

Castledon School

Bromfords Drive, Wickford, SS12 0PW

Inspection dates 28–29 November 2013 and 23 January 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The new headteacher and strong team of new senior leaders are rapidly improving the school.
- Thorough checking of the quality of teaching contributes to good improvements for pupils' learning in English and mathematics.
- Most pupils make rapid progress in mathematics especially those with severe learning difficulties and autism.
- Improved teaching of phonics (sounds that letters make) has enabled all pupils to make better progress in English.
- Leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage and the quality of children's learning are exceptional.
- Pupils eligible for the pupil premium funding make as good progress as others because of the good resources that help them to learn.
- Additional adults make a very strong contribution to learning in lessons through their support for pupils' academic, medical and physical needs.
- Pupils' behaviour is outstanding. Skilful management of pupils ensure all, including pupils with behaviour, social and emotional difficulties, engage successfully with learning.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding.
- Interesting themes and activities ensure that pupils develop skills in a wide range of subjects such as religious education, life skills and sport. They are also encouraged to explore different faiths and cultures. All this supports their good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The Governing Body knows the school's strengths and weaknesses well and holds leaders and managers to account effectively.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The progress of a few more-able pupils with moderate learning difficulties is sometimes slow because some work is too easy.
- Some of the qualifications planned for the few more-able pupils in Key Stage 4 are not challenging enough.
- Subject and key stage leaders do not track pupils' progress as well as they should.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors watched 18 lessons, all of which were observed jointly with the headteacher and deputy headteacher. Inspectors also carried out a series of short visits to other lessons across the school, observed registration and listened to children read.
- Meetings were held with staff, pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body and other governors, and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of the 13 responses to the on-line Parent View questionnaire and the views of the parents and carers collected by the school. Inspectors also considered the 33 responses to the staff questionnaire as well as the views of staff collected by the school.
- The inspection team scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school’s own information about pupils’ achievement, the school’s self-evaluation, improvement plans, safeguarding policies and records and documents, relating to performance management.

Inspection team

Justina Ilochi, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Joanna Jones

Additional Inspector

Christine Dick

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Castledon is a special school for pupils aged five-16 years.
- Less than a quarter of its pupils are girls. Almost all pupils are from White British backgrounds.
- The proportion of pupils supported through the pupil premium (additional funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, or who are looked after by the local authority) is almost twice the national average.
- All pupils have a statement of special educational needs. The majority of pupils have severe learning difficulties (SLD) or moderate learning difficulties (MLD). Several pupils are also on the autistic spectrum (AS) and some pupils have behaviour, emotional and social difficulties. A few pupils have complex medical needs.
- Since the last inspection, the school has experienced a period of turbulence with major changes. The headteacher has been in post since September 2012, the deputy headteacher since April 2013 and the newly restructured senior leadership team commenced work in September 2013. In addition, this year, six teachers are either on maternity leave or have been absent due to long term sickness.
- The school has an outreach programme. It works in 'loose' partnership with other special schools in Essex and in the 'Collaborative Learning Centre' with Wickford schools.
- A few pupils attend the local mainstream school.
- Inspectors were aware, during this inspection, that serious allegations of a child protection nature were being investigated by the appropriate authorities. While Ofsted does not have the power to investigate incidents of this kind, actions taken by the school in response to the allegations were considered, alongside other evidence available at the time of the inspection, to inform inspectors' judgements.
- As part of Ofsted's quality assurance procedures, an additional inspector visited the school on 23 January 2014 to gather further evidence.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching further and increase the rates of progress of the small number of more-able pupils with moderate learning difficulties in the school by:
 - making sure that teachers plan activities that make pupils think hard and want to find things out for themselves
 - ensuring that school leaders check pupils' progress regularly against the high but realistic targets that have been set, so that they are able to help all pupils to do the best they can
 - ensuring that teachers' marking helps pupils to know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve
 - increasing the range of qualifications available at Key Stage 4 so that they are better matched to all pupils' abilities.
- Develop the roles of teachers who lead subjects and key stages, so that they have a clear understanding of the progress pupils make towards their end of key stage targets and to ensure timely action is taken to address any issues of concern.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils' progress throughout the school has improved rapidly. Most children in Reception make outstanding progress from their low starting points and a few develop the skills expected for their age.
- Pupils' progress in mathematics, reading and writing has been on an upward trajectory in the last three years. This is because of the good opportunities for extending pupils' problem solving skills and writing in other subjects such as life skills and physical education. However, the progress of some more-able pupils in Key Stage 4 is restricted by the limited range of qualifications available to them. Most pupils, though, achieve relevant qualifications and skills to prepare them for their next stage in education and future life.
- Results of teacher assessments and tests taken in Years 2, 6, and 11 show most pupils, especially those with severe learning difficulties, make good progress from low starting points in English, mathematics, science and personal and social education. Pupils display consistently positive attitudes to learning, whether with a teaching assistant or class teacher. This is because of the school's emphasis on eradicating any inadequate teaching and promoting good practice.
- There is an improving picture of progress for pupils with autism and other needs such as behaviour, emotional and social difficulties. This is because the school has identified the help they need more accurately and has provided additional support and guidance that is at the right level for them. Pupil's literacy and communication skills have developed particularly well this year.
- Teachers generally have high expectations and plan activities that interest and motivate pupils to learn. However, in a few lessons, teachers do not build effectively enough on the skills and knowledge the few more able pupils already have. Consequently, their progress slows.
- Pupils eligible for the pupil premium funding make similar progress to their peers in the school. The school's data indicate that gaps in progress between these pupils and others have closed. This is because funding in the last year has been spent effectively on additional resources such as the employment of two 'communications team' staff. This team has significantly improved communication with parents and the attendance, behaviour and progress of these pupils.
- A few pupils have benefited, and made good progress, from the collaboration of the school with its local mainstream secondary school. The school supports these pupils well and keeps a close watch on their attendance and progress towards set targets.

The quality of teaching is good

- Most teaching is good, with some examples of outstanding practice. In a small number of lessons pupils' learning requires improvement. The school has worked successfully to eliminate any inadequate teaching through its coaching and mentoring programme for new teachers and teachers needing support. The good quality of teaching has led to overall good progress for pupils despite some instability in staffing in the school.
- Pupils benefit from a range of subjects that are taught well and which prepare them for their next steps in learning. For instance, in one Key Stage 3 English lesson, the teacher used the

recipe for a sandwich to teach pupils how to write instructional texts. Pupils learnt how to make a sandwich and developed several 'bossy' words such as 'drizzle' and 'slice' to help with their writing. All pupils were interested and enjoyed the lesson, making good progress as a result.

- Mathematical skills are developed well in small groups in Key Stages 3 and 4. In life skills lessons, teachers and supporting adults help pupils to learn to plan budgets, cook, serve and carry out cleaning up activities extremely well. Consequently, pupils with severe learning difficulties, autism and behavioural needs participate, enjoy and make outstanding progress, particularly in their mathematical problem solving skills and in their personal development.
- Adults who support pupils with complex medical needs make a strong contribution to rates of progress for these pupils in mathematics, reading and writing. This is because they are well trained in how to get the best out of pupils in their charge. For example, in an ICT lesson with a group of Key Stage 4 pupils, additional adults made learning interesting using cues and prompts to ensure that less able pupils, including pupils with Down's Syndrome, made good progress with their reading and writing.
- Teaching is outstanding in the Early Years Foundation Stage because of the exceptional leadership of the Early Years Foundation leader and the effective use of practical equipment to help children learn. Expectations of what children in Reception can do are very high and, as a result, their progress is outstanding. For example, children were encouraged to make up their own games during times when they played by themselves as well as in supported playtimes.
- Teachers plan activities that are exciting. Pupils are interested so they concentrate intensely, behave well and work hard. The teaching of reading is good and phonic (sounds that letters make) knowledge is developing well in all key stages, especially in Key Stages 1 and 2. Teachers know what they need to do to help pupils to improve. As a result, pupils make good progress in reading from when they join the school.
- The teaching of writing has improved over the last three years. Teachers and other adults make sure that pupils are given ample opportunities to write during literacy lessons. The school has a particularly strong focus on developing pupils' writing. The positive impact of this was seen by inspectors in writing in pupils' books during the inspection.
- Teachers listen to, and skilfully question pupils, to check how well they are doing. Other adults provide well-judged support for pupils to improve their communication skills, using excellent resources which keep pupils interested in learning. Occasionally, teachers do not set work that is hard enough for a few more-able pupils, or are too quick to give the answers to more difficult questions.
- Pupils' work is assessed frequently as lessons progress but not all pupils, especially the more able in Key Stage 3 and 4, are provided with enough information about how well they are doing or given individual guidance on how to improve their work.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Pupils' outstanding behaviour is underpinned by the very constructive and calming effect of the first 30 minutes of every school day. The school devotes this time to activities that include working with experts, such as occupational therapists to develop motor skills, providing excellent help with reading and encouraging pupils to reflect on their behaviour targets. Pupils enjoy these activities and this is reflected in their regular attendance.

- Pupils are well cared for. Pupils and staff are unreservedly caring and polite to one another and there is a strong community feeling in the school which fosters outstanding relationships.
- A few pupils have very challenging behaviours associated with their complex range of behaviour, emotional and social difficulties. Staff are adept at managing these behaviours and removing obstacles to learning for pupils. Hence, pupils engage exceptionally well and their attitude to learning is outstanding.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. Students who spoke with inspectors say that they are very happy and feel safe at school. Special lessons are devoted to learning about safety issues including e-safety. Pupils know they can talk about their worries with a trusted adult. The majority of parents, carers and staff who responded to Ofsted's questionnaires have confirmed this. On the very few occasions when bullying incidents happen, they are dealt with exceptionally well and exclusions have decreased in the last year.
- The management of pupils' behaviour by staff is excellent. Procedures are used consistently well and the reporting and recording systems are robust. Consequently, all pupils in all key stages, as well as children in Reception, respond extremely well to the school's rewards programme and look forward to their Friday rewards assembly. This has led to significantly reduced incident rates in the last three years.

The leadership and management are good

- The new headteacher and deputy headteacher have justifiably earned the trust and respect of the school community by providing strong leadership in a very short time. The robustness of the school's view of its own strengths and weaknesses and the high-quality training and professional development for staff have ensured that pupils make good progress. The school's planning for the future is linked effectively to the school's self-assessment.
- The new leadership team has ensured that assessment information is now gathered and analysed frequently so pupils' progress is checked against national data. The accuracy of teacher assessments is checked regularly within the school and against the assessment of other teachers in similar schools. However, teachers who lead subjects and key stages are still developing the ways in which they are challenging their departments on the progress expected for different groups of pupils, including that of the few more able pupils.
- The way subjects are taught is stimulating and interesting for all pupils. A good start has been made on providing a more challenging range of qualifications for pupils by the time they leave school. This has already had a positive impact on increasing the rate of progress, at Key Stage 4, for pupils with severe learning difficulties. However, the range of qualifications for the few more-able pupils with moderate learning difficulties in Key Stage 4 is more limited.
- Effective procedures for setting targets for teachers to work to have helped to establish good teaching quickly. The performance of staff is built on rigorous and accurate checking of their lessons, their planning and pupils' progress. Staff pay levels are increasingly well matched to their level of expertise and responsibilities.
- The school's commitment to ensuring equality is evident in its targeting of additional support to ensure that all pupils now make similarly good progress overall. The use of additional funding from the pupil premium is managed extremely well. Leaders know that the teaching of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is leading to narrowing the gaps in progress for these pupils.
- The school uses the government funding for sport to pay for additional adults to support its

extra-curricular sports programmes and to provide models of good practice for the teaching of physical education. The school is working on ways to measure the impact of this funding on the quality of teaching.

- The school encourages parents and carers to join in the life of the school. Parents and carers regularly work with the school to support the achievement of pupils' behaviour targets and to join in celebrations of success. They know their children's learning and progress is linked to their attitude to learning which is exceptional.
- School leaders and governors follow procedures for securing the safety of pupils systematically and with rigour. Statutory requirements for safeguarding are met.
- The school provides extensive outreach support to several schools within Essex. This has provided ample opportunities for teachers to exchange ideas and has improved their confidence in supporting pupils to progress to the next stage beyond their current school. As a result, pupils benefit from good information, advice and guidance about their next steps in education from knowledgeable staff.
- The local authority has provided 'light touch' support for the school in the last two years following the appointment of a new headteacher and deputy. The school has welcomed this, in a very positive way and values the high-quality expertise and support they receive.
- The governance of the school:
 - Since the last inspection, the Governing Body has ensured the appointment of a strong headteacher and senior leadership team. They have supported the school to eliminate weaknesses in teaching.
 - Governance is good because the governing body has been effective in challenging senior leaders to bring about improvement. They have been trained well to understand information on pupils' progress provided by the school.
 - Governors are knowledgeable about the quality of teaching and how it links to pupils' progress and the school's pay structure.
 - The Governing Body has planned effective ways for measuring the impact of the additional funding the school receives for sport or the pupil premium. Governors are well informed about the difference the pupil premium funding is making to the achievement and well-being of eligible pupils.

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	115461
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	427151

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	5–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	135
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Nan Ashkettle
Headteacher	Philippa Holliday
Date of previous school inspection	21 October 2010
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