

Castle High School and Visual Arts College

St James's Road, Dudley, West Midlands DY1 3JE

Inspection dates

9–10 February 2016

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- In 2015, too few pupils made the progress expected of them, especially in mathematics and science.
- The proportion of pupils attaining five or more GCSE A* to C grades, including in English and mathematics, is still too low.
- The quality of teaching, while improving, remains variable. Leaders know that they need to do more to reduce further the inconsistencies that remain in teaching.
- Some pupils are not sufficiently interested in lessons to fully involve themselves in their learning. As a result, not all pupils try hard enough when asked to work independently.
- Not all pupils value punctuality to lessons. Learning is disrupted as a result of some lateness to lessons.
- Some staff apply the school's effective behaviour management policy inconsistently.

The school has the following strengths

- This school is well led and managed by a headteacher and other leaders who have high expectations and aspirations for pupils and staff. Recent appointments have strengthened leadership, giving the school greater capacity for further and more rapid improvement.
- Standards are rising and increasing numbers of pupils currently at the school are making the progress expected nationally, including in English and mathematics.
- Leaders are having a positive impact on improving teaching and this is accelerating the progress of pupils currently at the school.
- Pupils are safe in school. Leaders have put in place comprehensive and effective measures to ensure that pupils are properly safeguarded.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good. The school successfully promotes values such as tolerance, mutual respect and fairness.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching and progress, especially in mathematics and science, by:
 - ensuring that the quality of teaching in all subjects matches the high standards and good practice evident in some subjects
 - promoting active participation and development of independent learning skills by pupils
 - making sure marking and feedback are carried out by all staff in line with school policy.
- Build on the positive relationships that exist in school by:
 - improving punctuality to lessons so that all pupils are ready to learn from the outset
 - challenging and engaging pupils in all lessons to remove opportunities for low-level disruption
 - supporting teachers to apply consistently the effective school behaviour policy.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The headteacher, senior leaders and governors, who are ambitious for pupils and for the school, are determinedly leading improvements. New appointments have strengthened the capacity of leaders, and although the impact of recent changes are emerging, they are not yet fully embedded. Leaders have clearly communicated their vision for the school to all staff, who support the drive to improve teaching, behaviour and outcomes. They have created an open and transparent culture among staff where discussion of solutions is encouraged. Positive relationships exist, but staff are rigorously held to account. Improvements have resulted in raised aspirations for pupils and a more positive climate for learning.
- Leaders and governors know the school's strengths and weaknesses. Leaders use a wide range of accurate information to inform their realistic assessment of standards in the school and create clear plans for improvement. Leaders' rigorous and systematic approach to self-evaluation has led to improvements in teaching and better outcomes for pupils currently at the school.
- Leaders have planned a successful and extensive professional development programme for teachers. There has been a substantial focus on improving the quality of teaching and assessment and teaching is improving. In addition, regular monitoring of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment quickly identifies where a member of staff may need additional support. Provision is quickly put into place and results in improvements to teaching.
- The local authority provides a small amount of support and advice to the school, because of its faith in the school's leaders to drive improvement. This support is helpful to leaders and governors.
- Staff morale is high and they are very proud of their school. Leaders successfully motivate and support staff. Staff who spoke to inspectors or completed the staff questionnaire say they enjoy working at the school and think that the school is well led and managed.
- Leaders use pupil premium funding successfully. The pupil premium is additional money given by the government for pupils in local authority care and those known to be eligible for free school meals, to improve outcomes for these pupils. Leaders track precisely which additional activities have the most impact so that funding can be allocated effectively.
- Teachers' performance management targets are challenging and linked to pupils' progress and professional teaching standards. Rewards are related to success in achieving these targets.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced and provides a range of courses that meets the needs and ambitions of pupils. There is a good range of subjects for pupils to choose from. Additional support in a wide range of subjects, including English and mathematics, is successfully enhancing the progress of those pupils who fall behind.
- Pupils are able to participate in additional activities to broaden their experience. Pupils successfully take part in sporting, artistic and cultural opportunities that support their personal development. These opportunities are valued by pupils and parents. One parent commented that, 'pupils are given every opportunity to succeed'.
- Pupils are prepared well for life in modern Britain. Through the curriculum and extra-curricular activities, pupils develop positive values, attitudes and respect for people different from themselves. They also develop an understanding of democracy and the rule of law.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - is committed to the school's vision to embrace the talents of all its pupils and celebrate the richness of its cultural diversity
 - has a clear understanding of the priorities for the school, based on regular meetings and frequent visits to the school
 - effectively provides challenge and support to leaders at all levels, questions underperformance and checks that actions taken are having a positive impact
 - are aware of how pupil premium funding is spent and the overall impact it has on improving rates of progress for groups of pupils.

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. All staff and governors have received appropriate and recent training related to safeguarding and so understand their responsibilities in keeping pupils safe. Staff follow the school's safeguarding policy and procedures and can identify pupils who may be at risk and act swiftly, involving external agencies where necessary. As a result, pupils feel safe and parents agree with this view. Arrangements for checking on the quality and safety of alternative provision placements are thorough and effective.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement

- Despite current improvements in the quality of teaching, there remains variability, especially where staffing changes have delayed new practice from being fully embedded. This is especially true in mathematics and science. Instability in staffing has been resolved since the start of term in September 2015. Where teaching is currently less strong, teachers do not consistently plan activities that motivate, challenge or engage the interest of all pupils. As a result, pupils have weaknesses in their understanding, lack enjoyment in that subject and present their work poorly in their books. Staff are successfully addressing these shortfalls. Pupils say they enjoy their learning, and they link that to better teaching and more stable staffing.
- The school has a clear policy on the nature and frequency of marking and provision of written feedback to pupils. Not all teachers follow leaders' expectations and marking and feedback are not frequent enough or do not always tell pupils clearly and specifically how to improve. As a result, pupils either receive insufficient feedback or may not be able to identify exactly what they need to do to improve their work.
- Teachers use questioning very effectively to help pupils to develop their ideas and think carefully about their answers. For instance, in an English lesson, pupils studying a poem were successfully challenged by the teacher to develop opinions about how specific vocabulary creates an emotional response. However, in some lessons, questions posed by teachers are too imprecise to provide information about pupils' progress. In other lessons, teachers accept brief, closed responses which do not encourage pupils to think more deeply or provide detailed responses, and fails to sustain pupils' interest in learning.
- The teaching of literacy is well planned and a strong focus for the school. For example, in a religious education lesson, pupils were encouraged to use precise subject language to explain concepts clearly in extended written answers. In a mathematics lesson, pupils were again required to use precise subject language to explain terms and methods clearly to others. Pupils' numeracy skills are developing more slowly than their literacy skills because teachers do not always provide opportunities for pupils to use mathematical skills in a range of subjects.
- Teachers' accurate assessment of pupils' work helps leaders and teachers to know when a pupil is falling behind, so extra support can be given to get them back on track. This information is often used effectively and teachers allow an element of choice, so that pupils can challenge themselves with more difficult tasks. Pupils appreciate these opportunities and use them to extend their learning. However, at times teachers do not insist that pupils take full advantage of opportunities to engage in lessons. For example, in a mathematics lesson, pupils waited for the teacher to go through the answers rather than completing calculations themselves. In science, some pupils' work in books was not well presented and pupils commented on the lack of opportunity to take part in practical work due to frequent changes in their teacher. Pupils then do not make as much progress as possible and do not increase their skills to think and work independently.
- Relationships between pupils and teachers are good. Teachers encourage pupils to show respect for the ideas and views of others. However, learning time is lost as not all lessons begin punctually because some pupils arrive late and this disturbs others. In these instances, teachers do not consistently apply the school's behaviour policy.
- Teachers use information they have on pupils to target support where it is needed most to help pupils to catch up when they do not understand. Consequently, rates of progress have improved and pupils currently in the school are making satisfactory or better progress.
- In many lessons, inspectors noted that teachers took opportunities to develop pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding. For instance, in an art lesson, pupils were using inspiration from Mexican culture to produce creative work, while in a religious education lesson, pupils were involved in a debate on how they would respond to different moral dilemmas. As a result, the development of spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding is a strength of the school.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- The school places great emphasis on ensuring that pupils' well-being is at the core of what they do on a daily basis. Senior leaders have appointed additional pastoral leaders, which has successfully increased the capacity to provide good care and support for pupils in school. Pastoral staff are supported by the work of many different external agencies. Pupils receive effective and appropriate additional provision from external agencies as required.
- Pupils follow an extensive programme of personal, social and health education. They are systematically taught how to deal with bullying, internet safety and other risks including knife crime. Pupils are actively involved in combating radicalisation and extremism, with some pupils becoming young ambassadors to prevent radicalisation. Pupils say that they feel safe in school and know how to share concerns with school staff.
- Pupils show tolerance and respect for each other and for people of different faiths or cultures. They are clear about the unacceptability of prejudice-based language. Pupils know how to be good citizens through contributing to wider society and life in modern Britain.
- Very few incidents of bullying are recorded and when it does occur, it is dealt with swiftly and effectively. Staff tackle bullying using a system of restorative justice that reduces the chances of bullying reoccurring. Pupils and parents are positive about the way the school tackles bullying.
- Teachers are quick to tackle the use of inappropriate language in lessons and around the school when it occurs. They challenge stereotypes and promote equality of opportunity and diversity in teaching and learning.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- In lessons, most pupils are well behaved and polite. They listen respectfully to their teachers and to other pupils, and contribute their own ideas in a mature fashion. A small number of pupils make poor choices regarding their conduct. This remains a concern of some staff, parents and pupils. Inspectors observed inattention, chatting and some disruption to learning in a few lessons, usually because the work set was not engaging or did not have sufficient challenge. Leaders have an effective behaviour management system in place, but this is not applied consistently by all teachers.
- The vast majority of pupils are punctual when moving between classes, but some lateness to lessons was observed, resulting in later starts and reduced learning time for pupils.
- The number of fixed-term exclusions has increased as a result of higher expectations for pupil behaviour in the school. A very small number of pupils have caused the increase in fixed-term exclusions as they find meeting the school's behaviour codes challenging.
- Attendance of pupils is close to the national average. However, leaders are aware that attendance rates for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs or disability are lower than for other pupils in the school and nationally. Strategies are in place to address low rates of attendance for specific groups of pupils and these are having a demonstrably positive impact.
- The vast majority of pupils behave consistently well in and around the school at all times of the day. The school is generally calm and orderly, but some older pupils are boisterous and exuberant and occasionally use inappropriate language with each other. However, pupils are polite to staff and visitors and clearly demonstrate good relationships with adults in school. Most pupils wear their uniform neatly and correctly and proudly. The school site is free from damage and litter.
- Alternative provision is used to engage pupils at risk of permanent exclusion from school. This has resulted in a reduction in historically high rates of permanent exclusion. The small number of pupils who are educated away from the school site attend and behave well and are safe.

Outcomes for pupils

require improvement

- Although there is currently a picture of improvement in outcomes, leaders were disappointed by the public examination results for 2015, with some measures lower than in 2014. Mathematics in particular performed badly in 2015 because too many pupils achieved a grade D rather than a C, affecting the overall performance figures. In English, pupils did much better, achieving outcomes that were similar to all pupils nationally.
- Leaders assessed the prior attainment of pupils who took examinations in 2015 as this information was not available for all pupils. As a result of leaders' additional analysis, a more detailed picture of the progress of Year 11 pupils in 2015 was available. Pupils' progress in English remained good since the last inspection and compares favourably with the progress of other pupils nationally. Pupils' progress in mathematics declined in 2015, reflecting instability of teaching staff within the department. Pupils' progress in humanities and modern foreign languages was at least as good as for other pupils nationally. However, too few pupils made the progress expected of them in science.
- Inspectors looked carefully and in detail at the evidence available for current outcomes for pupils across all subjects and years since the start of the academic year 2015. The school's extensive and accurate assessment information currently indicates that rates of progress in English will improve in 2016. The proportion of pupils making expected progress in mathematics in 2016 is now similar to that of all pupils nationally. Progress in science is improving as teachers address gaps in pupils' understanding that arose through changes in teachers last year. Pupils' outcomes are at least satisfactory in most subject areas.
- Pupils with special educational needs or disability currently in the school are making progress in line with other pupils in the school in English. However, gaps exist between the proportion of pupils with special educational needs or disability and their peers in making expected progress in mathematics.
- The proportion of the most-able pupils is below average on entry to the school. These pupils, however, make good progress and gain results that are comparable with similar pupils nationally.
- Pupils who speak English as an additional language achieve better than similar pupils nationally. Pupils who are learning English for the first time in school acquire English language skills quickly as a result of effective provision from teachers and support staff.
- The progress of disadvantaged pupils, particularly those with high prior attainment, is similar to that of other pupils in the school and nationally. Disadvantaged pupils' attainment remains slightly lower than the attainment of other pupils in the school and nationally.
- Pupils who have low levels of skill in English and/or mathematics when they start school in Year 7 are effectively supported by programmes that focus on developing literacy and numeracy skills. As a result of the high-quality interventions provided, pupils who were behind in English and/or mathematics catch up with their peers.
- The very small number of pupils who complete their education at a different location are achieving well. They make progress and achieve qualifications that prepare them well for the next stage of their education.
- In the past, the proportion of all pupils who do not successfully continue in education, training or employment after Year 11 has been above the national average. This is especially true for disadvantaged pupils. The process of careers information, guidance and advice now starts in Year 8 so that pupils can make informed choices about their futures. As a result, an increasing proportion of pupils successfully continue in education, training or employment when they leave the school.

School details

Unique reference number	103867
Local authority	Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
Inspection number	10002508

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

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	607
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Peter Marsh
Headteacher	Ms Michelle King
Telephone number	01384 816045
Website	www.castle.dudley.sch.uk
Email address	general@castle.dudley.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	16–17 October 2013

Information about this school

- Castle High School and Visual Arts College is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- The school has an above-average intake of pupils of minority ethnic heritage. Of these, the largest group is of Pakistani heritage. Almost one quarter of pupils speak English as an additional language.
- The percentage of pupils who are supported through the pupil premium (which provides additional funding for children who are looked after and those known to be eligible for free school meals) is above average.
- The proportion of pupils with special educational needs or disability is above average.
- A very small number of pupils access all of their education with Nova Training, an alternative provider.
- In 2015, the school did not meet the government's current floor standards, which set minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress by the end of Year 11.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching in 28 lessons; five of these were carried out with members of the school's senior leadership team. Lessons visited covered a wide range of subjects and year groups across the school. Inspectors carried out two learning walks and visited the withdrawal room. Inspectors also observed registration periods and an assembly. Pupils' behaviour between lessons, and at break- and lunchtime was also observed by inspectors.
- Pupils' work was reviewed by inspectors in lessons.
- Inspectors held meetings with senior and middle leaders, teaching staff, governors and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors evaluated the 10 responses of parents to the Ofsted online questionnaire (Parent View) and the parent questionnaire analysis provided by the school. Inspectors also took into account the views of 37 members of staff through the inspection questionnaire responses.
- Pupils met formally with inspectors on two separate occasions. Inspectors also conducted many informal discussions with pupils.
- Inspectors reviewed documentation from a variety of sources, including the school's self-evaluation and plans, school policies, school information about outcomes, teaching and behaviour, and minutes of governing body meetings.

Inspection team

Rob Hackfath, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Derek Barnes	Ofsted Inspector
Nicola Walters	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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