

# The Castle School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique reference number</b>	109297
<b>Local authority</b>	South Gloucestershire
<b>Inspection number</b>	395310
<b>Inspection dates</b>	13–14 June 2012
<b>Lead inspector</b>	Ian Hodgkinson HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	1750
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	381
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Stuart Hill
<b>Headteacher</b>	Melanie Warnes
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	14–15 January 2009
<b>School address</b>	Park Road Thornbury South Gloucestershire BS35 1HT
<b>Telephone number</b>	01454 862100
<b>Fax number</b>	01454 862101
<b>Email address</b>	enquiries@thecastleschool.org.uk

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<b>Age group</b>	11–18
<b>Inspection date(s)</b>	13–14 June 2012
<b>Inspection number</b>	395310



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## Introduction

### Inspection team

Ian Hodgkinson	Her Majesty's Inspector
Angela Corbett	Additional Inspector
Catherine Robinson-Slater	Additional Inspector
Stuart Sherman	Additional Inspector
Lesley Voaden	Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed 49 teachers teaching 49 lessons, around a fifth of which were joint observations with members of the senior team. Meetings were held with four groups of students, with members of the governing body and with school staff, including senior and middle leaders. At the time of the inspection, there were no lessons for students in Years 11 and 13 because of their involvement in public examinations, but a small number of students from these year groups were interviewed. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line Parent View questionnaire in planning the inspection, observed the school's work and looked at a number of documents, including the school's self-evaluation and development plans, its safeguarding policies, and minutes of meetings of the governing body. They analysed 241 parental questionnaires and others completed by pupils and staff.

## Information about the school

The school is much bigger than the average-sized secondary school and has a large sixth form. It operates across two sites half a mile apart, with the smaller site primarily serving as a sixth form centre. The school serves the town of Thornbury, but draws its students from a very wide geographical area, including from residential areas in the north of Bristol. Students are mostly White British. The proportion known to be eligible for free school meals is low. While the proportion of students designated with a disability or who have special educational needs is low overall, the proportion supported by school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is broadly average and has increased since the last inspection. The school meets the current floor standard, which are the minimum standards expected by the government. It is a specialist school in the visual arts and for special educational needs, and has been designated as a High Performing Specialist School which works with other local schools. Among many awards, it has, since the last inspection, attained ICT-mark accreditation for its provision in information and communication technology.

**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

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Achievement of pupils</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Quality of teaching</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Behaviour and safety of pupils</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>2</b>

## Key findings

- This is a good school. It is not outstanding because, despite considerable strengths and ambitious leadership, variations in the quality of teaching and learning mean that progress is not consistently rapid for all groups of students.
- Students' attainment by the end of Year 11 has remained high overall since the previous inspection, including in English, mathematics and especially in the specialist subject of art and design. The most able students make consistently strong progress. However, rates of progress for students in some lower- and middle-ability groups have fluctuated and shown occasional weaknesses over time.
- Teachers' confident command of their subjects, their inclusive questioning of all students, and the quietly assertive management of their classes, are common strengths which assure that students generally learn well. However, tasks are not always adapted well enough to ensure that all groups of students make rapid progress. While there are many examples of exemplary marking and feedback to students on how to improve their work, in a small minority of cases marking is cursory and does not support effective progress for all.
- Students' personal qualities develop very strongly. Students generally behave well in lessons and courteously around the sites. Most feel safe at school.
- The wide distribution of responsibilities across senior and middle leaders has helped create a highly cohesive and committed staff. Well-developed systems for monitoring and developing teaching, and for managing staff performance, have successfully maintained the school's good quality of teaching since the previous inspection. Not all departments have, however, focused strongly enough on monitoring their success in closing gaps in achievement between groups of students or sixth form subjects.
- The sixth form is good. Students thoroughly enjoy their time there and benefit

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particularly from the wide range of enrichment and extra-curricular opportunities. Although rates of progress vary across subjects, students achieve well overall. Good teaching and the high quality of individual support help to ensure that virtually all sixth form students proceed into employment, further or higher education.

## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Secure good or outstanding progress for all groups of students by:
  - ensuring that tasks are consistently well matched to students' abilities in lessons
  - providing consistently precise and helpful feedback to students in all subjects on how to improve
  - ensuring that, in monitoring and developing performance in all departments, leaders and managers at all levels prioritise the need to close gaps between the achievement of different groups of students.
  
- Secure good or outstanding achievement for students across all subjects in the sixth form by:
  - strengthening the tracking of students' academic progress by subject
  - increasing the focus of sixth form self-evaluation on the relative academic progress of students in their subjects to sharpen improvement planning.

## Main report

### Achievement of pupils

Students join the school with above-average attainment. They achieve well, making generally good progress to attain high standards in GCSE examinations. The strong progress made by the most able is reflected in the high proportion of students who attain top grades of A\* or A across most subjects. Students in some lower- and middle-ability groups, including disabled students, those with special educational needs and those known to be eligible for free school meals, have not always made good progress in recent years. In response, the school has adapted its curriculum extensively to provide a wide range of courses, often of a high quality, as an alternative for those who struggle to engage with a full academic programme. Disabled students and those with special educational needs in Year 10 were seen, for example, making excellent progress in their literacy skills as they worked on tasks to distinguish fact from opinion with specialist staff in the learning support centre. The school has also targeted additional resources from the government's 'pupil premium' to extend its programme of individual mentoring, and to increase its engagement with parents and carers, to support the progress of those students in groups most vulnerable to underachievement. As a result, school data indicate that while some gaps remain for these groups, they have narrowed, particularly in the current Year 11.

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The pace of learning was seen to slow for lower- and middle-ability students in a small minority of lessons where work for them was too challenging. Generally, however, students learn well, and often show outstanding skills for working independently and with others to solve problems and improve their work. Basic skills are well developed. Students write fluently and the more able students confidently explain their points and evaluate evidence as they develop their written answers. Students are generally confident in asking questions or giving their views, although in the sixth form the precision of their speaking skills is not as consistently high as that of their writing skills. The school's 'book trek' system ensures that students read regularly and that they read increasingly challenging materials across Key Stage 3. Students use information and communication technology confidently to support learning, including for visual learning and display linked to the school's specialism.

Students' attainment is high overall in the sixth form, especially at the highest grades of A\* to B at A level. Sixth-form students achieve well overall, but differences in attainment and progress between subjects reflect variations in the quality of learning in the classroom. Students make outstanding progress where the teachers' questioning and activities are designed to be challenging for all, but progress is slower where tasks are pitched at the same level in classes containing students with a wide range of abilities.

### **Quality of teaching**

The quality of teaching is good overall; it has some considerable strengths, and in over a third of lessons observed teaching was judged outstanding. Parents and carers are overwhelmingly of the view that their children are well taught. Teachers' strong subject knowledge allows the teachers to engage confidently with their classes and plan challenging activities which, in many cases, motivate students to work to high standards. Teachers often challenge their students to think and reflect widely on social, moral and cultural issues within and beyond their subjects. For example, an outstanding learning skills lesson enabled Year 7 students to reflect maturely and articulate views confidently on the issue of the eviction of the Traveller community from the Dale Farm site. Lessons often incorporate stimulating activities which promote students' independence and their skills of working collaboratively with their peers. Teachers' questioning skills are very well developed, ensuring that questions are widely distributed around the class and probe sensitively to encourage students to develop their answers. Teachers generally manage the behaviour of their classes calmly and effectively.

Disabled students and those with special educational needs are mostly well taught. Teaching assistants provide very effective support where their role is planned thoroughly with the teacher. Where this is not so they are, on occasions, under utilised. Some lessons are exceptionally well planned to meet students' specific needs, such as an English booster class in Year 8 where students with special educational needs made excellent progress in their understanding of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, through highly engaging performance and consolidation activities. In the minority of lessons where tasks are not adapted well enough to match the

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capabilities of different individuals or groups of students, some find work too challenging, or some too easy, and in a few cases students disengage from learning as a consequence.

There are many examples of excellent assessment, marking, and feedback to students which contribute strongly to their progress. In English, for example, students in Key Stage 3 regularly update their targets following the teachers' assessment of their work so that they can aim for the next level of attainment in their next piece of work. Not all teachers, however, offer students such clear guidance in their marking on how to improve their work.

### **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

Students' positive attitudes and their good behaviour make significant contributions to their effective learning in class. Students generally engage quickly and constructively in lesson activities. Standards of behaviour were seen to diminish in a very few instances where the pace of the lesson was slow or work was not sufficiently challenging, but generally students of all abilities sustain concentration and effort over long periods. The large majority of students, parents and carers feel that behaviour is generally good around school and in lessons, but a small minority of students, parents and carers told inspectors that lessons were sometimes disrupted by poor behaviour. Students' enjoyment of school and its activities is reflected in the generally high rates of attendance. Punctuality to lessons is good, but some students arrive rather late to school in the morning.

Most students feel safe at school. Students are taught how to keep themselves safe, and, through the personal, social and health education programme and tutorial activities, they learn about different forms of bullying, including racist and prejudice-based bullying, and how to counter this. The school has a wide range of strategies and support mechanisms to deal with bullying when it occurs, and most students, parents and carers feel that the school deals effectively with bullying incidents. Although a very small number of parents and carers, particularly of children in younger age groups, expressed concerns about verbal bullying in particular, evidence showed that relationships between students are mostly highly positive and mutually respectful. Students develop into active citizens able to make an effective contribution to their community through the wide range of opportunities they are given to reflect on social and global issues, take responsibilities within teams, and to make their voices heard on many aspects of school development and learning.

### **Leadership and management**

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher has inspired a common vision for the school's direction, in providing for its community and raising students' achievement, that is effectively supported by staff at all levels. There is collective responsibility for provision and the achievement of students, with senior and middle leaders fully involved in the process of self-evaluation and development planning. The school has accurately identified the school's strengths and areas for

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development. This has led to some effective development planning across the school. However, there are some inconsistencies in the approaches taken by different leaders. The success criteria for actions are not always closely linked to students' attainment and progress, and departmental plans are not coherently pulled together to maximise their impact on the achievement of different groups of students. Nonetheless, the overall track record of students' achievement over time and improvements in provision, including the expansion of partnership working with other schools and agencies, indicate that there is good capacity for the school to improve further. There is careful monitoring of students' progress and personal development, although better attention is given to the tracking of students' progress at Key Stages 3 and 4 than in the sixth form. In addition, the school's evaluation of sixth-form provision is not always focused sharply enough on the relative progress of students across different subjects, and this, in turn, limits the effectiveness of improvement planning. The curriculum meets the needs of students well, and is particularly well tailored for the more able, those with special educational needs and those who are at risk of exclusion. This exemplifies the school's efforts to promote equality of opportunity and tackle discrimination in any form.

Since the last inspection, improving the quality of teaching has been tackled with determination through rigorous monitoring and evaluation, and robust performance management. Professional development is planned well and is increasingly being driven by lead practitioners. For example, the quality of teachers' questioning skills for teaching in both the main school and the sixth form has improved. Consequently, a higher proportion of teaching is now outstanding. A wide range of opportunities, both within and beyond the school day, very effectively promote students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Students, including those in the sixth form, get on well together as a result of the school's inclusive ethos. The governing body is well informed about the school and is effective in challenging school leaders. It plays a strong role in shaping the strategic direction of the school. Safeguarding arrangements meet requirements.



## 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	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

## Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and 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 governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

**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.**



15 June 2012

Dear Students

### **Inspection of The Castle School, Thornbury, BS35 1HT**

Many thanks for the welcome you gave to me and my colleagues when we visited the school for its recent inspection. We greatly appreciated the time you gave to us in directing us around the large site and discussing aspects of the school's work. Particular thanks go to those students in Years 11 and 13 who, despite being on examination leave, came into school specially to talk with us. This reflects the way in which your personal qualities develop strongly in the school. Students learn to cooperate and take a wide range of responsibilities. Your behaviour is positive and constructive, and high attendance rates confirm your enjoyment of the school and its extensive range of activities.

We have judged yours to be a good school. Your attainment is high in GCSE examinations at the end of Year 11 and in A-level examinations in the sixth form. You make good progress overall and achieve well, particularly those of you who go on to achieve the highest grades. There is some variation in rates of progress for students who find learning more difficult, and in the sixth form there are some variations in students' achievement between different subjects. The teaching you receive is good overall and often outstanding. Teachers' subject knowledge, their management of their classes, and the way in which the teachers question all of you to extend and deepen your thinking are key strengths. The headteacher's very clear vision for the direction of the school is widely shared among school leaders and staff. School leaders have a clear understanding of the key priorities for further improvement. These include the need to:

- ensure that all groups of students consistently make at least good progress
- ensure that students' achievement is consistently strong across all subjects in the sixth form.

You can help in this by continuing to work hard and by giving your opinions when consulted on matters of school improvement. I wish you every success.

Yours sincerely

Ian Hodgkinson  
Her Majesty's Inspector

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