

Inspection of a good school: Castledon School

Bromfords Drive, Wickford, Essex, SS12 0PW

Inspection dates:

24 and 25 April 2024

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of good as a result of this ungraded (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might be outstanding if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

The headteacher of this school is Simon Holliday. The school is part of Zenith Multi Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Andy Hodgkinson, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Stewart Taylor.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils flourish at this nurturing school where, as one parent summed up, 'every child is seen and heard'. Staff take the time to understand pupils' needs and interests so they can support them to engage well in lessons. Pupils are resilient, they learn to manage their emotions and successfully reflect on their behaviour and learning.

Pupils' behaviour is impeccable. Clear routines and a consistently friendly approach from staff help pupils to feel safe and secure in the school environment. Pupils are kind towards one another, for instance, older pupils helping the younger ones with the climbing equipment. Many pupils learn to socialise for the first time. They enjoy cooking and sitting down at lunch together. They cope extraordinarily well with new situations. This is because staff carefully consider the steps they need to take for this to happen.

Pupils' and sixth form students' outcomes are strong. They receive a well-rounded education which prepares them very well for adulthood. Pupils develop into independent and confident individuals. They are not fazed by such experiences as appearing on television for their high-quality artwork or travelling to the O2 to be part of the Young Voices choir.

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

At the heart of the school's aspirations is the desire for the pupils to be exceedingly well prepared for their future lives. Staff constantly reflect upon how the curriculum best serves its pupils. There is careful consideration of pupils' education, health and care (EHC)

plans. Pupils' targets are broken down into manageable steps. These are seamlessly integrated into teachers' planning.

The school has established a highly ambitious curriculum. This is expertly delivered. Staff have high expectations of what pupils can do and achieve. The curriculum prepares pupils remarkably well for each stage of their education. Students in the sixth form gain a suite of qualifications, including in English and mathematics, that set them up well for further study or the world of work.

Staff know pupils exceptionally well. They make regular and precise checks on what pupils know, remember and can do. Staff use this information to remove barriers to pupils' learning so that pupils succeed. They revisit key content regularly to help pupils recall. The total communication approach means that pupils express their needs and wants easily. Staff are highly skilled at encouraging pupils to move out of their comfort zone. This may be, for example, exploring how water feels on pupils' feet, to then kicking in the pool and finally immersing for a swimming lesson. As a result, pupils want to learn and are curious to find out more.

The school prioritises the development of pupils' reading, language and communication skills. Staff deliver the school's chosen phonics programme successfully. The training and planning for the implementation of this is thorough. Older pupils who can read, enjoy doing so. The English curriculum covers a rich range of texts. Pupils' favourite tales include Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* which was 'sweet and sad'.

Pupils and sixth form students have extraordinary levels of motivation. They are highly engaged in their learning. This results in a calm working atmosphere throughout the school. While staff are well-versed in strategies for de-escalation, the pupils will settle themselves. They learn to recognise when they are anxious and what to do if they find they cannot cope in situations.

The school goes 'above and beyond' with their offer of a rich and wide set of experiences. For example, through a series of progressive residentials pupils learn how to pack and stay away from home. The first time is a night away, then a residential, progressing to an active holiday abroad, such as skiing. Pupils receive outdoor education in a local country park. These opportunities make an impressive contribution to pupils' personal development.

The school's curriculum for the preparation for adulthood is comprehensive. Students learn how to travel independently, including how to drive, so they can access facilities and courses off-site. They understand how to be financially secure. Staff take great care to ensure that pupils have an age-appropriate understanding of healthy relationships. Pupils benefit from a wide-ranging careers programme, including work experience. Other schools access the school's careers provision, such as the careers fair.

Staff are enjoying being part of the new trust. They feel highly valued and appreciate the extensive training offer. The trust and governors provide strong strategic oversight of the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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 an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in December 2018.

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.

Further information

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

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	141765
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10323751
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	5 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	236
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	50
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Stewart Taylor
CEO of the trust	Andy Hodgkinson
Headteacher	Simon Holliday
Website	www.castledon.org
Date(s) of previous inspection	11 and 12 December 2018, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school caters for pupils with autism and moderate learning difficulties. All pupils have an EHC plan.
- The school joined the Zenith Multi-Academy Trust in September 2023.
- The trust has delegated some responsibilities for oversight of the school to a local governing body.
- Since the last inspection, the headteacher has assumed full responsibility of the role. Prior to this he shared the position with the predecessor headteacher.
- The school uses one unregistered alternative provider.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school’s education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with trustees, the chief executive officer for the trust, the chair of the local governing body, members of the governing body, the headteacher, senior leaders, middle leaders and staff.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: Early reading, mathematics, PE and personal, social and emotional education. For the latter, this included a consideration of the school’s personal, social and health education (PSHE) and relationships and sex education (RSE) provision. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils’ work.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils’ interests first.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted’s staff survey and Ofsted Parent View, including free-text comments.

Inspection team

Liz Smith, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Sue Cox

Ofsted Inspector

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