standards in a special school are below those expected of pupils of a similar age nationally. For some this may well be the case but for others it may not. This is reflected in the supplementary guidance in the evaluation schedule.

Inspectors should:

- not hold preconceived notions about pupils' abilities.
- check on the attainment of pupils on admission to the school and their current attainment level
- describe the standards of different pupils in the text of the report if there is a significant difference between groups that cannot be fully explained by the grade or * given in the IJF.

Judging the quality of pupils' learning and their progress

Inspectors should:

- not make judgements by category of need
- use pupils' ages and starting points (baseline) alongside the time pupils have been receiving specialist support/been at the school to analyse progress
- maintain high expectations of learning for all pupils in lesson observations
- not assume pupils always need adult help. In the evaluation schedule the criteria 'Too many pupils fail to work effectively unless closely directed by an adult and give up easily' can be as relevant in special schools as in any other school.
- find out about moderation procedures for assessing against P-scales (at minimum this should be across the school, best practice is across local authority/region/or group of schools)

- not use success against individual education plan (IEP) targets as substantial evidence contributing to making the achievement judgement. It is often unhelpful to explore IEPs in depth on inspection as it is difficult to evaluate how challenging the targets are and therefore conclusions cannot be drawn.
- be aware of [National Strategies' progression guidance 2009-10](#) and the associated data sets.

The extent to which pupils feel safe

In many special schools communicating with pupils during a short meeting as an unfamiliar person is difficult and inspectors may need to find different ways of gathering evidence to make this judgement. For example, investigate views sought by the school but ensure due regard is given to how the school seeks these views. Best practice frequently uses independent advocates. It is important to remember, within this judgement, the effectiveness of care, guidance and support and the safeguarding judgement, that UK evidence indicates that disabled children are at increased risk of abuse and the presence of multiple disabilities appears to increase the risk of both abuse and neglect (Source: Working Together to Safeguard Children, 2006 (paragraph 11.28)).

Inspectors should:

- give high emphasis to the criteria 'Pupils know about the main risks they might face and understand how these risks may threaten their own and others' safety' in the evaluation schedule. This should include risks outside school and in the future.

Behaviour

Where behaviour and social skills are significant needs inspectors should:

- analyse the school baselines for all pupils, and review targets for improvement
- find out if pupils are learning to behave in socially acceptable ways and make appropriate choices about their own behaviour. It is not acceptable for behaviour to be over-reliant on adult control over time
- **examine behaviour tracking** and the school's analysis of this in making judgements about behaviour, particularly as some pupils may not be present on the day of inspection.

Pupils' attendance

Inspectors should:

- consider attendance in relation to national levels for all schools

The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships

Inspectors should:

- consider the flexibility and range of the curriculum to meet the needs and interests of all the pupils including enabling sufficient choice (equitable to choice for mainstream peers) of subjects and qualifications particularly at Key Stage 4
- make sure the curriculum helps to raise aspirations and does not present 'glass ceilings' for any pupil
- make sure everything the school does is 'educationally justifiable' (and ensure staff can explain how)

The effectiveness of care, guidance and support

Inspectors should:

- challenge the assumption that additional adult support always improves progress for pupils and investigate the outcomes of any additional support or intervention thoroughly
- ensure pupils are at the centre of decision making by being well prepared and supported in making decisions as well as being involved in meetings where decisions about their future are made

Writing the report

- Language used should promote disability equality and reflect a positive image of disabled people in line with the DDA and Ofsted's communication policy
- The description of the school should clearly reflect the range of needs of pupils at the school
- Inspectors should comply with Ofsted's Accessibility: good practice guide and notify the RISP when an inspection letter to pupils needs to be made available in an alternative format or translated.
<http://intranet/NR/ronlyres/73BF1695-FC49-4A23-AF43-D457D3B425D1/0/accessibilityGoodPracticeGuide.doc>