

Castle School, Cambridge

Courtney Way, Cambridge, CB4 2EE

Inspection dates 3–4 December 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The headteacher’s exceptional leadership has brought about a strong, well-knit school community.
- The experienced senior leaders are constantly looking to improve their work, and have made important changes to help pupils with different needs to learn in the best way for them.
- The staffing structure has been altered and this, together with good new appointments, has made the school even more effective.
- Teaching has improved. It is now mostly good and a small amount is outstanding. This means the vast majority of pupils make good and sometimes outstanding progress.
- The sixth form is good. The well-taught study programmes prepare pupils well for the next stage of their education or training.
- Subjects are mostly taught in an interesting and exciting way, with lots of opportunities for learning beyond the classroom.
- Pupils are mostly polite and well behaved around school and in lessons, and feel safe.
- Most parents are supportive of the school and feel it does a good job in helping their children get off to a good start in life.
- Governors have a good understanding of the journey the school has been on, and have a clear picture of what needs to happen next.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not all teachers plan really interesting work that is just at the right level of difficulty for each pupil and fully involves them in the lesson.
- Not every parent feels their child is doing as well as they could at school.
- A very small number of pupils sometimes have difficulty managing their own challenging behaviour, and the school is not fully effective in helping them to do so.
- A few staff do not always give clear messages about the high standards of behaviour they expect from pupils in lessons.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited 15 lessons, all of which were seen together with senior leaders. They also visited parts of lessons and carried out 'learning walks' to see how pupils began their school day and to see them practise their reading. Inspectors also joined pupils in assembly as well as lunch and break times, watched them arrive and leave school, and spoke to parents who were dropping off their children.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher and the staff responsible for assessment and behaviour and safety. They also met with a group of governors, some pupils and a representative of the local authority, and spoke with the school's improvement adviser by telephone.
- A range of documentation was examined, including school policies and procedures and information about teachers' performance, pupils' progress, behaviour and safety and attendance.
- Inspectors took note of the 43 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View). They also took into consideration letters from parents and the school's recent questionnaires to staff.

Inspection team

Debra McCarthy, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Sa'ad Khaldi

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Castle School is larger than the average area special school, and was created from five Cambridgeshire special schools in 2006.
- All pupils have a statement of special educational needs, mostly for autistic spectrum disorder or speech, language and communication needs. Some have severe or moderate learning difficulties and a small number have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, profound and multiple learning difficulties or visual impairments. A few pupils have multisensory impairments.
- Most pupils are White British and speak English as their first language. An above-average proportion are eligible for the pupil premium (extra funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, looked after by the local authority or from a family with a parent in the armed forces).
- Some older pupils attend Cambridge Regional College or the College of West Anglia for academic courses and work-related training.
- The school provides an outreach support service for teachers and pupils with special educational needs in local mainstream schools.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement by making sure all teaching is at least good and more is outstanding by:
 - always planning interesting tasks that hold pupils' attention and are at the right level for each individual to build on their previous knowledge or skills
 - consistently insisting on high levels of behaviour in lessons, so all pupils are able to make the best use of the time available.
- Work closely with the local authority to ensure the school is able to find the best way of providing for the very small number of pupils who can show extremely challenging behaviour.
- Improve links with parents further by finding out why some parents do not feel their children are doing as well at school as they might and responding appropriately.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Children make a good start in the Early Years Foundation Stage and settle quickly into their daily routines. The way their progress is recorded makes sure that teachers in subsequent classes know how well they have done so they can plan next steps. Teachers compare these records amongst themselves and with other schools to make sure they are accurate.
- Pupils mostly make good progress in mathematics and English in Key Stages 1 and 2. The school's effective methods of regularly checking how well pupils do mean that they are able to quickly identify if any pupils are doing less well and in which subjects. This means that teachers are able to find out what the problem is and put it right, so there is no noticeable difference in achievement between different groups such as boys and girls or pupils with moderate or severe learning difficulties.
- The majority of pupils in Key Stage 3 make outstanding progress. A few pupils with moderate learning difficulties or speech and language difficulties were having difficulty with some aspects of design and technology. However, swift action by senior leaders has addressed this.
- Carefully thought out programmes of work designed to meet the needs of different abilities in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form mean that pupils make good progress and achieve a range of relevant qualifications that help them move onto the next stage of their education and training. Some more-able pupils gained a grade D in GCSE art last year. Pupils also enjoy a range of good work-related learning opportunities and well-planned work experience placements.
- Additional therapies such as music and art help pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties or autism spectrum disorders to overcome the barriers that get in the way of being able to learn effectively. Additional support from speech and language therapists and well-trained staff within the school mean that pupils with speech and language or communication difficulties are helped to take a fuller part in lessons so they can achieve as well as their peers.
- The school has an effective way of measuring the achievements of pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties, so that teachers can see the progress they are making. Additional resources and training for support staff mean pupils with visual or multisensory impairments have the equipment and help they need to join in with everyone else.
- The school carefully tracks the progress of pupils who are known to be eligible for the pupil premium. The results show that almost every pupil makes the same or better progress in English and mathematics as those who do not receive the funding.
- The school does not receive Year 7 'catch-up' funding, and does not enter pupils early for GCSE examinations.
- Plans are well under way to make good use of the government's primary sports funding to improve the already good provision for physical education in the school. These include the appointment of a sports coordinator who is helping teachers plan and assess their physical education lessons.

The quality of teaching is good

- The school's own monitoring records suggested that the majority of teaching was outstanding.

However, lesson observations during the inspection and pupils' achievements over time give a picture of mostly good teaching, some of which is outstanding.

- Senior leaders have a clearer view of what good teaching looks like in lessons now that the criteria they use for grading teaching have been improved. Teachers have a much better idea of what they need to do to make their teaching better.
- Classes are grouped according to age, but also so that pupils who share similar styles of learning can be taught together. This helps teachers plan lessons that are appropriate for their needs.
- Children in Reception benefit from a range of different learning experiences, both indoors and outdoors. They have the opportunity to practise listening skills and this prepares them well for learning how to follow teachers' instructions and to make a good start on learning early reading skills, whether that means recognising symbols or beginning to read simple words.
- In the best teaching seen, teachers showed they had good subject knowledge and knew exactly how well pupils had done previously, which helped them plan the right learning opportunities for each pupil. Alternative strategies such as signing or symbols were used well to support pupils' understanding or help them communicate.
- Pupils were seen working together in teams and role play was used creatively to make learning fun. For example, in a Key Stage 3 English lesson, pupils excitedly took on the role of detectives investigating a series of local crimes, including the mystery of the headteacher's missing school keys. As well as using their reading, writing and speaking and listening skills in a practical way, they learnt the importance of asking open-ended questions to find out more information.
- The clear focus on helping pupils become as independent as possible is clearly visible by the time pupils reach the sixth form. Literacy and numeracy are given a high priority whatever a pupil's ability. For example, in a sixth form lesson for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties, staff helped pupils learn about number through sensory experiences.
- Pupils have opportunities to read widely and often throughout the school, and in most classes pupils practise reading on a daily basis. A range of different reading materials are available, including book bags, and pupils are able to take books home and spend time in the library.
- On a few occasions, teachers do not always plan interesting activities that hold pupils' attention and are at the right level for each individual to practise what they have already learnt and move on to the next stage.
- Very occasionally, staff do not work together as well as they could to give clear messages to pupils about what they expect from them in terms of their behaviour. When this occurred during the inspection, pupils were allowed to opt out of learning for periods of the lesson.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Most pupils were seen to behave well in lessons and around the school, in assembly and at lunch and break times. Staff and pupils have very good relationships and there is a very positive ethos around the school, together with a clear sense that staff and pupils both enjoy being in school. Pupils arrive in lessons keen to do well, and show a thirst for learning.
- Keeping pupils safe is a high priority for senior leaders and there are now four staff with specialist training in child protection, who other staff can go to for help. This team meets weekly

to explore different ways of improving their practice and are working more closely with colleagues in social care.

- Pupils' very good personal, social and health education helps them learn about how to keep themselves safe on the internet, for example on social networking sites. They know how to make healthy choices such as saying no to smoking and have plenty of opportunities for outdoor play and taking part in sports such as football and boccia.
- The school is thinking much more deeply about the causes of some pupils' difficult behaviour and is able to use what it finds out to help them improve. Pupils are helped to learn how to express their feelings in an appropriate way. Key events such as anti-bullying week, internet safety day and road safety week add to what they learn in lessons.
- The behaviour of most pupils is usually managed well by staff, although very occasionally, strategies are not always followed all the way through. When used well, reward systems such as 'now and next' boards and 'I am working for...' cards help pupils understand their daily routines or cause and effect. These useful tools help pupils to make sense of their day or understand the consequences of their behaviour.
- The recent appointment of a senior leader whose responsibilities include looking at pupils' behaviour in more detail is already making a difference to the support staff receive and giving them greater confidence. Recording of behaviour has improved and information from this is being used well to check that interventions are effective. However, a very small number of pupils are a cause for concern for staff because of their particularly challenging behaviour. Some had been excluded on the first day of the inspection, and the school is still working at finding the best way of helping them to improve their behaviour.
- Pupils spoken to say they feel safe in school and most staff and parents agree. Pupils say there is sometimes a little bullying when newcomers arrive in school, but that staff soon sort it out when they tell them about it.
- The school has worked hard to improve attendance, and it is now broadly average.

The leadership and management are good

- The outstanding leadership of the headteacher has set the tone for the whole school. Staff at all different levels within the organisation have now been given greater responsibility for making sure the school is successful at what it does.
- The process of amalgamating five schools has not been an easy one and bringing together several different staff groups has not been without its problems. Most staff are now fully behind the headteacher and senior leaders.
- Senior leaders have reviewed their practice in detail, and have restructured leadership roles throughout the school to meet the needs of the changing pupil population. Equality of opportunity and access for all are at the core of the school's work. The Early Years Foundation Stage and the sixth form are both led and managed well.
- The excellent curriculum has been very well thought out to provide interesting and relevant experiences for pupils of all ages and abilities both in and out of the classroom. It is supplemented by a variety of lunchtime and after-school clubs and residential experiences. Even the younger pupils in the primary department were able to experience a sleepover in school

during the summer term.

- Pupils have plenty of opportunities to extend their social, moral, spiritual and cultural experiences. They celebrate festivals from their own and other cultures, and there is a strong emphasis on right and wrong and learning how to get along with one another. Pupils are given a voice through the school council, and in lessons by having the opportunity to assess how well they think they have done.
- The school provides effective independent support for pupils and their parents in helping them decide the most appropriate courses or placements after school.
- The local authority provides 'light touch' support for this good school with additional advice and guidance when requested. The school also buys in additional advice from an experienced specialist adviser in special educational needs.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body has secured the school's finances by prudent planning and careful reorganisation of the staffing structure. The governors have supported senior leaders well, but also challenged them appropriately. They have assessed their own strengths and weaknesses and applied strategies to improve their effectiveness. They are now very well placed to build on the now firm foundations of an established school community.
 - Governors are clear about how well teachers are doing, and understand the importance of the performance management of staff and the link between how well they do and their pay. They know how well pupils are doing in the school, including the impact that pupil premium funding has on the achievement of pupils who are eligible for support.
 - The governors make sure current national safeguarding requirements are all met.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	134972
Local authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	425183

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	137
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	20
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mary Langran
Headteacher	Carol McCarthy
Date of previous school inspection	16 September 2010
Telephone number	01223 442400
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