

Castledon School

Inspection report

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|--------------------------------|---------------------|
| Unique Reference Number | 115461 |
| Local Authority | Essex |
| Inspection number | 357754 |
| Inspection dates | 10–11 November 2010 |
| Reporting inspector | Judith Charlesworth |

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

| | |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| Type of school | Special |
| School category | Community special |
| Age range of pupils | 4–16 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 140 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Nan Ashkettle |
| Headteacher | Carole Ritchie |
| Date of previous school inspection | 10 January 2008 |
| School address | Bromfords Drive Essex SS12 0PW |
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. Fourteen lessons were observed taught by 13 teachers and a teaching assistant. Meetings were held with a group of pupils, staff and members of the governing body. The inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at a wide range of documentation including that relating to safeguarding, pupils' academic progress and personal development, curriculum and lesson planning, school improvement and the school's specialist status. Thirty one parental inspection questionnaires were returned and analysed, as were those submitted by school staff and pupils.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following.

- Does the school's new provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage meet their needs and the statutory requirements?
- How are the assessments of pupils' academic and non-academic skills used in the planning processes for the curriculum, teaching, learning and personal development?
- What is the nature of the innovative curriculum that is designed to meet the particular needs of the pupils?
- How is the school's specialist status improving its work and pupils' outcomes?

Information about the school

Castledon is a larger than average special school situated in a residential area near Basildon. It provides mainly for pupils who have moderate learning difficulties, although a small number have severe learning difficulties. All pupils have at least one additional need. The most prevalent of these are autistic spectrum disorder and behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Many pupils have challenging behaviour. Pupils join the school at any age and all have statements of their special educational needs. Almost all pupils are of White British heritage and seven pupils are looked after. Provision for the Early Years Foundation Stage is new and there are six children of Reception age, all admitted this academic year. Castledon is one of Essex local authority's six Community Learning in Partnership schools and provides outreach support and training to a number of local schools. The school has Healthy Schools status and has just gained specialist status for cognition and learning.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

Castledon is an outstanding school because it puts preparation for pupils' future well-being at the heart of its work. This is expressed in its motto 'Learn to Live'. The school has improved considerably in all areas since its last inspection. Rigorous self-evaluation has underpinned continual self-review and change to improve pupils' outcomes. In particular, this has led to their outstanding progress in personal development and the provision of an outstanding, rich curriculum with life skills as a central component. The school's specialist status reinforces this drive and is already supporting improvement in the school's work and support for other schools. The new provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage is good. It benefits from the school's robust policies and practices and children have a good start to their education. However, documented planning does not show a suitable balance between adult-directed activities and child-initiated, play-based activities that complement, extend and supplement them.

Clear, effective plans and strategies underpin improvements in pupils' behaviour and achievement. Castledon has many partnerships with professionals and organisations which support and enhance pupils' outcomes. Consequently, pupils enjoy school, their behaviour is good and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Teaching and learning are good overall, with outstanding elements in most lessons. The assessment of pupils' skills is used extremely well to set targets and plan curriculum development. Consequently, pupils' academic progress is good, particularly in mathematics and science, although progress in English is more variable. The school is already working to improve this by focusing on developing pupils' speaking and listening skills throughout the curriculum.

The senior leaders' ambitions for pupils' academic success and future well-being are shared by staff at all levels. Staff welcome the opportunity to develop their skills and take responsibility for school-wide initiatives, such as the promotion of community cohesion. They effectively demonstrate the school's principle of 'working together helps problems get better' and staff speak convincingly about the cohesiveness of the school and the help they receive from one another. Governance is good. The governing body holds the school to account for its performance, based on the plentiful information provided. The school's effectiveness is underpinned by robust, well-implemented and regularly reviewed policies and practices. These ensure, for example, that procedures to safeguard pupils and assure they have equal opportunities and do not experience discrimination are outstanding. The school's data analysis shows that the quality of provision and pupils' outcomes are improving consistently. On the basis of its rigorous self-evaluation, and continual improvement in practice and pupils' outcomes, the school's capacity for sustaining further improvement is outstanding.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage by developing curriculum planning to include child-initiated, play-based activities that complement, extend and supplement adult-directed activities, in each area of learning, inside and outdoors.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Pupils' attainment on entry is understandably low. Rigorous procedures to assess and track pupils' developing skills indicate that the majority make good progress in most subjects, and outstanding progress in personal development. Data show that there are no differences in the progress made by pupils from different groups, such as those with autistic spectrum disorder or who are looked after. However, analysis indicates that pupils achieve better if they join the school at a young age with lower-level skills. This is because pupils who enter the school in or approaching Key Stage 3 and above often have considerable additional needs, such as challenging behaviour. These pupils have to learn to enjoy and benefit from school. Nevertheless, all pupils gain suitable accreditation by the end of Key Stage 4, including the Employability Charter Award which supports their future well-being very effectively. Learning in lessons is good, and, when teaching is at its best, it is outstanding. This is shown by pupils' willingness to work, good behaviour and their keen enjoyment of lessons and pleasure in their own success. This was seen, for example, when a group of pupils watched staff role-play a shopkeeper and customer in a greengrocer's shop with delight, and then all shot up their hands to become a customer themselves.

Pupils say firmly that they feel exceptionally safe in school and know who to turn to if in need. They respond very well to the school's many strategies to help them make healthy choices. Most learn to overcome their challenging behaviour, which supports their emotional and mental health. Pupils' confidence and self-esteem grow as they learn to enjoy school, contribute to its everyday work and to ventures in the community, and achieve success. They develop qualities such as compassion, supported by the strong curriculum for personal, social and health education. The pupils understand the difference between right and wrong and give their views freely on a wide range of issues. They enjoy talking to visitors, for example, spontaneously taking the opportunity to tell them what they particularly like about school. Pupils learn about the range of different cultures across the country and the wider world through the school's innovative curriculum. This includes first-hand experience, for instance, by visiting the bustling, multi-cultural Camden market and by taking part in the 'What's so Great about Britain?' day.

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Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

| | |
|---|----------|
| Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning | 2 |
| Taking into account: | * |
| Pupils' attainment ¹ | |
| The quality of pupils' learning and their progress | 2 |
| The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress | 2 |
| The extent to which pupils feel safe | 1 |
| Pupils' behaviour | 2 |
| The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles | 1 |
| The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community | 1 |
| The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being | 1 |
| Taking into account: | |
| Pupils' attendance ¹ | 2 |
| The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | 1 |

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

* In some special schools inspectors do not make a judgement about attainment in relation to expectations of the pupils' age.

How effective is the provision?

Teaching has many good attributes, which are prevalent in almost all lessons. The most significant of these include:

- detailed individualised planning to meet each pupil's needs
- very effective questioning which assesses whether pupils understand what is being taught
- the use of information and communication technology (ICT), such as providing laptop computers for pupils' daily use to research, record and present work, which they enjoy very much
- immediate reward and reinforcement for the achievement of a personal target so that pupils are clear when they are doing well.

Occasionally, less effective elements such as the lack of suitable behaviour management for low-level disruption or a flat delivery reduce the quality of teaching. However, there is also a significant amount of outstanding teaching which combines the effective aspects to an inspirational level. This teaching is mirrored in the pupils' responses. It results in exemplary behaviour and attitudes, a keen motivation to work, and outstanding progress

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in the lesson. Pupils' assessment is rigorous and information is used extremely well to set up support and interventions, write lesson and personal learning targets, and to contribute to the bigger picture of curriculum planning.

The renewed life skills curriculum is taught through themes which combine subjects and allow pupils to learn through practical, engaging topics and activities. Planning is rigorous and learning objectives for individuals are clearly identified. The curriculum emphasises the development of key skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT, and ICT is used as much as possible for presentations, writing and research to prepare pupils for its use in adulthood. The curriculum is enhanced by practical work in the community, numerous visits and visitors, and 'inspiration days' to introduce new topics in an exciting, memorable way. Learning about the world of work is part of the whole school's curriculum, and gives pupils suitable real-life experiences such as contributing to the community, college and work experience at the appropriate age.

The school is inclusive and classes include pupils with a wide range of needs. Outstanding consideration is given for each pupil's well-being. This ensures that all are very effectively safeguarded, carefully monitored, and provided with support as necessary. Strong links with Connexions reinforce the school's outstanding work to prepare pupils for adulthood. Pupils' individual behaviour plans are very effective and challenging behaviour reduces quickly. Individual education plans provide clear, well-written targets that pupils know and understand because they are constantly referred to and rewarded. Parents are given considerable support, and questionnaire returns show that the great majority are happy with the school's provision.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

| | |
|--|----------|
| The quality of teaching | 2 |
| Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning | 1 |
| The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships | 1 |
| The effectiveness of care, guidance and support | 1 |

How effective are leadership and management?

Senior leaders are ambitious for pupils' adult lives, and equally ambitious for the staff and their well-being. Frequent consultations and self-evaluative reviews ensure that staff at all levels share the school's drive for excellence and play a full part in working to achieve it. Since the last inspection, a number of successful innovations and changes to the way that the curriculum is planned and taught have been introduced. Some of these are included in the school's bid for specialist status and are already implemented with positive effect, such as the introduction of new courses that lead to relevant qualifications. There has also been an increased emphasis on personalised planning which ensures that pupils have equal opportunities for learning and a successful future. Staff performance management is supportive and rigorous. Continuous professional development is central to the school's

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success, and where possible, the school's own staff are used to share their skills with colleagues.

The governing body provides good support and lively, constructive challenge. Members generally have a clear view of the school's strengths and weaknesses due to their involvement in the school, for example by mentoring pupils. They value the information provided by the headteacher and staff to keep them informed, but do not always sufficiently take the lead in seeking first-hand evidence. The policies and procedures that underpin the school's effective practice are robust and well monitored. Safeguarding procedures, for example, are outstanding and extend beyond requirements. They include monitoring all aspects of pupils' well-being, such as the effectiveness of anti-discriminatory practices and pupils' individual behaviour plans. The school's extensive partnerships, community presence and very well-received outreach support and training functions support local community cohesion very effectively. Furthermore, these aspects are fundamental to the school's specialist status, and partnership working is already extending further. Over the past 15 months, considerable work has taken place to promote community cohesion on a wider level, and, for example, has increased pupils' understanding of how difficult life can be for children in other countries.

These are the grades for leadership and management

| | |
|--|----------|
| The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement | 1 |
| Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning | 1 |
| The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met | 2 |
| The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers | 1 |
| The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being | 1 |
| The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination | 1 |
| The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures | 1 |
| The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion | 1 |
| The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money | 2 |

Early Years Foundation Stage

The new provision for children of reception age is good and they have a good start to their education. The provision benefits considerably from the school's outstanding policies and practice, for example, in meeting individual needs, safeguarding and staff development. The teamwork between staff members is good and the provision is well organised. The children are in a class with five to seven year olds, and all benefit from the nurturing approach to their welfare, learning and development. The older pupils in the class provide

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good role models for the younger children, particularly in relation to communication, language and literacy, and personal, social and emotional development. The children are warmly welcomed. They feel happy and comfortable in class and clearly enjoy their activities. They sit companionably around the table or in a circle, are accepting of each other, and listen and respond well to staff and other children alike.

Partnership with parents is good and they are well-informed about their children's activities and progress. Good support is given to promote children's personal development and communication skills throughout all activities. For example, children are supported by visual schedules, which help them to understand the order of the day and reduce frustration and inappropriate behaviour. Suitable records are kept of children's developing skills, and these are supported by very well-kept books of evidence. Children's attainment on entry is low, but records of the older pupils' achievement indicate that the provision supports good progress.

Small-group work is interesting, varied and meets children's individual needs. It strongly promotes their learning and development. However, curriculum planning does not show enough opportunity, either indoors or outside, for child-initiated, play-based activities in each area of learning that complement the adult-directed sessions.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

| | |
|--|----------|
| Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage | 2 |
| Taking into account: | |
| Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage | 2 |
| The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage | 2 |
| The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage | 2 |

Views of parents and carers

Just under one quarter of the questionnaires were returned. The great majority indicate that parents and carers are happy with the school's work. They particularly agree that their children enjoy school, teaching is good and the pupils are taught to have a healthy lifestyle. A few parents expressed concern about behaviour management and a small number of issues relating to leadership and management as a whole. The inspection found that behaviour management is good and pupils' behaviour improves considerably as a result. However, a few pupils' behaviour is not as good as it could be all the time. Leadership and management were found to be outstanding in most aspects.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Castledon School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 31 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 140 pupils registered at the school.

| Statements | Strongly agree | | Agree | | Disagree | | Strongly disagree | |
|---|----------------|----|-------|----|----------|----|-------------------|---|
| | Total | % | Total | % | Total | % | Total | % |
| My child enjoys school | 23 | 74 | 6 | 19 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| The school keeps my child safe | 25 | 81 | 5 | 16 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| My school informs me about my child's progress | 19 | 61 | 7 | 23 | 3 | 10 | 0 | 0 |
| My child is making enough progress at this school | 19 | 61 | 10 | 32 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 3 |
| The teaching is good at this school | 23 | 74 | 7 | 23 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| The school helps me to support my child's learning | 19 | 61 | 9 | 29 | 3 | 10 | 0 | 0 |
| The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle | 24 | 77 | 7 | 23 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment) | 20 | 65 | 9 | 29 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| The school meets my child's particular needs | 22 | 71 | 7 | 23 | 2 | 6 | 0 | 0 |
| The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour | 20 | 65 | 7 | 23 | 2 | 6 | 2 | 6 |
| The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns | 19 | 61 | 9 | 29 | 2 | 6 | 1 | 3 |
| The school is led and managed effectively | 21 | 68 | 6 | 19 | 2 | 6 | 1 | 3 |
| Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school | 24 | 77 | 5 | 16 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 |

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

| Grade | Judgement | Description |
|---------|--------------|--|
| Grade 1 | Outstanding | These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. |
| Grade 2 | Good | These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well. |
| Grade 3 | Satisfactory | These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils. |
| Grade 4 | Inadequate | These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves. |

Overall effectiveness of schools

| Type of school | Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools) | | | |
|----------------------|---|------|--------------|------------|
| | Outstanding | Good | Satisfactory | Inadequate |
| Nursery schools | 58 | 36 | 4 | 2 |
| Primary schools | 8 | 43 | 40 | 9 |
| Secondary schools | 10 | 35 | 42 | 13 |
| Sixth forms | 13 | 39 | 45 | 3 |
| Special schools | 33 | 42 | 20 | 4 |
| Pupil referral units | 18 | 40 | 29 | 12 |
| All schools | 11 | 42 | 38 | 9 |

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| Achievement: | the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training. |
| Attainment: | the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons. |
| Capacity to improve: | the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement. |
| Leadership and management: | the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school. |
| Learning: | how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners. |
| Overall effectiveness: | <p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support. |
| Progress: | the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started. |

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



12 November 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Castledon School, Wickford, SS12 0PW

Thank you very much for welcoming us into your school. We found it a great place to visit and were very pleased to conclude that Castledon is an outstanding school.

These are the things that are particularly good about your school:

- it continually strives to give you outstanding experiences, and become fully prepared for your adult lives
- your personal development is outstanding and you make outstanding progress in this aspect
- you make good progress in academic subjects, especially mathematics and science
- you enjoy school and your attitudes and work in class are often outstanding
- most of you learn to manage your own behaviour, and behaviour is good overall
- the staff care very well for you and want to help you as much as possible
- your curriculum is packed with interesting things to do and learn
- the school gives outstanding support to your parents and carers if they need it
- the school is very well led and managed, and staff want to make the school even better than it already is.

I have asked the school to do one main thing to improve. This is:

- to improve the curriculum planning for the youngest children to include more indoor and outdoor play activities that lead to learning.

If you all work hard and behave brilliantly all the time, as most of you do, then you will make even better progress than you do now.

I wish you all the best for your future lives.

Yours sincerely

Judith Charlesworth
Lead inspector

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