

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
[www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)



24 January 2019

Mrs Helen Richardson  
Headteacher  
Castle Park School  
Sedbergh Drive  
Kendal  
Cumbria  
LA9 6BE

Dear Mrs Richardson

### **Short inspection of Castle Park School**

Following my visit to the school on 9 January 2019, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since your predecessor school was judged to be good in March 2014.

### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Castle Park is a vibrant and happy learning community. You and your leadership team are aspirational for the school. You have provided an inclusive and welcoming environment where all are encouraged to discover their talents and achieve their best. Pupils leave the school very well prepared for their next stage of education.

You and your staff have planned an engaging and interesting curriculum. Teachers plan a wide variety of trips and visits to teach pupils about their local, national and global community. Staff use the extensive school grounds to bring pupils' learning to life, for example through pond dipping and growing a variety of vegetables on the school's allotment. A wide variety of extra-curricular clubs, including those for archery and art, are used to enhance pupils' skills. Pupils enjoy playing a wide range of musical instruments and the school choir sings regularly for the local community. Year 5 and Year 6 pupils visit galleries, museums and the Scottish Parliament during their residential trip to Edinburgh. In the autumn term, the whole school community enjoyed an African-themed week, including a visit from Zulu warriors.

Leaders and governors place a strong emphasis on training for staff and this has raised standards in areas such as phonics. They provide staff with regular training opportunities and teachers work closely together to share their expertise. Through close partnership with other schools, teachers have developed their skills. They have good subject knowledge and work well with support staff to provide work that matches pupils' abilities.

In lessons, staff encourage pupils to be independent and resilient learners who are able to tackle challenging work. Staff training has improved how teachers plan for the most able pupils in subjects including mathematics. Through skilful questioning, teachers identify pupils' misconceptions and show pupils how to improve. Pupils' workbooks show that staff help them to address any errors that they have made and develop their understanding. Teachers are further embedding improvements to mathematics teaching to ensure that standards continue to rise.

Through regular meetings, members of the trust board have a good understanding of how well pupils achieve. Members check that the school's finances are well managed. Governors share leaders' aspirations to raise standards still further. New appointments and regular training have enhanced governors' skills. Governors provide challenge and support for leaders and know the school's strengths and weaknesses. They keep a careful check on the school's development work, including improving attendance for pupils. Governors work closely with leaders to provide an environment which supports and challenges pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

Pupils across the school are extremely polite and welcoming to visitors. They are very proud of their school and enjoy their learning. In class, pupils are enthusiastic and well behaved. They move calmly around the school and show consideration for others. Pupils state that bullying is rare, and any incidents are dealt with quickly by adults. Through an engaging curriculum, pupils learn to value differences, including in other religions, cultures and ethnicities. During the inspection, pupils described how they enjoy trips to mosques, temples and churches as part of their learning in religious education.

Parents and carers share pupils' extremely positive view of the school. A typical comment on Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents, praised the school's curriculum: 'We are very grateful to Castle Park for filling our children with a wonderful enthusiasm to learn – for sparking new interests and enhancing existing ones.' Parents typically describe leaders and teachers as 'amazing' and 'fantastic'. During the inspection, parents of pupils new to the school were keen to explain how quickly their children had settled into their new classes due to the welcoming ethos of the school.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Leaders place a high priority on keeping pupils safe and have made sure that safeguarding arrangements are thorough and of high quality. Leaders hold regular and appropriate safeguarding briefings and training for staff. As a result, all staff have up-to-date knowledge of safeguarding. This keeps them alert to risks and attentive to procedures. Staff teach pupils how to keep themselves safe online. You ensure that the curriculum has opportunities for pupils to learn how to keep themselves safe in the wider community, including visits from the local police community support officer.

Leaders waste no time in contacting other professionals to seek support for pupils and their families when needed. You are tenacious in ensuring that pupils receive

the help that they need. Staff teach pupils to talk to a trusted adult if they feel sad, scared or worried. Leaders and staff know pupils well and provide a wide range of support for the most vulnerable pupils and their families. You have taken effective action to ensure that the school is a safe and secure place for pupils. Parents, pupils and staff agree that pupils are safe in school.

## **Inspection findings**

- The inspection focused on a number of key lines of enquiry. The first of these was to check how regularly pupils attend school. Pupils enjoy school and value their education. Most attend very regularly. Leaders have put in place a range of support and initiatives to raise attendance, including for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND. Staff check pupils' attendance and follow up absences with parents. Good attendance is celebrated in weekly assemblies, school displays and in the school's newsletter. You arrange home visits and parent meetings with the school's educational welfare officer for pupils with low attendance. Leaders strongly discourage term-time holidays due to their adverse impact on pupils' learning. As a result of these effective actions, attendance improved last term and was above national averages. A small number of pupils are persistently absent, including some disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND. Leaders are proactive in working with these pupils and their families to improve attendance; this is having a positive impact for some of these pupils.
- During the inspection, I considered the effectiveness of mathematics teaching in key stage 2. This was because, in recent years, pupils' progress in mathematics at the end of Year 6 has been less strong than in reading and writing. Leaders have improved the approach to teaching mathematics across the school. Through working with other professionals, staff have developed their confidence and effectiveness in mathematics teaching. Teachers plan lessons which build on pupils' previous learning. Pupils are given frequent opportunities to develop their basic skills, including learning their multiplication tables. In lessons, staff use questioning very skilfully to develop pupils' reasoning skills. As a result, pupils are confident in explaining their mathematical thinking. Pupils' workbooks show that they revisit their learning and practise their written calculations regularly. The changes that you have made are having a positive impact. For example, in Years 3 and 4, pupils' progress is improving strongly. Because of the improvements that you have made, pupils now start Year 6 with a more secure understanding of basic concepts, including place value. Leaders are keeping a careful check on teaching and learning to ensure that the changes that you have made continue to improve progress in mathematics, including for the most able pupils.
- My final key line of enquiry was to check the provision made for pupils with SEND. I found that Castle Park School is an inclusive school. Leaders and staff are passionate about providing a learning environment which enables pupils with SEND to thrive. The school's inclusion team works closely with staff and other professionals to plan additional support programmes which precisely match pupils' needs. In class, this group of pupils is encouraged to develop their independence and to achieve well. Staff provide a range of learning tools and visual aids to support pupils in their learning. Pupils, including those with complex

needs, learn alongside their peers and develop their confidence. Staff have high expectations for what pupils with SEND can achieve and plan work which challenges pupils. Leaders check pupils' progress carefully to make sure that the support they receive is having the impact that it should. Pupils' workbooks show that they make good progress and achieve well.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue in their efforts to improve overall school attendance further and reduce rates of persistent absence, including for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND
- staff embed recent improvements in mathematics teaching so that pupils, including the most able, make the progress of which they are capable.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Cumbria. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Elizabeth Stevens  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I met with you, your deputy headteacher and the subject leader for mathematics. I also met with the inclusion manager and deputy inclusion manager. I took account of 26 staff responses to Ofsted's online survey. I met with eight governors and three members of the trust board. I met with 10 pupils and spoke informally with other pupils during lessons. I also considered 48 responses to Ofsted's online survey for pupils. I visited classes with you and your deputy headteacher, where I observed teaching and learning and looked at pupils' work. I scrutinised samples of pupils' work from each year group, including pupils with SEND.

I spoke with parents at the start of the school day. I took account of 36 responses to Parent View, the Ofsted online questionnaire, including free-text responses. I looked at a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plan and evaluations of teaching and learning. I checked behaviour and attendance logs and analysis. I also evaluated safeguarding procedures, including policies to keep pupils safe and safeguarding checks. I undertook a review of the school's website.