



# The Castle School

## Inspection Report

**Unique Reference Number** 109297  
**LEA** South Gloucestershire  
**Inspection number** 278177  
**Inspection dates** 22 February 2006 to 23 February 2006  
**Reporting inspector** Ian Stuart AI

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Comprehensive	<b>School address</b>	Park Road
<b>School category</b>	Community		Bristol
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 19		BS35 1HT
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed	<b>Telephone number</b>	01454 862100
<b>Number on roll</b>	1700	<b>Fax number</b>	01454 862101
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair of governors</b>	Mr Ray Tyrrell
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	14 February 2000	<b>Headteacher</b>	Ms Melanie Warnes

<b>Age group</b> 11 to 19	<b>Inspection dates</b> 22 February 2006 - 23 February 2006	<b>Inspection number</b> 278177
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## **Introduction**

The inspection was carried out by five Additional Inspectors.

## **Description of the school**

The Castle School is a large comprehensive school with over 1,700 students, including over 330 sixth formers. It is heavily oversubscribed. It has two sites, about half a mile apart. One site operates mainly, but not exclusively, as the sixth form centre. The school became a Specialist Visual Arts College and obtained the Gold Arts Mark award in 2003. Students come from a broad range of circumstances, including a number of affluent areas, but none come from areas of significant deprivation. Very few come from minority ethnic groups or do not speak English as their first language. None are at an early stage of learning English. The number of students with special educational needs is below average. Attainment on entry is slightly above average. The headteacher has been in post since September 2004.

## **Key for inspection grades**

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

## **Overall effectiveness of the school**

### **Grade: 2**

This is a good school with many strengths that enable students to flourish and enjoy their education. The sixth form is particularly effective. The school has a good understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. The inspection team is in broad agreement with the school's own self-evaluation of its effectiveness, including its judgement that results in 2005 at GCSE and in the Year 9 tests were satisfactory rather than good and not as good as in previous years. However, the measures the school has taken are ensuring that current achievement is good. When fully effective, these measures should help raise achievement and standards further. Overall, teaching is good. Teachers make lessons enjoyable and, as a result, most students learn well. However, they tend to do better in some subjects than others and a challenge for the school is to bring achievement in all subjects up to that of the best, where achievement is outstanding. The curriculum is good with many strengths, including the wide range of courses for senior students and the outstanding extra-curricular provision, including music and sport. Academically able students achieve well, but there is scope to extend them further. Students' personal development and well-being are good. They make a particularly positive contribution to the school and wider community, and their attendance is very good. Leadership and management are good. Under the headteacher's effective leadership, all levels of leadership and management, including governors, work well together with a strong sense of collective responsibility. Issues from the previous inspection have been adequately tackled, and the very good management of the school's Visual Arts College status has brought considerable benefits to the school and the community it serves. The school now has a clear view of the direction it needs to take to improve less strong areas of its work. This gives a good capacity for further improvement. The school enjoys the full support of most parents and students, and it gives good value for money.

## **Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form**

### **Grade: 2**

The inspectors agree with the school's self-evaluation that the sixth form is good with many outstanding features. It is excellently led with very effective systems to support the students. Their progress is monitored in such a way that problems are identified very quickly and effective action taken. The curriculum is good with a wide range of academic and vocational courses. Outstanding care and guidance ensure that students' personal development and well-being are excellent. With the strong support systems, students' achievement is good and often very good, enabling them to reach very high standards. They work very well with their teachers, enjoying excellent relationships with them. The students are fine, mature young people.

## **What the school should do to improve further**

- Improve achievement in all subjects to that of the best
- Continue to raise standards of academically able students further.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

Overall standards by the end of Year 11 are high. However, results in 2005 were lower than those in other recent years mainly because about 20 students of average and below average ability achieved much below their potential. The 2005 national test results, taken at the end of Year 9, were well above the national average but were slightly lower than those of 2004 mainly because the results of a relatively small number of students of average ability were not as good as they should have been. Overall achievement was satisfactory and not all targets were fully met. However, there is much evidence that present achievement, both in Years 7 to 9 and in Years 10 and 11, is now good again. Challenging targets have been set for the present Years 9 and 11. The school's present detailed systems for tracking students' progress and taking effective action when students are falling behind their targets mean that the vast majority are on course to meet them. There is potential for achievement to rise further because students perform better in some subjects than others. If, for example, students performed as well in all subjects as they do in art and design and in geography, achievement would be outstanding. The school acknowledges these differences and there is a strong focus in the current School Improvement Plan on teaching strategies that develop further the ways students learn. The many academically able students in the school achieve well with substantial numbers gaining A\* grades at GCSE. Some of these students could benefit from further accelerated learning programmes to push on their progress more quickly. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities make the same rate of progress as other students. Standards in the sixth form are very high and have been rising steadily in recent years. Achievement in the sixth form, though not yet outstanding, is better than in the rest of the school because high quality practices of evaluating teaching and learning and supporting students have been well established for several years. Students respond very positively and, as a result, achieve very well.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 2**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 1**

Students' personal development is good; in the sixth form, it is outstanding with excellent relationships and fine contributions from the students. Students enjoy their education and speak well of all aspects of the school. Many are really enthusiastic about their learning and they contribute exceptionally well to the local and wider community, particularly in their fund-raising for charities. Students enjoy a very wide range activities and their cultural and social development is very good. Spiritual and moral development is good. In the sixth form students' awareness of world environmental issues is sharpened by visiting guests and speakers. Inspectors judge pupils' behaviour to be good, with very good consideration, co-operation and friendliness to each other and to adults being the norm. Some students expressed their concerns that the unsatisfactory behaviour in some classes of a small minority of students sometimes adversely affects their learning. One indication of students'

very good attitudes to school is the exceptionally good rates of attendance. Participation in after school and community activities and charity events is very good. The school council is active, meets regularly and is involved in discussing issues and improving aspects of school life. It is valued and has led, for example, to improved staff supervision of some communal areas following suggestions by students. Awareness of health and safety issues is very good and most students are choosing to adopt a healthy lifestyle. The very good quality of careers education and guidance and well planned work experience ensure that students understand about the world of work and appreciate the importance of the decisions that they make about options, sixth form and college choices. They have the skills required for the workplace or higher education because they take real responsibility for their own learning by working well in teams and groups.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

The quality of teaching is good. Teachers have very good relationships with students. Teachers work hard and successfully to provide students with extensive guidance for examinations. This was particularly successful in a sixth form English lesson where the preparation of students for a timed essay, including the very good use of their own ideas, was of high quality. Initiatives to improve teaching through a focus on the way students learn are mostly at an early stage and, because of that, there is variation in the impact these initiatives are having on students' learning. In better lessons, students are fully engaged in varied activities from the start of the lesson. When teachers support and focus students' thinking against clear objectives for the lesson, they make the sort of excellent progress that was observed in a Year 7 history lesson on the Black Death. Generally, teachers help students to develop very good attitudes to learning. The best lessons use teaching methods that allow students to think for themselves and to extend the ways they learn. For example, in an excellent Year 11 science lesson, a first-rate check list encouraged students to assess their own knowledge and understanding of recent topics and methods of revision. In some lessons, teaching is less successful, mainly due to slow pace, low expectations, or a lack of suitable activities that fully stretch all groups of students in the class. Teachers make good use of data to set challenging targets and to monitor students' progress. In some faculties, such as humanities and technology, there are excellent systems to help students to move on to the next steps in their learning, but this is not yet consistent across all subjects. Because of this, some students are not always stretched to their fullest potential and, sometimes, some of the academically able could be extended further. This is an area for further development recognised both by the school's management and by some students themselves.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 2**

The school's curriculum is good with many significant strengths. It is flexible and well planned, providing well for the abilities and needs of all students, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities. Additional ways to extend the school's provision for raising further the achievement of the highest attaining students are now being sought by the school. This includes the possibility of accelerated courses and further provision for those with particular gifts and talents. The use of the National Strategies for Literacy and Numeracy is helping to raise achievement in Years 7 to 9. In information and communication technology (ICT), a similar initiative is only just beginning to have an impact because students do not have sufficient opportunities to use their ICT skills in all other subjects. The very good range of courses offered to students in Years 10 to 13 enables them to tailor their studies to their own individual strengths and interests. The modular general studies programme in the sixth form makes a very good contribution to students' personal development. Good vocational programmes, high quality work experience placements and very good partnerships with the business community contribute well to the development of students' selfconfidence and future economic well-being. The expressive arts curriculum is outstanding, resulting in high standards, high levels of enjoyment, and very good local links. This is exemplified in the recent edition of the 'State of the Art' publication in which a cross-curricular venture between the arts and English faculties showcases a superb selection of students' work. Enrichment and extra-curricular activities, including music and sport, are very good with high levels of attendance at the many exciting after school clubs. The split site does mean that some students in Years 10 and 11 lose valuable curriculum time in their vocational and other courses because of the time taken to move between sites.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 2**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 1**

In this very inclusive school, the quality of care, guidance and support is good and outstanding in the sixth form. Health and safety, risk assessment and child protection procedures are fully in place and the monitoring of behaviour and attendance is very good. Students say that unacceptable incidents, including cases of bullying, are dealt with well and that the system of rewards and sanctions is fair and increasingly effective. In Years 7 to 11, some elements of the provision to support students' progress, such as the new role of heads of year as leaders of student progress, have only recently been put into place and are not yet fully effective. However, the tutor and year head system provides very good care and guidance overall. In the sixth form, advice and guidance are excellent, particularly with regard to entry into higher education, and there is a clear focus on raising standards by consistently good academic monitoring and guidance. Throughout the school, assessment procedures are very effective. Students with learning difficulties are supported very well. Senior students often provide really good role models for others. Community and college links and the use of outside agencies are strong features of the school's support and guidance

arrangements. Many of these enhance the very good provision for careers education in the curriculum.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher provides a clear direction that is focused on learning. Her collaborative style of working is respected and supported by the leadership team and staff. Her approach is strongly supported by governors who are confident of improvement as a result. They also provide professional expertise and firmly challenge the school's activities and performance. They are very aware that having two sites causes some problems for the effective use of buildings and resources, as well as wasting time for staff and students. Although a few parents are critical of the school, most are very supportive and several comment favourably on the improving consultation and communication with them. This has led to coursework advice booklets and leaflets on a range of topics including homework, coping with teenagers and preparing for examinations. Effective monitoring and rigorous self-evaluation take place. The collection, analysis and use of data are particularly detailed and provide valuable insights into the school's work. As a result, it makes judgements about its own performance that are accurate, and issues arising from this inspection have already been identified by the school. The very high quality of leadership in the sixth form has been, and continues to be, a major factor in sustaining its consistently high standards and good achievement. The school's status as a Visual Arts College has been very effectively promoted, resulting in a striking workshop/gallery, substantial community involvement, enhanced reputation and high standards. The significance of 'visual learning' is gradually permeating all subjects. Leadership of this area is of high quality, and is a major contributory factor in the excellent partnerships the school enjoys with the community and other local schools. The school is being well led and managed through a period of change. Inspectors share the school's confidence that its capacity to improve is good.



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## Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	<b>School Overall</b>	<b>16-19</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	2	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	Yes
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

### Achievement and standards

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	2	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	2	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	2	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	1
The behaviour of learners	2	1
The attendance of learners	1	1
How well learners enjoy their education	2	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	1

### The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>	2	2
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	2	2
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	2	1

<sup>1</sup> Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

**Leadership and management**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	1
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	2
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	2
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	Yes

<b>The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy</b>	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
<b>The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe</b>	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
<b>The extent to which learners make a positive contribution</b>	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
<b>The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being</b>	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

## **Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Dear Students, Thank you for being so welcoming and friendly to us when we visited your school. Your views are very important and we value very much the help you gave us. The Castle School is a good school, with a particularly good sixth form. The school has many strong features, including the high quality care and support you receive. You are well taught and most of you enjoy your lessons. As a result, you are learning and achieving well. One of the best features is the very wide range of activities that are available to you. You are benefiting from being a Visual Arts College and the results of some of the work in the arts are stunning. Your very good attendance is one indication of your very positive attitudes. Generally, we found behaviour in the school to be good, but we note that some of you expressed concerns to us that some of your lessons are affected by the poor behaviour of a few students. Tackling this problem with your teachers is, perhaps, something you might like to discuss in your school council, which most of you think works well and is a useful way to involve you in the running of the school. Your school is well led and managed by your headteacher and other staff. They are particularly concerned at present to improve ways that teaching helps you to learn. We agree with them that a focus on the different ways you can learn is the best way to raise your achievements in all subjects from good to outstanding, and we are asking the school to look at two things in particular: • how to raise achievement in all subjects up to the standards already found in the best subjects • how to develop more ways of helping those of you who have particular talents to extend your achievements still further. I hope this letter is helpful to you. The inspectors believe the school has a bright future ahead of it, and we are confident that you will play your part in making the school even better. I wish all of you good luck for the future. Yours sincerely, Ian Stuart Lead Inspector Alexandra House 33 Kingsway London WC2B 6SE T 0207 421 6800 F 0207 421 6707 [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)