

Castle School, Cambridge

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	134972
Local Authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	360665
Inspection dates	16–17 September 2010
Reporting inspector	Janet Thompson HMI

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	3–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	128
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	25
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Tandy Harrison
Headteacher	Mrs Carol McCarthy
Date of previous school inspection	15 January 2008
School address	Courtney Way Cambridge CB4 2EE
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an additional inspector. Inspectors observed 25 lessons or parts of lessons, taught by 21 different teachers or instructors; observed a group music therapy session and an assembly; held meetings with pupils, staff, the chair of governors, therapists and other partners working at the school, and met a few parents informally within the school. They observed the school's work, and looked at a range of documentation including pupils' assessment records, support for learning programmes for individuals and school policies, and analysed 45 parental questionnaires.

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

- How progress data is analysed to ensure targets for all pupils are ambitious given their starting points at a particular age.
- Outcomes for different groups (with particular focus on children from different ethnic groups, gender, pupils with low attendance and looked after children) relating to healthy living, behaviour and how pupils from different groups contribute to the school community.
- How well pupils with complex communication needs progress from Early Years Foundation Stage through the school and how they apply what has been learned in other situations including home.
- The range and quality of curriculum pathways available at the ages of 14, 16 and over and how these lead to successful destinations.

Information about the school

Castle school is larger than many special schools and provides education for pupils with a wide range of needs. All pupils at the school have a statement of special educational needs. The very large majority of pupils have autistic spectrum disorders, moderate learning difficulties, severe learning difficulties or speech language and communication difficulties. Almost a tenth of the pupils at the school have profound and multiple learning disabilities. There are nearly three times as many boys as girls. Just over a fifth of pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals and three pupils are looked after. Over three quarters of the pupils are from White British backgrounds and 16% of pupils are from a range of different ethnic groups. The school provides accommodation for staff employed by the Primary Care Trust including therapists, some of whom provide medical care and support to pupils.

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?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Castle school provides a good supportive environment within which pupils learn and make good progress. There are clear distinctions made between the Early Years Foundation Stage and primary, secondary and sixth form phases with increasing opportunities for pupils to take on responsibility and become more independent.

Positive relationships between staff and pupils provide a strong foundation for learning. There is a sense of fun in lessons and in other activities, such as assemblies, that help pupils to enjoy their time in school. Good partnership with the speech and language therapy service has helped to improve the use of supportive communication systems helping many pupils to learn more. There remain some inconsistencies in the use of communication strategies but these are reducing. The large majority of pupils make good progress across the curriculum helped by additional strategies for support provided by the school. However, a small minority of pupils who have more complex needs, including those with complex emotional or social needs, make satisfactory progress.

The vast majority of pupils behave well and rise to staff expectations both within lessons and in less formal times during the school day. There are pupils who find social interaction and engaging with learning more difficult. Staff use a range of supportive communication and behaviour strategies which, when used consistently, succeed in helping these pupils to become less reliant on adult help and more independent in making 'the right choices'. Pupils enjoy school, and although there are a few instances of pupils not always being supportive to one another, in the vast majority of cases they are helpful and encouraging of each other. New pupils to the school are supported well and they settle quickly.

The proportion of good teaching has increased since the last inspection but too much is satisfactory in meeting the diverse needs of all pupils. There is not always a good pace or sufficient challenge for all pupils in lessons and support staff are not always used effectively. Assessment and tracking systems have improved so that pupils are identified quickly if they are not making the progress they should and action is taken for example, the 'Access to learning' team provide additional support and advice. This coupled with other aspects of good care, guidance and support helps pupils make good progress.

The curriculum is well designed to provide creative links between subjects lower down the school and a widening range of subjects and experiences as pupils get older. The school has worked hard to ensure there are a wide range of opportunities available to all pupils.

Staff are conscientious in their care of the pupils and make sure personal needs are given the time and priority required. There is good attention to safeguarding pupils and ensuring their health and safety. Pupils spoken to by inspectors feel safe at the school and most parents agree this is a strength of the school.

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A continued focus on improvement is evident. Self-evaluation has made a good contribution to this, supported by detailed tracking and monitoring. Targets for pupils' progress have increasing challenge based on a good analysis of progress so far and high, but realistic, expectations. Strong leadership and a high commitment from staff have helped the school to improve. Leaders and the governing body have worked hard to make improvements while reducing a deficit budget. The school is well placed to improve further.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Establish the best practice observed in lessons so that:
 - expectations of all pupils are high and what teachers want all pupils to learn (rather than do) is more clearly identified
 - all pupils are given enough thinking time to respond to questions and their work
 - all staff are deployed effectively and the pace of all lessons is suitable for pupils to learn as much as possible.
- Ensure communication strategies are understood and used consistently by
 - helping staff to recognise when their use of language is confusing for some pupils
 - making sure all pupils that benefit from additional support, from symbols for example, have access to this for all aspects of learning
 - making sure when communication support is used there is not a long delay between showing that something is about to happen and it actually happening.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

Pupils start at the school at very different levels and all make at least satisfactory progress and the large majority make good progress. Expectations of achievement are appropriately adjusted according to the level at which pupils are working. Following a good start in the Early Years Foundation Stage most pupils in the primary phase make good gains in communication, literacy, mathematics and early cognitive skills. Good planning and the use of interesting resources help pupils engage in learning. Progress across the secondary phase is also good. At the end of Key Stage 4 pupils gain accreditation including entry level certificates and GCSEs in a wide range of subjects including English and mathematics. Popular choices include art and design as well as physical education and the creative arts. When taking into account a pupil's starting point, the accreditation gained reflects at least satisfactory progress for all and good progress for most. There are no discernable differences in achievement between boys and girls or those from different ethnic groups or social backgrounds. Progress of looked after children also reflects that of the majority of pupils. Progress in lessons is more variable and often satisfactory but the additional strategies arranged by the school such as individual programmes arranged by the 'Access to learning team' help to secure good progress for the majority of pupils. In some lessons, pupils who have more complex needs including those with complex emotional or social needs are not making as much progress as others and this is also reflected in their satisfactory progress over time.

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The school's work to promote healthy lifestyles has succeeded in raising pupils' awareness of how to remain healthy. A high number of pupils are involved in physical exercise outside the usual curriculum and pupils, including those with physical disabilities and complex needs, are keen to participate in the appropriately designed range of lunch time and after school clubs. Being 'Sports Leaders' provides great opportunities for some older pupils.

Pupils are well prepared for the future and encouraged to become more independent especially during lunch time and similar times in the day. Many are able to take on more responsibility as they grow older, including travelling to school independently or applying their learning in everyday situations. Although most pupils stay on in the school's sixth form, each year there are some who are well prepared to leave and attend college courses from age 16. Some younger children make only satisfactory progress in developing play skills during less formal times in the day because they receive less carefully targeted support than required for this to improve. Pupils are involved in making choices throughout the school and many particularly older pupils are involved in setting some of their own targets. Pupils gain confidence in decision making and many frequently help to lead and organise events within school. Pupils from last year's school council identified ways of ensuring the views of all pupils with a range of different types of need can be more fully represented. Attendance is average although the few pupils for whom attendance is low and not directly related to health needs is improving as a result of action from the school and other partners.

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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	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

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?

Teachers plan lessons carefully and in the best lessons ensure good communication strategies are in place for pupils with a range of needs. Relationships between staff and pupils are positive and encourage pupils to engage with the lesson. Inspectors observed some good questioning that helped pupils to develop their thinking and good interactions that enabled pupils requiring more support to be fully involved. However, there were too many times when the focus on completing a task took over from making sure pupils learned as much as possible. Too frequently pupils are not given the opportunity to achieve for themselves or have sufficient thinking time before more help is given. There were missed opportunities to find out what pupils already knew or could do in some lessons. In all lessons observed there were plenty of staff and yet they were not always deployed to best effect and progress dipped, particularly when pupils and staff were in larger groups for too long.

The curriculum is well designed and adapted to meet the wide range of needs within the school. In the primary phase, subjects are planned to provide many opportunities to learn and practise new skills in a variety of situations. In the secondary phase, more discrete subjects are planned but in a way that enables some pupils to gain an increasing knowledge and understanding within each of the subjects and for others to continue to

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learn and practise key skills in a variety of ways. Additional opportunities, including working with other schools and community groups from outside school, further enhance the quality of the curriculum.

Care, guidance and support are adjusted well according to a child's needs. There are pupils who require a great deal of individual support to be ready for learning. This is carried out with respect and in a way that supports pupils' dignity. Support from therapists and other agencies helps to ensure care and support are well targeted. There are a few missed opportunities where staff do not always maximise opportunities for learning outside 'formal lessons', for example, demonstrating play skills and adapting support to help pupils improve such skills during play times in the primary phase.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The aspirations for pupils are high amongst staff and this tone is set by the headteacher and leadership team. These, alongside a keen focus on improving teaching and communication, identified during the last inspection, have helped ensure more pupils make good progress and behave in a way that enables them to get on with each other and learn more. Analysis of the progress and development of pupils is robust and highlights where there are any differences. The school has acted on this information and the differences in performance for different groups are narrowing. The inspection took place in the second week of a new school year and inspectors found staff had been well-briefed and those that were new had started a good induction programme.

The governing body discharge their responsibilities in a satisfactory way. They have established a suitable structure that helps them challenge the school and the performance of different groups of pupils within the school. They have helped the leadership team to make sure improvements are established before introducing more new developments. Although the curriculum is well designed to ensure cultural and spiritual development the governing body and school leaders are aware that their work in promoting community cohesion needs to have a more robust evaluation and detailed action plan.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

The children make good progress encouraged by high expectations from staff for learning and behaviour. The balance between adult support and child initiated learning is well planned and adjusted according to a child's needs. Inspectors were especially pleased to observe how well new pupils had settled into the class and started to respond to the routines of the day. The good range of resources are presented in imaginative ways. Different areas for different types of activity are clear both inside and outside. There is good use of signing and symbols helping children to make choices and behave appropriately so that they can learn. The teacher plans well and ensures the staff team are well deployed enabling children to be imaginative and creative as well as offering support to engage in new activities when required.

Children make a good start in this class and are well supported to move on to the next class. Assessment is detailed and includes the level of support a child needs to access or achieve in a learning activity. The recording of achievement including annotated photographs and work demonstrates good progress over time.

There are positive relationships between staff and pupils and learning is fun. Staff have had appropriate training to ensure children are safe and to make sure any additional needs for example physical needs are met. Good leadership has ensured that all the welfare and learning requirements for children at this age are met and partnerships with therapists and other agencies help to meet the needs of all the pupils. Good links with parents are established and maintained through regular communication.

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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

Sixth form

The sixth form is distinct from the rest of the school enabling students to have a sense of 'growing up'. Students are motivated and make good progress in their chosen pathways. They develop levels of independence appropriate to their starting points and needs.

Teaching is similar to that of the rest of the school, there is some good teaching and some that is satisfactory where time for learning is not always maximised. Good leadership has ensured students are able to follow a pathway that meets their needs and that progress made by students is good. Students are encouraged to follow one of the three pathways provided by the school. One supports students in gaining basic skills and life skills. The second pathway helps students gain a diploma in life and living, alongside functional skills accreditation. The third pathway supports students in gaining entry level or above, qualifications from a menu of subjects including English, mathematics, physical education, personal and social development, catering and employment skills. Students on this pathway also have one day a week work experience. Some students stay at the school until they are 19, when some successfully move on to a local college, others to specialist colleges. Most students following the third pathway leave school to start a chosen college course at 18. Students are usually successful but there is not always enough choice for students to build upon the success they have experienced at the school.

There are good links with the local college to enhance the choices available to students. Additional opportunities also come through other links for example the Duke of Edinburgh Awards supported by youth workers. These additional opportunities help to motivate students and inspectors observed the enthusiasm of students when they were planning a residential visit and walking expedition.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

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Views of parents and carers

Most parents and carers think their child enjoys school and is kept safe. A large majority believe that their child is making enough progress at school and that they are well taught and supported. A few parents spoken to at the school and in the questionnaires commented on the good improvements at the school since the last inspection. A small minority of parents and carers are concerned that the school does not deal effectively with unacceptable behaviour from some pupils. Similarly there are a few parents and carers who do not think the provision at the school is meeting their child's needs and are particularly concerned about the levels of care and support. During the two days, inspectors found staff diligent in their care of pupils and found the procedures and protocols followed by staff for hygiene, health and safety to be good. The behaviour observed was good and records demonstrated significant improvements for some pupils in managing their own behaviour. Inspectors also found that some pupils had concerns about the behaviour of other pupils but they also felt staff helped inappropriate behaviour to be less frequent and the introduction of more lunch time clubs had helped to reduce incidents considerably. Governors have identified the need for better communication and engagement with parents as one of their forthcoming priorities.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Castle School, Cambridge 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 45 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 128 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	22	49	19	42	4	9	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	19	42	20	44	3	7	1	2
My school informs me about my child's progress	16	36	25	56	1	2	1	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	10	22	23	51	6	13	2	4
The teaching is good at this school	13	29	25	56	3	7	2	4
The school helps me to support my child's learning	13	29	22	49	6	13	2	4
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	14	31	25	56	3	7	2	4
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)	12	27	24	53	3	7	3	7
The school meets my child's particular needs	20	44	16	36	6	13	2	4
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	10	22	22	49	4	9	5	11
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	18	40	17	38	4	9	3	7
The school is led and managed effectively	19	42	17	38	4	9	2	4
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	19	42	17	38	5	11	3	7

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.



20 September 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Castle School, Cambridge, Cambridge, CB4 2EE

Thank you for welcoming me and my colleague to your school; we enjoyed our two days with you. This is what we found out:

You go to a good school and most of you make good progress.

Many of you told us you enjoy school and most of your parents agree with this.

You behave well and are given the necessary help when you find this difficult.

Staff are friendly and care for you well. They help to keep you safe and you told us how much you appreciate their help.

The headteacher and staff have high expectations of what you can achieve and how you can behave.

Lessons provide a range of interesting things to learn and you have lots of opportunities to do different things.

We have asked the school to give you more opportunities in lessons to have time to think and to do more for yourselves. We would like you to help teachers by showing them what you can already do so that they expect more from some of you in lessons.

The school works well with the speech and language therapist to help you communicate your needs but we have asked staff at the school to make sure you always have access to the right form of communication in lessons and at other times during the school day.

Yours sincerely

Janet Thompson

Her Majesty's Inspector

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