

Castle Academy

Station Road, Conisbrough, Doncaster, South Yorkshire DN12 3DB

Inspection dates

21 to 22 May 2019

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 new principal and assistant headteacher are inspirational leaders. They have inspired the staff and made rapid improvements that have had a significant impact on the quality of education. They have introduced significant improvements with energy and determination.
- There have been substantial improvements in the ethos and culture of the school. Staff, pupils and parents say that pupils' behaviour has significantly improved. As a result, the school is now a calmer and more productive learning environment.
- All leaders, teachers and teaching assistants have benefited greatly from high-quality training and support. As a result, all aspects of the school's work are good and improving.
- Determined leadership has brought about significant improvement in the majority of teaching, which is now good. Teachers plan learning well to build on pupils' prior skills and knowledge. However, in a minority of classes, assessment information is not used well and expectations, especially of the most able, are variable.
- The school provides strong support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and disadvantaged pupils. The assistant headteacher ensures she has a comprehensive overview of the interventions and support put in place to support pupils. Consequently, these pupils make strong progress from their starting points.
- Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is strong. It contributes effectively to their personal development and preparation for adult life.
- Pupils feel safe and secure because they know that adults in the school care for them and are ready to help them. Pupils learn how to keep safe in different situations.
- Children make a strong start in the early years. Most leave Reception well prepared for Year 1.
- The multi-academy trust provides effective support and development, which has enabled the school to improve. Board members are also well equipped to provide effective challenge and support.
- While there have been improvements in attendance, persistent absence remains higher than the national average for disadvantaged pupils.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that children and pupils make improved progress and greater proportions of children at the end of the early years, key stage 1 and key stage 2 reach and exceed age-related expectations in reading, writing and mathematics by:
 - setting more challenging work, especially for the most able
 - deepening teachers' subject knowledge in mathematics to help them anticipate potential pupil misconceptions or inefficient strategies
 - replicating the most effective existing practice and high expectations across all key stage 2 classes.
- Reduce the number of disadvantaged pupils who miss school on too many occasions.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- This is a rapidly improving school. Leaders are ambitious for pupils' achievement. They are determined to provide pupils with a high-quality education that allows pupils to thrive. Relationships between pupils and staff are very positive and behaviour is much improved. Pupils now focus well in lessons because they want to learn.
- The recently appointed principal has been unwavering in her determination to eradicate all aspects of underperformance and ensure an excellent standard of education for pupils in this school. Staff turbulence and a decline in the school's performance have been successfully tackled head-on. In a short period of time, the principal has led actions which are already transforming and improving the quality of teaching across the school.
- All current leaders are passionate about learning and developing their skills. Leaders and teachers have benefited greatly from the support and training provided by the trust and other consultants. Leaders have developed effective skills to evaluate, train and support colleagues, and to hold them to account for their performance. As a result, teaching and pupils' outcomes are improving.
- Leaders have developed effective systems for checking on pupils' progress, as well as on all other aspects of the school's work. They use the information extremely well to evaluate the effectiveness of their actions and to prioritise and plan the next stages of development planning. Leaders have a strong capacity to deliver further improvements.
- Leaders have instilled a collective responsibility for pupils' outcomes and have raised teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve. Staff feel well supported and are becoming more reflective about the impact of their teaching on pupils' learning. This has contributed to the recent improvements to pupils' outcomes. However, there is still some work to do to ensure that the expectations for the most able pupils are consistently high.
- Leaders have established strategies for evaluating the impact of their approach to improving pupils' behaviour. This analysis is helping them to identify patterns and any repeated incidents so that bespoke plans and support can be put in place. By understanding the root cause of pupils' behaviour, leaders and teachers are more precisely meeting pupils' needs. Pupils are now increasingly able to manage their own feelings and demonstrate more self-discipline. This has led to a sharp reduction in the frequency and severity of incidents of inappropriate behaviour.
- The school's focus on behaviour and attitudes to learning contributes strongly to pupils' social and moral development. Leaders are keen to make sure that, through the curriculum, pupils access a broad range of experiences to support their spiritual and cultural development, and also their appreciation of the local area.
- Middle leaders are very enthusiastic about their roles and responsibilities. They are taking a lead in leading improvements in their subjects. The English and mathematics leaders have worked hard to implement initiatives that have raised the quality of teaching in their subjects. They can clearly demonstrate the impact of their work and have evaluated actions effectively.

- Leaders have ensured that reading is promoted well through school and that pupils are encouraged to read regularly, both for pleasure and to enhance their learning across the curriculum.
- Leadership of provision for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND is highly effective. The highly skilled assistant headteacher has an extremely detailed knowledge of pupils with SEND and their individual needs, including what is in place to support pupils in class and any further additional help for pupils and families. The leader makes thorough checks on teaching and the curriculum to ensure that pupils get the help they need to develop independence and make gains in their learning. Funding is used effectively to make sure that pupils are making increasingly strong progress from their starting points.
- Leaders are highly ambitious for the outcomes of disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils. Their use of the pupil premium funding is sharply focused on removing barriers to learning. Pastoral leaders work closely with teachers to ensure that disadvantaged pupils are well supported and receive work that challenges them. Consequently, current assessment information shows that disadvantaged pupils are making particularly strong progress across the school.
- Leaders use the primary school physical education and sport funding effectively to ensure that pupils receive high-quality sporting experiences and that they have a chance to represent their school in local competitions and events.
- Leaders think carefully about ways to enhance pupils' learning through after-school clubs. A wide variety run throughout the year and are used to motivate and inspire pupils. Examples of these are dodgeball, 'Castle force', baking and forest schools. Leaders carefully monitor the pupils who attend to ensure equal access to all pupils, whatever their circumstances.
- The majority of parents are very happy with the school. Parents told inspectors that they have seen many positive changes since the principal started in post. One parent said, 'Since Mrs Mason has begun her leadership at the school, I feel it has improved dramatically. The school feels happier and brighter. My children are happy at school and always want to attend.' However, some parents believe that behaviour is still inconsistent in classes.
- Staff morale is very high. Staff say that the school has improved significantly. All staff who responded to the Ofsted questionnaire said they are proud to work here, and they all acknowledge the improvements to pupils' behaviour.

Governance of the school

- Governance is very strong. The transition management board works in close partnership with the trustees of the multi-academy trust. Board members and trustees sensibly coordinate their challenging questions for leaders as well as their responses to leaders' updates. This effective approach strengthens the lines of accountability within the trust.
- Board members have an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Governors, who are linked to a key aspect of the school, meet their associated school leader regularly. For example, the board member responsible for pupil premium

spending carries out regular reviews with the pupil premium leader. As a result, all board members have a clear understanding of the impact of the school's actions on pupils' outcomes.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The principal, who is the designated safeguarding lead, has attended advanced training. She ensures, through regular staff training and updates on the weekly staff newsletter, that safeguarding is a high priority throughout the school. All members of staff and governors are aware of the range of potential child protection issues that might occur in the community. They are alert to any changes in pupils' behaviour, and they report any concerns promptly.
- Leaders have ensured that all checks made on staff are thorough. Systems are clearly embedded and, as a result, staff can explain their duties and responsibilities for keeping pupils safe.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching has significantly improved since the appointment of the current principal in April 2018 and continues to improve. New approaches are becoming embedded and are providing more consistency. Consequently, current pupils are making good progress and an increasing proportion are reaching age-related expectations.
- Teachers have increasingly high expectations of what the vast majority of pupils can, and should, achieve. Teachers use assessment effectively to make sure that lessons build on pupils' prior knowledge. Well-thought-out sequences of lessons build on what pupils can already do and challenge pupils further through well-matched tasks.
- Work is usually pitched well, according to pupils' abilities, and teachers are skilled at adapting and changing plans based on ongoing daily assessments of how well pupils grasp learning. On some occasions, work does not provide enough challenge, especially for most-able pupils.
- Teaching is particularly strong in early years and key stage 1 because there is a high degree of consistency in the way reading, writing and mathematics is taught. Agreed approaches are tightly implemented, especially the focus on developing pupils' ability to explain what they are learning.
- As a result of a rigorous and systematic approach to the teaching of phonics, children are getting off to a faster start in their reading in early years and key stage 1. Pupils are quickly developing a love of reading from an early age. The school has invested in an attractive and well stocked library. A fresh approach to the teaching of reading across the school engages pupils in more complex class texts.
- Pupils write enthusiastically and often in English, but also in other subjects across the curriculum linked to their topic work. Pupils have frequent opportunities for writing at length. Evidence in English and other subject workbooks confirms that pupils write for a range of purposes and audiences. As a result, they make good progress. Nevertheless, teachers do not routinely challenge pupils who are already writing at a good standard to think more deeply and write with greater sophistication. As a result,

pupils, especially the most able, do not consistently reach the higher standards of which they are capable.

- There has been a recent focus on developing pupils' ability to use and apply their mathematical knowledge and skills to investigate and solve problems. Pupils are increasingly confident in their use of number, are developing good reasoning skills and are making strong progress. However, at times, some teachers lack deep subject knowledge to be able to identify misconceptions before they occur. For example, pupils carried out formal methods when mental strategies would have been more efficient.
- Work in pupils' books is very well sequenced and builds on pupils' prior learning. As a result, pupils recall their knowledge and apply what they have learned successfully in other curricular areas.
- Positive relationships between staff and pupils create a constructive atmosphere in lessons. Pupils respond well to the high expectations from staff and usually demonstrate good behaviour for learning. Pupils are developing the resilience needed to overcome mistakes when they are learning something new.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Support for vulnerable pupils is particularly effective. School leaders and staff know pupils and their families well and are quick to identify pupils who may need additional guidance and support. For example, a calm and prompt start to school is encouraged through breakfast club and is effective in providing a settled start to the school day.
- The curriculum helps pupils learn how to stay safe and be healthy. At lunchtime, there is a range of activities which support their physical and social development. The pupils take part in the Astrea Promise, which develops pupils' reliance, empathy, aspiration and happiness. Pupils speak with passion about the different challenges they complete as part of the programme; opportunities include going to France, camping and running their own business. Through this, the school has ensured that the pupils' physical and mental health needs are supported.
- Pupils are very aware of the potential dangers while using the internet. They are taught about online safety measures and understand how to stay safe.
- Pupils say that bullying is rare and that they are confident that adults in school are there to listen should they have any concerns. A culture of respect for others is developing throughout the school and helps to prepare pupils well for life in modern Britain.
- Pupils take their roles and responsibilities seriously. They proudly talked to the inspector about being a school councillor, librarian and volunteering in and around school. One child was seen asking pupils, off her own back, about ideas to take back to the school council meeting. She then said, 'I just want to make the school a better place.'

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Leaders have worked hard to set high expectations for pupils' behaviour. The strategies which have been implemented are being consistently and rigorously applied by all staff. This means that pupils have a clear understanding of the choices they make and the consequences that follow. They value the rewards system and respond well to the incentives. Pupils say that there is noticeable difference since the current principal started. They say that although there can be incidents of bad behaviour, the staff deal with these effectively and pupils are now choosing to behave due to the school's reward systems.
- The parent support adviser has worked hard with families to reduce absence in school. As a result, more pupils are in school regularly. The school has also monitored how regular attendance has had a positive impact on the outcomes of pupils. However, although decreasing, there is still a significant number of disadvantaged pupils who miss school too often.
- Due to highly effective behaviour strategies, the number of extreme behaviour incidents has decreased rapidly. As a result, the number of school exclusions have also decreased significantly.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- As a result of more effective teaching, outcomes at the end of key stage 2 in 2018 showed a marked improvement in the proportion of pupils who achieved age-related expectations in reading, writing and mathematics. Although the proportions of pupils achieving the higher standards were lower than those seen nationally, provisional figures show that more pupils are likely to reach these in 2019.
- The work of current pupils across the school demonstrates that the 2018 improvements in standards continue to be sustained. Pupils in all year groups are making strong progress in a wide range of subjects, including English and mathematics. The proportions of pupils achieving the higher levels at key stage 2 are also set to increase. However, this substantial increase is not yet seen in year groups other than Years 2 and 6.
- In 2018, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics at key stage 1 had improved from the previous year. Current evidence shows that proportions of pupils achieving the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics are above average, with a greater proportion achieving the higher standards than in previous years.
- Over the past two years, the proportion of pupils with SEND, pupils who are disadvantaged and those who have other vulnerabilities, has increased significantly. Effective support is put in place to ensure these pupils make strong progress from their starting points.
- Disadvantaged pupils make good progress throughout the school. The school's information shows that the differences in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally are diminishing, with disadvantaged pupils making faster

progress than their peers.

- Pupils with SEND make strong progress due to the effective work of teachers and teaching assistants who support learning by breaking it down into small chunks. Close monitoring supports adults in knowing what progress has been made and what the pupils need to develop next.
- The proportion of pupils who met the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check has been below average for the past two years. However, through very effective training and careful monitoring of pupils' progress in phonics, this is set to increase. Current evidence shows that the vast majority of pupils have already reached a reading standard that is expected at the end of Year 1.
- Pupils who read to the inspector did so fluently. Those developing their reading skills used their phonics skills well to sound out and read unfamiliar words. Older pupils are familiar with the works of a wide range of authors.

Early years provision

Good

- Leaders have made sure that children get off to a positive start in Reception. Children make good progress from their typically low starting points. By the time they leave Reception, the majority of children reach a good level of development.
- Leaders have identified communication and language as an area in which children are often less well developed on entry to school. Leaders have carefully thought about the provision in the classroom so that it promotes children's language development effectively.
- The setting is well led, and staff make very good use of their assessments to ensure that their questioning enables children to develop their literacy and numeracy skills. Activities are planned carefully so they are bespoke, thus enabling children to move forward rapidly from their starting points.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good. Teachers provide well-planned activities that enthuse the children and are carefully matched to their learning needs.
- Leaders have ensured that parents are extensively involved in supporting their youngsters' learning by inviting parents into daily morning activities. These vary each day but focus on a particular aspect of the early years curriculum, such as writing the child's name or sharing the news from the weekend.
- Staff have built strong relationships with children and this has created a calm environment. Children usually behave well and follow adult instructions. Children are safe and well cared for. Staff know each child's needs well. They quickly spot when children are exhibiting early signs of anxiety and use carefully planned strategies to prevent their feelings from escalating.
- Safeguarding arrangements in early years are effective. Children feel safe and secure. Relevant staff hold paediatric first-aid certificates and they follow safeguarding procedures just as thoroughly as the rest of the school. Welfare requirements in early years are met.

School details

Unique reference number	144483
Local authority	Doncaster
Inspection number	10087468

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	144
Appropriate authority	Transition management board
Chair	Christine Fitt
Principal	Ann-Marie Mason
Telephone number	01709 513 010
Website	www.castleacademy.org
Email address	admin@astreacastle.org
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school joined Astrea Academy Trust in June 2016.
- Since then, there have been several principals. The current principal has been in post since April 2018.
- The school is a smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is around the national average.
- Over the past year, the school has had high levels of mobility, with increased numbers of vulnerable pupils entering the school.
- The school runs a breakfast club.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector gathered a range of evidence to judge the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. The inspector also observed learning across the school. Observations were carried out jointly with the principal.
- The inspector held meetings with the principal, assistant headteacher and other leaders, including the English and mathematics leaders. Meetings were also held with groups of pupils and board members. The inspector spoke to representatives from Astrea Academy Trust, including the CEO.
- Together with leaders, the inspector looked in detail at a range of pupils' books and work in different subjects. The inspector heard four pupils read and spoke with pupils throughout the inspection about their learning.
- A range of documentation was examined, including the school's checks on the suitability of adults to work with children and other documentation regarding safer recruitment of staff.
- Leaders made available the school's self-evaluation document, in year assessments, minutes of trust meetings, and documentation regarding child protection.
- The inspector took into consideration the 23 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and spoke to parents at the beginning of the school day.
- The inspector also considered responses from 17 staff to the online survey.

Inspection team

Eve Morris, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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