



The Castle School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 110182
LEA West Berkshire LEA
Inspection number 278375
Inspection dates 14 June 2006 to 15 June 2006
Reporting inspector Kiran Campbell-Platt AI

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

Type of school	Special	School address	Love Lane
School category	Community		Donnington
Age range of pupils	2 to 19		Newbury RG14 2JG
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01635 42976
Number on roll	137	Fax number	01635 551725
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr Alec Cawley
Date of previous inspection	26 June 2000	Headteacher	Mrs Kerry Gray

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
2 to 19	14 June 2006 - 15 June 2006	278375

© Crown copyright 2006

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

The Castle School is an all-age community special school for pupils with severe learning needs. The school has a specialist resource for pupils with autism. It runs a nursery class for pupils with complex learning needs which is co-located within a local mainstream nursery school. Boys outnumber girls and very few pupils are from ethnic minority groups. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is above average. An increasing proportion of younger pupils have complex needs. The school is involved in a number of innovative developments including the Curriculum for the 21st Century project. It belongs to a 'Leading Edge' partnership of local schools and a college of further education.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The Castle School is a good school with some outstanding features. The inspection evidence confirms the school's accuracy in identifying its strengths and areas for improvement. The headteacher has established an ethos of continual and systematic school improvement through effective processes of self review. The leadership team and staff show a high level of commitment to improving pupils' learning experiences and achievement. This has resulted in good improvement since the last inspection. The overwhelming majority of parents value the care taken by the school to support their pupils. The curriculum is good. It is well matched to the needs of the three main groups of pupils across all years. The quality of provision in the Foundation Stage is good. The curriculum for pupils in Post-16 and for those with autistic spectrum disorder is very good. The school's accommodation sometimes limits small group work in Years 7 to 14. Outstanding care, guidance and support result in pupils' excellent personal development. Pupils increase in confidence as they move through school. Teaching and learning is good overall. As a result pupils make good progress. Teaching is generally effective across subjects but does not consistently exploit opportunities to develop and extend pupils' communication and literacy skills. The school works hard to develop the pupils' voice through all its activities. In some classes pupils choose their targets and review their own progress and the school is well placed to promote this further. Inclusion and access to learning opportunities with local mainstream schools are much enjoyed by pupils, as are lunchtime clubs, trips and residential visits. Attendance is average with very low rates of unauthorised absences. There are very few exclusions. Governance is good. The school has very good capacity to improve. It provides good value for money.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The school has a Post-16 unit for 15 pupils with severe learning difficulties. They follow a life-skills based curriculum which is carefully matched to their needs. The school correctly focuses on providing practical experiences so that pupils develop responsibility and skills for independence. This results in pupils making good progress in their social and life skills. The school works hard with local services and colleges to ensure that pupils are well prepared for future life.

What the school should do to improve further

- extend pupils' involvement in target setting and review of progress across the school
- ensure that teachers take every opportunity to develop pupils' literacy and communication skills across the curriculum.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The inspection confirms the school's view that progress and achievement are good. Pupils enter school with high levels of need and learning difficulties. Many have challenging behaviours and poor social and communication skills. An increasing number enter school with complex needs. The widely different groups of learners make good progress because the school works hard to ensure that its provision is adapted to the needs of the three different groups of pupils in each of the key stages. Pupils develop life skills and gain awareness of work-related and healthy life-styles through personal, social and health education (PSHE) and citizenship. Older pupils have good opportunities for external accreditation in many subjects including English, mathematics, science, life skills sport and leisure and tourism. Pupils make good progress as they meet challenging targets in English, mathematics, science, PSHE and information and communication technology (ICT). The good quality of the curriculum is reflected in several awards gained by the school, including Artsmark, Healthy Schools' Gold awards, and the Basic Skills Quality Mark. Pupils' communication skills could be enhanced by further developing literacy across the curriculum subjects. Pupils' portfolios show that they enjoy class activities and the very good enrichment activities including trips, residential visits and joint learning activities with local schools in music, dance and other physical activities. The school's 'value added' data shows that the progress made by different groups is good. The assessment information also shows that subject specialists have a strong impact on progress in science, physical education (PE), art and music. In these areas pupils make very good progress. The school is working towards developing this further.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development and well being are outstanding. Their attitudes to learning are very positive. Those who enter the school with very poor attitudes make very good progress in appreciating the hard work put in by teachers and the progress which results from this. Attendance is average in comparison to similar schools, and exclusion rates are very low. Behaviour in lessons and around school is good. Pupils are courteous to each other and their teachers.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. They become aware of spiritual themes and reflection from religious education, assemblies and regular prayers and reflections which teachers plan in daily work. Their moral development is well supported by the PSHE curriculum and the good modelling by staff. Pupils say 'teachers are fair' when they use sanctions for poor behaviour, for example, rudeness to staff. Their social development is well supported by curriculum-related trips, lunch time clubs and the excellent range of inclusion opportunities which they have with local schools. This is especially strong for creative and physical education such as dance and music. Pupils in the nursery benefit from its co-location within a mainstream nursery where they share many curricular and play activities.

Pupils gain awareness of health and safety from the PSHE curriculum. They enjoy coming to school. Their awareness of the benefits of a healthy life style is promoted by the very good range of physical activity including the lunch time clubs. Older pupils contribute to the school through community work and by working with younger pupils. They make very good progress in developing skills for the future through careers education, work placements and life skills programmes in Years 10 to 14.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good overall. The inspection confirms the headteacher's judgement that most teaching is good or better with a small proportion of satisfactory teaching. Features of good and outstanding teaching include teachers' use of a wide range of strategies to meet pupils' needs. These include using signs and symbols and other communication techniques to enable pupils to be engaged in learning. Teachers know pupils well and planning is securely based on targets which are challenging. The content is well linked to pupils' interests and assessment information. In these lessons teachers' subject knowledge is very good. Learning support assistants are actively involved with pupils in guiding them and helping them to understand and participate in activities. Teachers make very good use of interactive white boards to engage and motivate pupils and to help them to learn about difficult concepts. For example, in a lesson in religious education the teacher used a short film to help pupils to follow the creation story from the Bible. She managed to engage some challenging pupils who then asked questions about how the world began. In some lessons teachers miss opportunities to develop pupils' literacy and communication skills including their vocabulary. In some departments teachers plan well to include pupils in choosing targets for learning and self-assessment of their progress to increase their 'ownership' of learning and enhance their 'voice'. The school is aware of the benefit of this in improving pupils' confidence and self-esteem, and is well placed to develop this further.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good overall. Good improvements have been made since the last inspection when the curriculum was judged to be satisfactory. The school is managing the increase in younger pupils with complex needs very well. It works hard to ensure that the curriculum is adapted to the needs of the different groups of pupils with varying needs and abilities in school. There is a broad, balanced curriculum which is adapted by class teachers for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties, severe learning difficulties and moderate learning difficulties. Pupils with autistic spectrum disorder, who are taught in the three resource classes, benefit from learning activities, routines and organisation which closely match their needs and result in good progress overall with some pupils making very good progress in relation to their learning difficulties. There are good systems in place to monitor and evaluate how well the

curriculum provision and organisation of classes supports pupils' learning, development and progress. The school is very good at integrating all its pupils in activities, both in school and elsewhere. Very good partnerships with local mainstream schools support regular participation of pupils in music and PE activities in these schools. This supports their social and academic progress. The curriculum is enriched by lunch time clubs, trips and residential visits which pupils enjoy. The school makes creative use of its accommodation, for example, the internet cafe; but the limitations of space restrict the small group work necessary for some groups of pupils, especially those with challenging behaviours.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Care, guidance and support for pupils are outstanding. Procedures for safeguarding pupils, including child protection arrangements, health and safety and risk assessment, are fully in place. There are strong and rigorous systems for target setting and review. Transitional planning is good. Parents' and pupils' views inform the process and the involvement of local agencies ensures that pupils have appropriate placements at the end of Years 11 and 14. Many pupils go on to further education courses at the end of Year 11 to carry on with well chosen vocational courses in such areas as motor-vehicles, construction and child development. The school has very good relationships with external agencies, including education welfare, educational psychology and social services, so that pupils' needs are met. It uses the extensive partnerships with local schools such as the 'leading edge' partnership to enrich pupils' learning experience and to support inclusion. The integrated provision at the mainstream nursery is outstanding as it makes a strong contribution to enhancing pupils' well-being.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher has an exceptional understanding of whole-school improvement and has been effective in establishing thorough systems and procedures for self review. Monitoring of teaching and learning are accurate and the information is used well to support teachers' planning and assessment skills. This has resulted in a high degree of consistency in good teaching across the school. Parents value the care and support given to their children by all staff. There are good accreditation opportunities for pupils in Years 10-14. The constraints set by the accommodation in years 7-14 are dealt with well. The school is in ongoing discussions with the local authority to improve its accommodation. The leadership team give a strong lead in ensuring that the ethos of respect for pupils as learners informs all the work of the school. This results in outstanding care, guidance and support and the excellent personal development of pupils. The school is successful in helping pupils to take increasing responsibility for their learning. The model of shared leadership results in senior and middle managers being effective in regular monitoring of the school's provision and identifying strengths and areas for improvement.

This has resulted in good improvements on all issues arising from the last report. The use of ICT in subject areas is now good and good progress is being made in using assessment data. The inspection confirms the school's view that progress of pupils is good overall. This would be further enhanced by developing specialist teaching and teachers' subject expertise. Governors play a strong part in supporting school improvement planning. The school has very good capacity to make further improvements.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Inspection judgements

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

Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	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	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
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

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
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

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

The quality of provision

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

¹ 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

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	1	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	Yes

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
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
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
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
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
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
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
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

Pupils

Thank you for talking to me and helping me to do my job. I really enjoyed my time in your school and looking at your work. A special thanks to the members of the school council who I met and who explained to me what was good about the school.

This is what I thought about your school. You all receive a good education and you are cared for extremely well. You are well behaved, friendly and get on very well with staff and each other. You enjoy coming to school and the many interesting activities that teachers plan for you. You make good progress in making choices and being able to express your views and opinions. Your mums and dads really appreciate what the school does for you and the care it takes to make sure that you enjoy your learning. Your headteacher and all the staff do their best to help you to learn and achieve well. They listen to you carefully. Your school knows what it does well and how it can improve even more. Your progress is recorded very carefully and staff let you know how you can get even better. You are well prepared for life after school.

There are a few things the school can do even better. Teachers can make sure that they take every opportunity in lessons to help to improve your communication and literacy skills. Teachers can also involve you all in setting your targets for learning and in reviewing the progress you make in meeting your targets. Once again, thank you for your help and making my visit such a pleasant one.

Yours sincerely,

Kiran Campbell-Platt

Lead Inspector