

Inspection of a good school: Castle Newnham School

Polhill Avenue, Bedford, Bedfordshire MK41 9DT

Inspection dates: 23 and 24 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 not be as high if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Staff ensure that pupils are well looked after. Pupils are safe and happy here. There are adults to speak to if pupils have a worry or concern. Pupils treat each other with respect, celebrating the differences between themselves and others. Incidents of bullying and prejudicial language are dealt with and stopped promptly.

Leaders have high ambitions for pupils but these are not yet fully realised. Pupils receive an inconsistent experience in how well the curriculum is taught. Teachers do not always adapt their lessons so that pupils consistently learn well.

Pupils move around the site in a calm and orderly way. There are some pupils whose behaviour disturbs learning. Staff do not always deal with these incidents quickly to minimise disruption to pupils' learning.

Pupils value the many opportunities beyond the classroom. They enjoy taking part in clubs, trips and the many performances and showcase events put on by the performing arts department. These activities broaden pupils' interests, experiences and understanding of the world.

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

Leaders have designed the curriculum effectively. They have ensured that the important knowledge that pupils should learn, and the order in which it is taught, is suitably identified in each subject. Pupils experience a broad, mainly academic curriculum. The curriculum is ambitious, with almost all pupils studying the range of subjects that make up the English Baccalaureate in key stage 4. This helps to keep pupils' options open to further study and their future careers. Leaders are broadening the curriculum offer further

by giving pupils the opportunity to study Spanish and increasing the range of courses pupils can choose from in Year 9.

Teachers have secure knowledge of the subjects they teach. However, the school has not ensured that teaching is consistently effective across the school. Teachers do not always check well enough what pupils have learned. This means that some pupils have some misconceptions that are not addressed effectively. Sometimes, the work set is either too easy or too hard. This means that pupils are not always suitably challenged and therefore do not learn as well as they could.

The school identifies pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) promptly. Their individual needs are accurately identified. Staff make sure that pupils with SEND receive the adaptations they need to access the curriculum. Pupils in the school's 'Ark' provision learn well as teaching is very well adapted. They are being prepared well for life after school.

Leaders have identified pupils in key stage 3 who need to get better at reading. Some of the pupils who need extra help do receive the right support. However, there are pupils across all year groups who are not yet getting the support they need to improve their reading accuracy and fluency. This means that they are not able to access the curriculum fully.

Pupils' learning is sometimes disrupted by poor behaviour. When disruption does occur, leaders have not made sure that staff are supported to use the recently updated behaviour system to quickly address it. Pupils benefit from high-quality pastoral support. Skilled staff support pupils well with wider needs such as mental health and well-being.

Pupils are tolerant and accepting of difference. They learn about this through a programme of personal, social, health and economic education. The careers advice and guidance are improving. However, pupils do not yet have 'experiences of workplaces' and there are not enough links with higher education providers. They are therefore not as well prepared for their next steps as they might be.

Leaders have enriched the curriculum with a wide range of clubs and educational visits. These include sports clubs, including a rowing club, The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, many performing arts events, a Year 9 trip to a multi-sports centre and a ski trip. These activities help pupils to understand the importance of contributing positively to society.

Leaders have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. Staff, including early career teachers, are happy and feel well supported by leaders. Leaders have made changes to help staff manage their workload. Governors work well to provide effective challenge to leaders.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school has not ensured that the curriculum is taught and assessed consistently well. Pupils do not always benefit from the most appropriate adaptations to allow them to access the full curriculum and learn as well as they could. Sometimes, teachers do not check carefully what pupils know and understand. This means some pupils find work too easy, while others have misconceptions that are not addressed effectively. The school must ensure that teachers receive high-quality training and guidance to help them teach consistently well, so pupils of all abilities are challenged to learn as much as they can.
- The school has not ensured that all pupils who need help with reading are identified and receive the right support. These pupils are not able to access the curriculum as well as they should. The school needs to ensure that staff identify these pupils and put in place the right support to help them read more accurately and fluently. This will then help them to understand more of what they read.
- The school has made changes to the systems used to manage behaviour. However, teachers do not consistently apply these systems. As a result, the poor behaviour of pupils is disrupting too many lessons. The school needs to ensure that staff are supported to manage behaviour so that pupils behave well in lessons and around the school.
- The school has not ensured that pupils' careers advice and guidance prepare them well enough for their next steps. Pupils do not yet have 'experiences of workplaces' and there are not enough links with further education providers. The school needs to ensure that the curriculum for pupils' careers advice and guidance contains all the relevant information and opportunities for them to make informed choices regarding their next steps.

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 September 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	109661
Local authority	Bedford
Inspection number	10318571
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	720
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Tom Barwood
Principal	Ruth Wilkes
Website	www.castlennwham.school
Dates of previous inspection	25 and 26 September 2018, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of a federation with Castle Newnham Primary School.
- 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 carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, science, modern foreign languages and history. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers and pupils about learning and looked at a sample of pupils' work.
- The lead inspector held meetings with a range of leaders. This included the school's special educational needs coordinator, leaders of design and technology, physical education, hospitality and catering and other members of the senior leadership team.

- The lead inspector scrutinised various school documents and met with a range of pupils from different year groups. The lead inspector met with representatives of the governing body.
- 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 the 117 responses made by parents to Ofsted Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, including 90 free-text responses. Inspectors also considered 66 responses to Ofsted's online staff questionnaire and the 123 responses to Ofsted's pupil questionnaire.

Inspection team

Sue Pryor, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Paul Lawrence

Ofsted Inspector

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