

Castle Academy

St George's Street, Northampton, Northamptonshire NN1 2TR

Inspection dates

29–30 November 2016

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The principal and vice-principal are leading the school well. They have successfully raised the expectations of the teachers to enable pupils to make good progress.
- The pupils' outcomes are rising. The proportion of pupils who have met the expected standard in writing at the end of key stage 2 in 2016 is above the national average.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good. The teachers regularly challenge the pupils to improve their work. This enables pupils to achieve well.
- The school has good links with the local community. Most parents are very supportive of the school.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is successfully supported. The school embraces the wide range of cultures that the pupils represent. The school is a harmonious community.
- Pupils work collaboratively together and respect each other's views. Pupils' behaviour is good.
- The governing body and the trust know the school well. They offer a good level of challenge and support to school leaders. The quality of teaching is improving.
- The children are well supported in the Nursery and make a good start in the early years. The children are enthusiastic learners.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching and learning to raise pupils' outcomes further, by:
 - developing pupils' skills to problem-solve and reason mathematically, particularly for the most able pupils and the most able disadvantaged pupils
 - consistently using all opportunities to deepen pupils' learning within lessons to enable pupils to make faster progress.
- Improve leadership and management, including in the early years, by:
 - further developing the role of senior and middle leaders to improve teaching and learning across the school
 - ensuring that the curriculum further promotes the progress of boys, to enable more to achieve highly at the end of each key stage.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The principal and the vice-principal are an effective team and lead the school well. They have established an ethos where pupils are inspired and challenged, diversity is embraced and pupils are developing the skills for lifelong learning. In addition, both pupils and staff are encouraged to be leaders and to take responsibility for their own learning. Consequently, the achievement of pupils is rising across the school.
- The strong leadership is impacting positively on pupils' outcomes. Unconfirmed information from the end of key stage 2 assessments in 2016 show that pupils made above average progress in reading, writing and mathematics from their starting points. This would match similar progress made by pupils in 2015 for all three subjects.
- The leadership team motivates teachers by providing a wide range of opportunities to promote the professional development of staff. Using results from their rigorous monitoring of teaching, leaders implement specific training to help support individual teachers' performance. In addition, teachers are set measurable performance targets and only good performance is rewarded. As a result, the quality of teaching has improved and is now good.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced and pupils' skills and knowledge are developed well in history, geography and the arts. In addition, the school enhances the curriculum through 'wow' events to enhance pupils' learning. These events have included setting up a dinosaur workshop for pupils to dig for fossils and to make model dinosaurs, as well as reading under the stars to promote the enjoyment of reading.
- However, the current curriculum is not successfully motivating the boys to achieve as well as the girls. The school's own pupil tracking information shows that boys' outcomes in many year groups are below those of the girls in reading, writing and mathematics. Senior leaders have started to review how the curriculum can be tailored to motivate more boys to make faster progress.
- The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The school celebrates diversity by displaying the 36 different languages spoken by pupils and their families on a world map, under the theme of 'different places, one school'. The pupils in Year 6 have studied poems from the first world war and visited the national arboretum to remember those who have lost their lives in wars. Some pupils have sung at the London Wembley Arena as part of the Voice in a Million project to raise the public's awareness of children in care. As a result, pupils demonstrate respect and compassion for each other.
- The school promotes British values well. The pupils are respectful to others who may have different lifestyles to their own. The pupils learn about democracy through voting for members of the school council. The pupils' knowledge of different religions has been developed through a visit to a gurdwara to learn more about Sikhism. There is a display of psalms and of Diwali in the school to promote tolerance and respect for different religions.
- The principal and the vice-principal are now developing the roles of other senior and middle leaders to monitor and evaluate their subject responsibilities to further improve

the quality of teaching. The skilled English and mathematics subject leaders have started to impact more on the teaching and learning across the school. However, their impact across every year group is not as well developed as it could be. In addition, there are several new leaders in position. It is too soon to judge the impact of their work. They include, for example, the leaders for teaching and learning and of the early years.

- Leaders have used the pupil premium well to accelerate the progress of disadvantaged pupils. There is a range of intervention strategies to meet the academic and pastoral needs of disadvantaged pupils, including extra tuition for English and mathematics. Unconfirmed information from the end of key stage 2 assessments in 2016 shows that disadvantaged pupils made above average progress compared to other pupils nationally from the same starting points in reading and writing. They made broadly average progress in mathematics.
- The sports premium funding provides a range of extra-curricular clubs for pupils to participate in. These include gymnastics and dance after school as well as football and basketball at lunchtimes. The leader of sport checks that disadvantaged pupils are accessing the clubs. The school takes part in local competitions against other schools and has enjoyed recent success with tag rugby.

Governance of the school

- The chair of the academy improvement board is also the chief executive officer of the EMLC Trust. She meets with the principal on a weekly basis and knows the school's strengths and weaknesses well. The challenge adviser, who is a member of the academy improvement board, regularly visits the school and works with the leaders to quality assure the school's self-evaluation and evaluate the progress towards the priorities within the school improvement plan. As a result, the school leaders have a well-informed view of the school's performance.
- The EMLC Trust encourages the school to work with other schools within the trust as well as schools that are closer geographically. This provides numerous opportunities for teachers to moderate pupils' work to ensure that their assessments are accurate. In addition, the trust provides training for teachers and leaders to improve their own practice. As a result, there is a strong culture of everyone wanting to improve their own practice to raise outcomes for pupils.
- The advisory improvement board regularly checks the progress of groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, to ensure that the pupil premium funding is being used effectively. In addition, the trust conducts an annual review of pupil premium spending to hold leaders to account for the funding. The disadvantaged pupils have made good progress from their starting points.
- The advisory improvement board ensures that the appraisal system for teachers is comprehensive. They set the performance targets for the principal and check that a range of evidence has been used to evaluate the performance for all teachers. Consequently, poor performance is quickly identified and support is put in place to improve the quality of teaching. The quality of teaching is now consistently good.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders are very proactive to ensure that pupils' safety and well-being are at the heart of the school's work. They have comprehensive systems in place to identify, record and to act to ensure pupils are safe. The school ensures that staff who are new to the profession know the correct action to take if they have a concern. The leaders' record-keeping is of high quality and records contain the action they have taken following a concern raised.
- The safeguarding training for all the staff is comprehensive. All staff have been trained on the 'Prevent' programme which helps them to protect pupils who are potentially at risk of radicalisation and extremism. The school has good links with the local police to help keep them informed of the local issues in the community. All the staff have also had training in relation to female genital mutilation and know how to report any concerns.
- The school inclusion team support pupils and their families well through working with a range of external agencies, including social care and health visitors, to ensure the best outcomes for pupils. The school leaders are not afraid to challenge the actions of external agencies if they do not feel that the appropriate action is being taken to safeguard pupils.
- Members of the inclusion team support pupils well who are new to the country and speak very little or no English. They have a programme to support newly arrived pupils to enable them to learn English quickly and to access the curriculum. The team has also supported the opening of a language café for mothers of pupils who speak English as an additional language, to help improve the parents' knowledge and understanding of English and to improve relationships between school and home.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The good quality of teaching, learning and assessment enables pupils to make good progress from their starting points. The relationships between adults and the pupils are good. The classrooms are orderly and pupils respond well to the learning tasks.
- Where teaching is most effective, the teachers demonstrate excellent subject knowledge. The teachers challenge pupils to explain their understanding of concepts and then set more difficult tasks for pupils to complete. In a Year 6 mathematics lesson, pupils were asked to problem-solve and simplify a fraction. Next, the teacher challenged the pupils to use the most efficient method. Following on from this, the pupils were set a difficult mathematical problem, where they considered each other's thoughts before reaching the answer.
- Scrutiny of pupils' work shows that the pupils in Years 5 and 6 are regularly given problem-solving questions and are developing their mathematical reasoning skills. However, there is less evidence of this work in the rest of the school until recently, particularly for the most able pupils.
- The teaching of writing is good. Pupils in key stage 1 use their phonic knowledge well

to write sentences. They are keen to add their own new words and spell more ambitious words. Pupils in key stage 2 are using their secure grammatical knowledge to write interesting sentences. After being inspired by Roald Dahl, pupils wrote about their dreams. One boy wrote, 'Shiny, sparkling, peaceful dreams shiver in the sky.'

- Teachers have promoted reading well since the start of term. Pupils have been set reading challenges for homework to further promote their understanding of texts. Younger pupils use their phonic knowledge to read unfamiliar words. The most able pupils read fluently and are encouraged to read high-quality books by Michael Morpurgo and J. R. R. Tolkien.
- The pupils respond well to opportunities to develop their design and technology skills. Pupils in Year 4 have made Viking longboats and pupils in Year 2 made games related to the book, 'Charlie and the chocolate factory'. In Year 3, the pupils' historical knowledge has been developed well. They became Anglo-Saxons to learn what life was like in medieval times. Their topic books showed that pupils have a good understanding of what they have learned.
- Where teaching is less effective, teachers do not deepen pupils' learning well enough through questioning the pupils' understanding of concepts, and do not address pupils' misconceptions quickly enough. Consequently, the pupils do not make as much progress as they could.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- The pupils are engaged in their learning and work well together. In Year 6, pupils worked well as a team to identify all the features of a newspaper quickly. Most pupils present their work neatly and join their handwriting. However, occasionally the standard of presentation in books for some pupils slips.
- The pupils' emotional well-being is promoted well. Pupils are asked to think about what makes them happy and what they value in life. If pupils do have a concern they say they can speak to an adult or put their concern in a worry box. The pupils say that their concerns are always followed up.
- The pupils are encouraged to eat healthy snacks at breaktime and there is a range of extra-curricular sport clubs for pupils to participate in. The Year 6 leaders help supervise the tyre activity trail in the playground. In addition, pupils have just raised £2,000 to help develop the playground.
- The pupils say bullying is rare. The school regularly communicates anti-bullying messages and informs pupils what to do if it happens to them. Moreover, the school informs the pupils about how to stay safe online. Older pupils have been given scenarios of potential situations which could happen to them online and they have been asked what their response would be. Consequently, the pupils know not to pass any personal details online and to report anything that concerns them.
- During the inspection, the pupils were learning about enterprise and making craft items to sell at the Christmas enterprise fair for parents. The school has a school bank to

encourage pupils to learn more about money and the value of saving.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- The pupils conduct themselves well in lessons and on the playground. They walk in an orderly fashion within the school and listen intently in assembly. The learning environment is calm and productive. Pupils' good conduct is rewarded through merit certificates which are also on display around the school. One pupil was recently awarded a certificate for understanding the importance of charity work.
- Most pupils respond well to the instructions of adults and settle to their learning quickly. Occasionally, some pupils have to be reminded to listen in lessons and to focus. The pupils say that most pupils behave well and that the adults do follow the school's behavioural policy for those pupils who do misbehave.
- The inclusion team supports pupils who may display behavioural difficulties. A range of intervention programmes are supported to improve pupils' behaviour both within lessons and on the playground. As a result, the behaviour of individual pupils that the inclusion team have worked with has improved considerably.
- The pupils' attendance has continued to improve and is now above the national average for primary schools for all groups of pupils. The school's attendance welfare officer works closely with the children's worker to monitor and support families to improve pupils' attendance. The school has worked hard with families to communicate the importance of pupils attending every day. Consequently, the number of pupils who are persistently absent has reduced.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Unconfirmed information from the end of key stage 2 in 2016 shows that the proportion of pupils who have reached the expected standard in writing and mathematics was above the national average. Moreover, the proportion of pupils who achieved highly in writing was also above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who reached the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 1 in 2016 was above the national average. This demonstrates an improvement from 2015 when pupils' achievement was well below the national average for all subjects.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils who achieved the expected standard in writing, or higher, in 2016 was above other pupils nationally at the end of key stage 2. This group of pupils scored higher in the spelling test than other pupils nationally. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils who achieved highly in reading was also above other pupils nationally. However, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils who achieved the expected standard in reading and mathematics was lower than other pupils nationally.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils who achieved highly in mathematics at the end of key stages 1 and 2 in 2016 was below the national average for other pupils.

- The most able pupils made more progress than other pupils nationally from the same starting point in reading, writing and mathematics in key stage 2 in 2016. However, in key stage 1 not as many most-able pupils attained highly in reading and writing as other pupils nationally from the same starting point.
- The progress of pupils who speak English as an additional language was strong. This group of pupils made above average progress in reading, writing and mathematics through key stage 2 in 2016. In key stage 1, the outcomes of this group of pupils were higher than other pupils nationally in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported well. The school uses a range of strategies to support pupils' progress and work closely with outside agencies to meet the needs of pupils. Pupils make broadly expected progress from their starting points but their outcomes are below those of other pupils nationally.
- The proportion of pupils who passed the phonics check in Year 1 was above the national average in 2016. This represents a rising trend. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language who passed the check in 2016 was also above the national average for all pupils.
- In 2016, both boys and girls made above average progress in writing and mathematics by the end of key stage 2. The boys made more progress than the girls in reading. Broadly equal proportions of boys and girls reached the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics.
- However, the school's current tracking system shows that boys are not achieving as well as girls in many year groups in reading, writing and mathematics.

Early years provision

Good

- The outcomes of the children by the end of the early years are rising. The proportion of children who achieved a good level of development in 2016 was just above the national average. The proportion of children who speak English as an additional language who reached a good level of development was also above the national average. The children are well prepared to start in Year 1.
- The achievement of boys and of disadvantaged pupils has also risen since 2015. The proportion of boys who achieved a good level of development in 2016 is above the national average for boys in 2015, although still lower than that of the girls. The proportion of disadvantaged children who reached a good level of development is now just below the national average for other children.
- The children make good progress from their low starting points when they arrive in the school. The school staff visit all the children in their homes to ensure they have as much information as possible to enable the children to make a good start. The positive links between school and home are reinforced through parents being encouraged to share their child's successes at home with the school staff. This enables the staff to celebrate the children's achievements at school to further enhance the children's self-esteem.
- The close relationship between the school staff and parents is further enhanced through the family feast at the start of the year. Parents are asked to bring in traditional food from their country of origin to enable the children to learn about

different cultures. This opportunity also enables the families of the children to get to know each other better and enables the school to be a harmonious community.

- The school works closely with a range of external agencies, including a speech and language therapist, health visitors and a dental nurse, to meet the needs of the children quickly. An early years family worker has also been employed by the school to ensure that all the needs of the children are being met. Consequently, children's needs are being identified quickly and extra support is put in place to enable the children to make good progress.
- The learning environment in the early years is nurturing and the children are motivated and engaged. In the Nursery, the children were observed making shapes out of playdough independently, for a sustained period of time. Adults take the opportunities to reinforce the children's mathematical development where they can. Outside, the teacher drew a circle on the frosted tricycle seat and asked the children to identify the shape. The children make strong progress from their starting points.
- The children's behaviour is good. Children cooperate well and settle into the school routines quickly. In the Nursery the children are encouraged to zip up their own coats before going outside.
- The challenge for the most able children in mathematics is not as effective as it could be. For example, when the children created patterns in the Reception Year, these were too easy for the most able. This group of children do not always make as much progress as they could.
- The teachers make regular assessments of the children's learning to identify the next steps. Senior leaders are currently supporting the new early years leader in analysing assessment information and quickly providing intervention strategies for those children who need extra support.

School details

Unique reference number	140362
Local authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	10019537

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	518
Appropriate authority	Academy improvement board
Chair	Jan Marshall
Principal	Lorna Beard
Telephone number	01604 638679
Website	castleacademy.northants.sch.uk
Email address	enquiries@castleacademy.northants.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school complies with statutory requirements about what information should be published on the school's website and also complies with the Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.
- The school is much larger than the average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is significantly higher than the national average for all schools.
- The proportion of pupils for whom the pupil premium provides support is broadly in line with the national average. This is the additional funding to support pupils known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below the national average.

- The proportion of pupils who arrive at the school or leave the school during the school year is higher than the national average.
- The school runs its own breakfast club which is managed by the academy improvement board.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed lessons, some jointly with senior leaders.
- The inspectors looked at pupils' work, covering a range of subjects.
- Meetings were held with: senior leaders; the leaders of English, mathematics, science and physical education, the early years, the curriculum, and the enhanced curriculum; lead teachers and the teacher responsible for teaching and learning; a member of the inclusion team; teachers who are new to the profession; the chair of the advisory improvement board and one other member of the EMLC Trust. In addition, an inspector held a phone call with the school's challenge adviser.
- The inspectors spoke informally to parents at the start of the school day. The inspectors also considered the 10 responses to the online Ofsted questionnaire, Parent View, and the nine responses to the free text service to parents.
- The inspectors also considered the questionnaires completed by 12 members of the school staff.
- The inspectors spoke to groups of pupils, listened to pupils read and observed the pupils at breaktime and in assembly.
- The inspectors looked at a range of documentation including: the school's self-evaluation; the school improvement plan; minutes of meetings of the advisory improvement board; the school's most recent information on pupils' achievement; and information related to safeguarding, behaviour and attendance.

Inspection team

Martin Finch, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Stuart Edmonds	Ofsted Inspector
Dorothy Martin	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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