

# The Castle School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique reference number</b>	110182
<b>Local authority</b>	West Berkshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	378056
<b>Inspection dates</b>	11–12 July 2012
<b>Lead inspector</b>	Sonja Joseph

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>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of students</b>	3–19
<b>Gender of students</b>	Mixed
Gender of students in the sixth form	Mixed
<b>Number of students on the school roll</b>	130
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	27
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Brian Connolly
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Jon Hewitt
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	4 March 2009
<b>School address</b>	Love Lane Newbury
	RG14 2JG
<b>Telephone number</b>	01635 42976
<b>Fax number</b>	01635 51725
<b>Email address</b>	headteacher@castle.w-berks.sch.uk

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<b>Age group</b>	3–19
<b>Inspection date(s)</b>	11–12 July
<b>Inspection number</b>	378056



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## Introduction

Inspection team

Sonja Joseph	Additional Inspector
Michael Buist	Additional Inspector
Ronald Elam	Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Twelve lessons were observed, each taught by a different teacher and/or teaching assistant. Three of the lesson observations were jointly undertaken with senior leaders. Meetings were held with senior and middle leaders, a group of learners and the Chair of the Governing Body. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line Parent View survey in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at a range of documentation including the school's self-evaluation, school improvement plans, safeguarding files and assessment data. The 48 questionnaires returned by parents and carers were analysed along with those from staff and learners.

## Information about the school

Castle School provides for disabled students and those who have a wide range of special educational needs that include severe learning difficulties, profound and multiple learning difficulties and autistic spectrum disorders. Many students have additional barriers to learning, such as with mobility and communication. Some exhibit challenging behaviour. All have a statement of special educational needs. The majority of students are of White British heritage and the proportion known to be eligible for free school meals is well above the national average. A very small number are in the care of the local authority. There are fewer girls in the school than boys. At the time of the inspection, a significant proportion of classes were out of school on the first day, attending the Olympic torch relay. The very few Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 pupils are dispersed across mixed-age classes according to their particular needs.

The school is located on three sites with the nursery provision based within a local mainstream nursery. Since the previous inspection, purpose-built post-16 provision for Castle students has been built at Newbury College. The present headteacher was appointed in September 2011.

**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 students</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Quality of teaching</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Behaviour and safety of students</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>2</b>

## Key findings

- This is a good school. It has a caring and supportive ethos, with high expectations, which ensures that most students achieve well. It is not yet outstanding because the proportion of outstanding teaching is not high enough to secure exceptionally rapid progress for all groups of students. Leadership and management are good overall, but there are weaknesses relating to the development of middle management roles and the use of data.
- All groups of students make good progress, whether they have severe learning difficulties, profound and multiple learning difficulties or autistic spectrum disorders. Some students make particularly good progress in reading and develop communication, writing and numeracy skills well.
- Teaching is consistently good and an increasing proportion is outstanding; this ensures that all students achieve well. In some lessons, pace slows because too lengthy sessions led by the teacher leave too little time for students to work on tasks independently and adults do not seize every opportunity to challenge students' learning through questioning.
- Behaviour is good as are attitudes to learning. Those with needs on the autistic spectrum learn to manage their anxious behaviour due to the understanding and consistent approach of staff. The school provides a secure environment in which students say they feel safe.
- The sixth form is good. Students make good progress and are well prepared for the next stages of their education because of the wide-ranging opportunities they have to apply their different skills in the local community. Equally good is the provision for the youngest children who make particularly fast progress in their social skills.
- Strong, purposeful leadership from the new headteacher and deputy headteacher ensures good teamwork. Self-evaluation is accurate and school leaders have used performance management effectively to improve the quality of teaching. The curriculum is outstanding, as is the promotion of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development; there is a wide range of exciting experiences, very well matched to students' needs.

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

- By July 2013, increase the proportion of outstanding teaching by:
  - ensuring that teachers consistently use questioning to deepen the thinking of students, and allow time for a response
  - ensuring that all lessons proceed at a good pace
  - reducing the level of teacher input to provide more opportunities for students to work independently.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
  - developing the use of data to inform senior leaders and the governing body about patterns and trends in the outcomes achieved by groups of students
  - increasing the effective involvement of middle leaders in the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning.

## Main report

### Achievement of students

The majority of parents and carers feel their children are making good progress. Inspection findings agree that achievement is good. While attainment is still low in relation to the national average, by the time they leave, all groups of students, including those with the most complex needs, make good progress overall from their individual starting points, and some make outstanding progress. This means that by the time they leave the school, all students gain recognised accreditation that is appropriate to their abilities. Children make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage and build successfully on this learning throughout the school. There are rising numbers of students who have achieved a range of vocational accreditations or have achieved at GCSE level and, as a result, move on successfully to the next stage of their learning. Boys and girls fare equally well, as do students known to be eligible for free school meals and those in public care. Progress in the sixth form is also good and students in the post-16 provision learn well as a result of carefully planned provision.

Targeted strategies that include the involvement of external agencies are effective in accelerating the progress made by individuals and groups of students. For example, students make outstanding progress in their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development from working with peers at the local mainstream primary and secondary schools. Students make particularly good progress in communication because of staff expertise in using a wide range of strategies and skills, including the use of signing, augmentative aids and the use of pictures, symbols, signs and objects of reference to enable students to communicate. Some students, including those in Years 2 and 6, are making accelerated progress in reading as a result of the priority given to it by the school. Specific, individual interventions and visual and sensory

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lessons which teach students about letters and the sounds they make enable them to make rapid improvements in their reading skills. As a result, many students are good functional readers by the time they leave school although they do not reach national expectations. Although students' learning in lessons is good, occasionally, the pace of learning slows a little when students sit too long listening to teachers' explanations.

Intensive therapy and multi-sensory approaches to learning also have a positive impact on the skill development of disabled students and those who have profound and multiple learning difficulties. For example, students with additional physical difficulties gain exceptionally from the opportunities provided through use of the hydrotherapy pool to learn to swim independently and thoroughly enjoy the opportunity to extend their muscles outside the normal limits they experience. Older students use their number skills in real-life situations, for example when travelling independently on the bus or train.

### **Quality of teaching**

The inspection confirmed the school's view that teaching is good. In the majority of lessons observed, across all key stages, a wide range of activities were provided that matched the capabilities and learning styles of the students. In most lessons, the pace was appropriate and the content lively so that students remained interested and engaged. Teaching is informed well by accurate ongoing assessments and observations of each individual pupil's progress. This approach is equally effective in the Early Years Foundation Stage where similar strengths are evident. The basic skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) are promoted very effectively within a range of subjects. For example, in an outstanding ICT lesson, students with profound and multiple learning difficulties developed their knowledge of historical characters through the highly effective use of sign, symbols and sensory objects which challenged students to make simple choices and communicate more clearly their intentions. Teaching assistants made a very strong contribution to such lessons, knowing when to step back but also ever watchful to make sure that students are engaged and focused, particularly in individual and group work.

Teachers are skilful in helping students to overcome their barriers to learning. For example, mobility aids are tailor-made to help students take part in classroom activities. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, children are enabled to participate in water play activities developing their knowledge of capacity, for example, alongside peers from the mainstream nursery. The teaching of reading is effective and is well adapted to students' preferred learning styles. This is further enhanced through role play when students use sensory 'story sacks'. Lessons promote students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development extremely well because of the many opportunities they provide for students to listen to and learn from each other and the interesting themes explored. These encourage students to work together in pairs or small groups and to observe clearly stated class rules for conduct. However, in a minority of lessons the learning is too teacher-led and there are not enough opportunities for students to develop independent learning skills; in such lessons, the

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pace of learning slows. On occasion, teachers do not take the opportunity to challenge students' thinking fully. Opportunities are missed, for example, to ask supplementary and more open-ended questions and staff do not always give enough time for students to consider their response. Most parents and carers returning the questionnaire agree with the inspection findings that teaching is good.

### **Behaviour and safety of students**

Behaviour and safety are good. The school's records show that the rate of exclusions and the number of serious behaviour incidents have fallen significantly over time. As a result of an outstanding curriculum, which has a focus on personal, social and health education, students show a keen awareness of all types of bullying, including prejudice-based harassment and cyber-bullying. Students who met with the inspector are clear that bullying is rare and are certain that adults would be on hand were it to occur. There are no recorded incidents of bullying. When challenging behaviour occurs in lessons or around school, staff have the necessary skills to defuse this so that learning can continue.

Overall, students have good attitudes to learning and enjoy their lessons. Occasionally, students lose attention or interest. This is when the pace of the lesson slows and students wait, rather than being encouraged to show initiative or independence in learning. The school has forged strong partnerships with outside agencies and professionals as well as with families to encourage good behaviour and support those students that the school considers the most vulnerable. The school works very closely with families to find out what works best for each child and keeps meticulous records related to behaviour. Risk assessments, personal profiles and behaviour management plans all show that staff know their students extremely well and respond very skilfully to their needs.

All students at their own levels understand how to keep safe and manage their behaviour in the broader community because the very practical curriculum, supported by the strong college links and work-related experiences, gives them many opportunities to develop their understanding and skills. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage benefit greatly from their contact with the mainstream provision. Consequently, the school is a harmonious, inclusive community where adults and students show a great deal of respect for one another.

A few parents expressed concern about behaviour management in the school but the inspectors concluded that these rare behavioural incidents are generally managed appropriately so that all are safe and students' learning is not disrupted.

### **Leadership and management**

The school's leaders and managers effectively monitor and evaluate the school's performance and have identified suitable priorities for its further development. This has included successfully improving the curriculum, refining the behaviour policy and its implementation and tackling weaknesses in teaching. Staff performance is well

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managed. Professional development has ensured that staff are rapidly broadening their skills base to effectively support the increasing range of special educational needs and disabilities they encounter among students. However, at present, middle leaders' involvement in monitoring the quality of teaching and learning is too limited. Although individual students' progress is carefully tracked, senior leaders do not consistently analyse data at a whole-school level to determine trends in the rates of achievement and attendance for groups of students.

Members of the governing body offer a good level of support and challenge to senior leaders and ensure policies and procedures for safeguarding are met, and that practice is of a good standard. Systems to promote equality of opportunity and tackle discrimination within the school are good and, as a result, successfully eliminate any gaps in the performance of different groups of students. The school has successfully tackled the areas for improvement from its last inspection. Thus, there is evidence of continuing good capacity to improve.

The curriculum is outstanding because it is highly personalised to meet the needs of students. A wide variety of enrichment and enterprise activities provides extensive opportunities for students to gain the skills they require for moving on to the next stages of their lives. For example, in the post-16 'internet cafe', students develop functional and independence skills as well as economic awareness. Residential trips enable students to tackle activities that require collaborative working and self-resilience. Successful partnerships with a range of organisations extend students' understanding of the wider world. For example, at Key Stage 4, students were observed undertaking 'world of work' interviews delivered by an external organisation, which developed their skills in communication, personal responsibility and independence. Such opportunities contribute to the outstanding provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.



## 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 students' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its students well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its students.
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 students. 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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	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 to 31 December 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.
Floor standards:	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
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.**



13 July 2012

Dear Students

### **Inspection of Castle School, Newbury RG14 2JG**

Thank you for making us so welcome when we visited your school recently. We very much enjoyed meeting you and seeing you in your classrooms and around the school. We were particularly impressed with your good behaviour and excellent manners, even when you sometimes did not find it easy to express yourselves. We like the way that you support each other during lessons and at lunchtime.

You attend a good school. You make good progress from when you join in the Early Years Foundations Stage to when you leave at the end of the sixth form. Your literacy and numeracy skills are improving and some of you are learning to read more effectively. We feel that the school provides excellent opportunities for your spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. You enjoy coming to school and taking part in lessons and other activities. The adults work hard to make sure that you can join in. Teachers plan good, interesting lessons.

The school is managed well and the headteacher and other senior staff know what the school needs to do to get even better.

We have asked the staff to make your school even better by:

- making sure that you always learn at a fast pace, asking you lots of challenging questions and giving you more opportunities to work independently
- involving some of the school's leaders more in keeping a close watch on how well you are learning, and making more use of the information they have on your progress.

Thank you once again. We wish you well for the future. Your teachers are working very hard to make your school even better. With your support and hard work, it is highly likely they will succeed.

Yours sincerely  
Sonja Joseph  
Lead inspector

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