

Inspection of a good school: The Castle School

Park Road, Thornbury, Bristol, Gloucestershire BS35 1HT

Inspection dates:

24 and 25 November 2021

Outcome

The Castle School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Leaders have raised expectations of how pupils should behave. Pupils have learned new routines and risen to leaders' expectations. Pupils move around the school sensibly. At breaktime, pupils enjoy catching up with friends or playing games on the sports pitches.

Pastoral leaders publicly share year-group successes, such as in sports tournaments. Pupils participate eagerly in lessons. There is little low-level disruption.

Leaders are working with pupils to reduce bullying. There is a group of 'anti-bullying ambassadors', which includes students in the sixth form. They review the school's policies and initiate discussions. Recently, for example, they asked the school to hold discussions in tutor time on the harm that 'banter' causes.

The school places particular value on the importance of learning a language. All pupils learn either French or German. Most pupils continue to study a language at GCSE. There is a long-established exchange programme. For example, pupils have visited Bockenem in Germany for over 30 years.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The school has seen a period of rapid change since the previous inspection. A new headteacher and several new senior leaders have joined the school. Together, they have ensured high standards in pupils' behaviour. They have gained the confidence of staff.

Parents and carers have noticed the positive difference that leaders have made. For example, many parents highlighted the high standard of remote learning provided during restrictions in place because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The headteacher involves pupils in whole-school developments by discussing his plans with them in assemblies.

Curriculum planning in most subjects is well designed. Curriculum leaders are ambitious for their subjects. They think carefully about how they can best prepare pupils for the

demands of the next stage of their education. For example, in languages, there is a focus on phonics learning to build pupils' confidence when speaking the language. There is a thorough approach to the teaching of grammar. This builds on pupils' knowledge so that they can write effectively.

Leaders encourage staff in different subjects to try out new teaching approaches. For example, teachers in mathematics use different methods to show pupils how to find solutions. In many subjects, teachers check what pupils can remember on a regular basis. Across the school, staff are asking more of pupils.

Reading has a high priority within the curriculum. Pupils are encouraged to read and enjoy celebrated literature, such as prize-winning novels. When pupils first join the school, staff check how well they can read. If they need help to catch up, pupils receive this in a timely way.

Leaders are raising expectations of what pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) can achieve. They are rightly ensuring that pupils with SEND learn the same curriculum as their peers when appropriate. Increasingly, teachers refer to 'pupil passports' to gain a detailed understanding of pupils' needs. Some staff are more familiar with this information than others. Pupils receive the pastoral support they need to be successful in lessons. However, teaching does not consistently make sure that pupils with SEND learn the essential concepts in each subject.

The school has built up a rich extra-curricular programme. Leaders have a strong determination to get clubs and activities up and running again, as many paused due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Many pupils take part in dance, music and sports clubs. Recently, there was national recognition for pupils' work on developing sustainable travel initiatives.

A well-established network of local employers provides information to pupils who are considering different careers. There are interest groups that meet to discuss ways into careers such as medicine, dentistry and law. Leaders find out about local opportunities, such as apprenticeships, and make pupils aware of these.

Many of the key messages that leaders have for pupils, including students in the sixth form, are taught through the 'life skills' programme. This includes sex and relationships education, learning about healthy lifestyles and citizenship. Although the curriculum that is in place is well planned, some older pupils have gaps in their knowledge and understanding. Pupils told inspectors that they would like to see the curriculum do more to challenge intolerant attitudes and discrimination.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff are aware of a wide range of possible risks to pupils. They use the school's system for reporting concerns confidently. Leaders keep detailed records on concerns raised and any actions taken.

Leaders meet regularly to discuss how they support pupils and their families. If they need to, leaders involve external agencies. They provide guidance to staff that helps them to support pupils during difficult times in their lives.

Leaders are developing their whole-school strategies, for example on anti-bullying and sexual abuse and harassment. They are listening to what pupils have to say about these important issues.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Information available to support pupils with SEND does not inform the way that the curriculum is planned for such pupils consistently. Therefore, teaching does not take into account pupils' needs fully. Leaders should ensure that there is an ambitious curriculum for pupils with SEND and that this is adapted sufficiently to support pupils to learn the same essential concepts as their peers.
- The programme to promote pupils' personal development is carefully planned. However, pupils would like it to be developed further. Some older pupils cannot recall learning and discussion around key issues such as intolerant attitudes and discrimination. Leaders should ensure that their 'life skills' curriculum is delivered effectively, so that it has the impact they intend.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good or outstanding school, because it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the section 8 inspection a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the third section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good in June 2012.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	139348
Local authority	South Gloucestershire
Inspection number	10199602
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,512
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	310
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Simon MacSorley
Headteacher	Joe Docherty
Website	www.thecastleschool.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	26 January 2016, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is larger than the average-sized secondary school.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is well below average.
- The school is part of the Castle School Education Trust. The trust comprises four secondary and three primary schools.
- Students in the sixth form attend a separate site called The Sixth Form Centre.
- The school uses one registered and three unregistered alternative providers.

Information about this inspection

This was the first routine inspection the school had received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders, and have taken that into account in their evaluation.

- Inspectors met with the headteacher, the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, a group of governors (including the chair of governors), a trustee, and a range of senior leaders, including the special educational needs coordinator and the designated safeguarding lead.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, French and art. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors scrutinised the single centre record of adults working within the school and held discussions with leaders, staff and pupils to gather information on the school's work to safeguard pupils.
- Inspectors held discussions with leaders and pupils, including with pupils in single-sex groups, to consider pupils' behaviour and wider development.
- Inspectors took account of the responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, including free-text responses, and the staff and pupil surveys.

Inspection team

Lydia Pride, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Benjamin Houghton

Ofsted Inspector

Stuart Wilson

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
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