

# Inspection of Castle Futures

12 Acland Street, Gainsborough, Lincolnshire DN21 2LG

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Inspection dates: 21 to 23 March 2023

## **Overall effectiveness**

**Inadequate**

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The quality of education

**Inadequate**

Behaviour and attitudes

**Requires improvement**

Personal development

**Requires improvement**

Leadership and management

**Inadequate**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

**No**

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Pupils at this school have often spent time out of education previously. They appreciate staff's efforts to help them have a positive experience of school and keep them safe. Pupils value the strong relationships they forge with staff and the friendships they make with their peers. Some pupils come to school more frequently than they did previously. However, others do not attend often enough.

Pupils know that staff want them to be successful. However, the curriculum in many subjects is poorly organised. Pupils often cannot recall key knowledge. Too many pupils struggle to read confidently. This has a negative impact on how well they learn in other subjects.

Behaviour is improving. There are fewer incidents that lead to pupils being suspended or restrained. Bullying happens, but it is usually resolved. Most pupils respond appropriately when staff challenge their unacceptable language. Pupils like gaining points for their positive conduct in lessons. However, some pupils struggle to regulate their behaviour. They disrupt their own, and others', learning and social times.

Pupils enjoy weekly enrichment sessions, including music, drama and gaming. Activities such as go-karting, paintballing and sailing help them to socialise positively with each other. However, there are too few opportunities for pupils to find out about their possible next steps or potential careers.

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

The proprietor did not manage the complex process of moving the school to its new site and increasing the number of pupils on roll carefully enough. This has had a detrimental impact on all aspects of the provision, particularly the quality of education and pupils' behaviour. The proprietor has not ensured that the school consistently meets all the independent school standards (the standards).

Recent leadership changes have provided much-needed stability and direction. Senior leaders have a clear understanding of the school's weaknesses. Their priorities for improvement are appropriate. While their work to bring about the necessary changes is in its infancy, it is beginning to make a difference. However, staff do not always have the knowledge or skills they need to be consistently effective in their roles.

The curriculum offer is not ambitious enough for all pupils. Pupils are too limited in the range of subjects they can study. They do not always follow programmes that offer suitable accreditations and qualifications. Pupils are not prepared well enough for the next steps.

Support for pupils who are in the early stages of learning to read lacks coherence. Not enough staff know how to teach phonics effectively. Approaches used to

improve these pupils' reading accuracy and fluency vary. Pupils' reading books are not always matched closely to the letters and sounds they know. These inconsistencies mean that these pupils do not develop their reading skills and confidence quickly enough. This limits how well they can access the curriculum. Work to promote a love of reading more widely is only just beginning.

In many subjects, the curriculum is not well thought out. Most teachers with oversight of a subject are only in the early stages of identifying exactly what pupils need to learn and when, including from the beginning of key stage 2. Pupils' learning is often disjointed and does not follow a clear sequence. They do not have secure foundations of knowledge on which to build. Leaders are beginning to resolve these weaknesses in the curriculum.

Teachers do not always consider information about each pupil's additional needs when planning and delivering the curriculum. Methods to teach pupils new knowledge are sometimes poorly chosen. Teachers do not check these pupils' knowledge closely enough or repeat information that pupils are unsure about. Teaching resources are sometimes inappropriate and contain inaccuracies. Pupils often cannot recall what they have learned in any detail.

The teaching of mathematics is more consistent. A well-organised curriculum helps pupils build their mathematical knowledge and skills. Pupils revisit key topics to secure and deepen their learning.

A new approach has led to some recent improvements in behaviour. Pupils discuss with staff how staff can help them manage their feelings and emotions. However, pupils are sometimes reluctant to engage with learning. Staff do not always follow agreed routines when pupils are disruptive. They sometimes struggle to help pupils regulate their behaviour. These inconsistencies in approach can prevent these pupils, and their peers, from learning.

A significant minority of pupils follow part-time programmes. This approach helps some pupils' transition into attending this school. For others, their part-time programme is designed well to meet their particular needs. This support helps some of these pupils to increase their engagement with education over time.

The curriculum for personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education and the programme for personal development do not promote pupils' wider development well enough. Pupils know little about relationships and sex education (RSE), and their awareness of different cultures and faiths is limited. They cannot explain important British values such as democracy and individual liberty. Pupils learn skills to help them become independent and responsible. However, careers guidance is poor. This means that pupils are not prepared well enough for their next steps.

Most staff are proud to work at the school and enjoy their jobs. However, some do not feel well supported or respected in their roles. They are concerned about the impact all the changes in school have had on their workload.

The proprietor is aware that there is a lot to do to rectify earlier mistakes. It has sought experienced guidance to help it improve the school. There are early signs that this help is beginning to make a positive difference. However, the improvements are only very recent.

The school site is well maintained. However, leaders were not aware of some minor health and safety issues that inspectors identified. While leaders resolved these issues, systems to ensure that they do not become a concern again are not yet secure. Leaders' assessment of risk lacks the necessary precision. This makes it challenging for staff to interpret risk assessments. The risk assessment policy provides insufficient guidance.

Leaders have made sure that the safeguarding policy and the RSE and health education policy are available on the school's website. The school meets the requirements of schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe from, for example, peer pressure, online gambling, extremist views and substance misuse.

Staff are well trained. They follow clear procedures to raise any welfare concerns about pupils. Leaders take swift and appropriate action in response. They work closely with external agencies, including local authorities, to ensure that pupils get the help they need.

Staff have assured themselves of the suitability of the safeguarding arrangements in place when pupils are not at the school because they are completing their studies with off-site providers or in community settings.

## **What does the school need to do to improve?**

### **(Information for the school and proprietor)**

- In many subjects, what pupils should learn and when has not yet been fully identified. The learning is not organised well enough. As a result, pupils struggle to secure their knowledge and do not achieve well. Leaders must ensure that, in each subject, there is in place an appropriately planned, ambitious curriculum that identifies exactly what pupils need to know and when.
- Pupils in the early stages of learning to read do not get the regular help they need to improve their reading. Pupils do not become accurate and fluent readers as quickly as they should. Leaders must make sure that pupils who need it benefit from an effective programme of support, to help them become confident readers.
- Some teachers do not make appropriate choices when deciding how to teach pupils new knowledge. The resources and methods they use are not always

suitable. As a result, pupils struggle to complete tasks independently and to recall what they have learned. Leaders need to ensure that teachers know how best to teach the curriculum in their subject, so that pupils build their knowledge securely over time.

- Teachers do not always consider each pupil's additional needs carefully enough when planning and delivering the curriculum. Pupils cannot always access the learning or remember important knowledge. Leaders need to ensure that teachers use information about each pupil's additional needs precisely to inform their planning, so that all pupils achieve well.
- Some staff do not apply the school's behaviour policy consistently. There are occasions when pupils do not receive the right support to help them manage their behaviour. Such occasions can disrupt their learning, and that of other pupils. Leaders need to ensure that all staff consistently follow the school's behaviour policy and use effective strategies to help pupils regulate their behaviour.
- Some pupils do not attend school often enough. These pupils miss out on opportunities to learn and to benefit from wider experiences. Leaders should ensure that these pupils receive support to attend school regularly.
- There are insufficient effective opportunities to promote pupils' wider development. Pupils do not learn about different faiths and cultures, or about fundamental British values. They have limited knowledge of RSE. Pupils do not learn enough, or receive sufficient independent guidance, about different careers. Consequently, they are not prepared well enough for their next steps, including as effective citizens. Leaders should ensure that the promotion of pupils' personal development enables pupils to become suitably knowledgeable about their next steps, and of the society of which they are part.
- The proprietor did not successfully manage the changes when the school merged with another school and moved site. As a consequence, the proprietor has not ensured that all the standards are consistently met. In managing these and subsequent changes, leaders have not ensured that all staff feel well supported and that staff workload is manageable. The proprietor and leaders should take the necessary action to ensure that all the standards are consistently met, and that, in so doing, staff are well informed and supported.

## 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 (DfE) has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	147170
<b>DfE registration number</b>	925/6018
<b>Local authority</b>	Lincolnshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	10266724
<b>Type of school</b>	Other independent school
<b>School category</b>	Independent school
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	7 to 19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	106
<b>Number of part-time pupils</b>	0
<b>Proprietor</b>	Castle Special Projects Limited
<b>Chair</b>	John Marsden
<b>Headteacher</b>	Michael Taylor (Interim executive headteacher)
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£170 to £200 per day
<b>Telephone number</b>	01427 253117
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.castleseducation.co.uk">www.castleseducation.co.uk</a>
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:info@castleseducation.co.uk">info@castleseducation.co.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	3 to 5 March 2020

## Information about this school

- Castle Futures is registered to provide education for up to 110 pupils aged seven to 19. There are currently 106 pupils on roll.
- The school offers specialist provision for pupils who have social, emotional and mental health needs. All pupils currently on the school's roll are pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Some pupils have a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder. Almost all pupils have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
- The school's most recent standard inspection took place from 3 to 5 March 2020.

- A material change inspection took place in November 2021. Following the inspection, the DfE approved an increase in the maximum number for which the school is registered to have on roll to 110 pupils and an extension of the school's age range to between seven and 19 years old.
- In September 2022, the school moved to its current registered address. At the same time, the school amalgamated with another school owned by the proprietor. As a result, the number of pupils on the school's roll has grown significantly this academic year and the proprietor has employed more staff.
- During the inspection, leaders advised the DfE that they no longer want the school to be registered to provide education for students over the age of 16 years. Currently, there are no students aged above 16 years on the school's roll.
- Approximately one fifth of pupils on the school's roll who are entitled to a full-time education currently follow a part-time programme. Some of these pupils receive part or all of their education off site, either at home or in a community setting, as part of the school's 'outreach' programme.
- Pupils travel to the school from several local authorities.
- The school uses two off-site providers for pupils to receive therapeutic support.
- The school does not use the services of any alternative providers.
- The interim executive headteacher took up the post in January 2023, having been the school's improvement adviser since September 2022.
- Many teachers responsible for overseeing different subjects have only taken up their responsibilities recently.
- The school's governing body has been disbanded since the pandemic.

## Information about this inspection

Inspectors carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The school has failed to meet the independent school standards. These are the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The DfE commissioned Ofsted to carry out the standard inspection earlier in the inspection cycle than previously planned. This was due to the school having amalgamated with another school owned by the proprietor, to check that the standards continued to be met.
- Inspectors met with the interim executive headteacher, the associate headteacher and the two deputy headteachers. They also met with the leader responsible for

the provision for pupils with SEND and the leader responsible for health and safety.

- The lead inspector met with the two representatives of the proprietor, including the chair of the proprietor board.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in four subjects: early reading, mathematics, art and PSHE education. For each deep dive, inspectors visited lessons, met with teachers of the subject to discuss the curriculum, looked at a sample of pupils' work and spoke with some pupils about their learning. Inspectors also looked at samples of pupils' work in other subjects, including English, cookery, history and geography.
- The lead inspector met with safeguarding leaders to discuss the school's approach to safeguarding. She examined safeguarding records, the school's system for recruiting staff and the school's single central record. Inspectors spoke with staff and pupils about safeguarding.
- Inspectors observed the behaviour of pupils during social times and met with pupils.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documents, including those related to the school's self-evaluation, school improvement, attendance and behaviour, EHC plans and risk assessment.
- Inspectors considered responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View. They also noted responses to Ofsted's surveys for school staff and pupils.
- To check the school's compliance with the independent school standards, inspectors reviewed relevant documentation and toured the school's premises.

### **Inspection team**

Rachel Tordoff, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Paul Lowther

Ofsted Inspector



## **Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements**

### **The school failed to meet the following independent school standards**

#### **Part 1. Quality of education provided**

- 2(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if-
  - 2(1)(a) the proprietor ensures that a written policy on the curriculum, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work, which provides for the matters specified in sub-paragraph (2) is drawn up and implemented effectively; and
  - 2(1)(b) the written policy, plans and schemes of work-
    - 2(1)(b)(i) take into account the ages, aptitudes and needs of all pupils, including those pupils with an EHC plan.
- 2(2) For the purposes of paragraph (2)(1)(a), the matters are-
  - 2(2)(b) that pupils acquire speaking, listening, literacy and numeracy skills;
  - 2(2)(e) for pupils receiving secondary education, access to accurate, up-to-date careers guidance that-
    - 2(2)(e)(i) is presented in an impartial manner;
    - 2(2)(e)(ii) enables them to make informed choices about a broad range of career options; and
    - 2(2)(e)(iii) helps to encourage them to fulfil their potential;
  - 2(2)(h) that all pupils have the opportunity to learn and make progress; and
  - 2(2)(i) effective preparation of pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life in British society.
- 2A(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor-
  - 2A(1)(a) ensures that every registered pupil who is provided with primary education at the school is provided with relationships education,
  - 2A(1)(b) ensures that every registered pupil who is provided with secondary education at the school is provided with relationships and sex education, except in so far as the pupil is excused as mentioned in sub-paragraph (2), and
  - 2A(1)(d) in making arrangements for the purposes of paragraphs (a), (b) or (c), has regard to any guidance under section 80A of the Education Act 2002 that applies in relation to the provision of education by maintained schools.
- 3 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that the teaching at the school-
  - 3(a) enables pupils to acquire new knowledge and make good progress according to their ability so that they increase their understanding and develop their skills in the subjects taught;
  - 3(c) involves well planned lessons and effective teaching methods, activities and management of class time;

- 3(d) shows a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the pupils, and ensures that these are taken into account in the planning of lessons;
- 3(e) demonstrates good knowledge and understanding of the subject matter being taught;
- 3(f) utilises effectively classroom resources of a good quality, quantity and range;
- 3(g) demonstrates that a framework is in place to assess pupils' work regularly and thoroughly and use information from that assessment to plan teaching so that pupils can progress; and
- 3(h) utilises effective strategies for managing behaviour and encouraging pupils to act responsibly.

## **Part 2. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils**

- 5 The standard about the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils at the school is met if the proprietor-
  - 5(a) actively promotes the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs;
  - 5(b) ensures that principles are actively promoted which-
    - 5(b)(v) further tolerance and harmony between different cultural traditions by enabling pupils to acquire an appreciation of and respect for their own and other cultures; and
    - 5(b)(vii) encourage respect for democracy and support for participation in the democratic process, including respect for the basis on which the law is made and applied in England.

## **Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils**

- 9 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor promotes good behaviour amongst pupils by ensuring that-
  - 9(b) the policy is implemented effectively.
- 11 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that relevant health and safety laws are complied with by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written health and safety policy.
- 16 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that-
  - 16(a) the welfare of pupils at the school is safeguarded and promoted by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written risk assessment policy; and
  - 16(b) appropriate action is taken to reduce risks that are identified.

## **Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools**

- 34(1) The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school-
  - 34(1)(a) demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently; and
  - 34(1)(b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently; and
  - 34(1)(c) actively promote the well-being of pupils.

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