



The Castle School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 123886
LEA Somerset
Inspection number 281583
Inspection dates 25 January 2006 to 26 January 2006
Reporting inspector Valerie Pearson HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Wellington Road
School category	Community		Taunton
Age range of pupils	11 to 16		Somerset TA1 5AU
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01823 274073
Number on roll	1180	Fax number	01823 274080
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs Sheila Naylor
Date of previous inspection	1 November 1999	Headteacher	Mr Kevin Freedman

Age group 11 to 16	Inspection dates 25 January 2006 - 26 January 2006	Inspection number 281583
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The Castle School is a large 11-16 mixed comprehensive school. It serves an area which is socially and economically positive, although there are pockets of deprivation. The number of students with learning difficulties and disabilities is recorded as below the national average, as is the number of students with statements of special educational needs (SEN). It is recognised, however, that the school's low figure for the number of students with SEN statements is a reflection of the way in which the Local Education Authority (LEA) issues statements. The number of students eligible for free schools meals is well below the national average. Very few of the students do not have or are believed not to have English as a first language.

The Castle School has had specialist Sports College status since 2003.

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 outstanding features. This judgement supports the school's evaluation of itself. The school is highly valued by students and parents and carers. It is committed to doing the very best for every student and this lies at the heart of the outstanding care and support students receive from the school.

Students' personal development is outstanding. They relish opportunities to take responsibility and enjoy the exceptionally wide range of extra-curricular activities offered by the school.

Inspectors judge that the school has an accurate understanding of its strengths and weaknesses and agree with the priorities the school has identified for itself. Teaching is good and ensures that students make good progress. The school recognises that securing further improvement hinges around giving students more opportunities to follow up ideas and work independently in lessons and ensuring that assessment is used in every subject to make sure learning meets the needs of all students. Students' results at the age of 16 are high. Raising standards in information and communication technology (ICT), however, is an important school priority. The school correctly identifies and is addressing areas where there are inconsistencies in students' progress or performance.

The headteacher provides outstanding leadership and sets a clear direction for the school. The school has made good progress in improving accommodation and addressing health and safety issues since the last inspection although progress in improving ICT has been slower. Specialist school status is making a good impact on standards in physical education (PE) and on enriching the curriculum and students' learning, including through an outstanding range of activities.

The school manages its resources well and provides very good value for money. This is not a complacent school that will rest on past achievements. It keeps striving to improve. The capacity for it to do so is excellent. This is a school that is close to being outstanding.

What the school should do to improve further

- raise achievement further by giving students more opportunities to follow up ideas and work independently in lessons
- ensure that assessment for learning is used consistently in all lessons and monitor its effect on students' progress
- raise standards in ICT through extending to all students appropriately challenging learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students make good progress. They enter the school with standards slightly above the national average. By the age of 14 students achieve results that are above the national average in all subjects except ICT. Students make particularly good progress

in science as a consequence of detailed analysis of the previous year's performance and careful targeting of students. Standards in ICT are below average as a result of insufficient provision. The school has plans in place to rectify this situation.

Results in national examinations at the age of 16 are consistently high. Girls make particularly strong progress. With school action, the gap between the progress of girls and boys has been successfully narrowed over the last two years. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress comparable with their peers as a result of careful identification of their needs and tailored provision. Results are excellent in science, physical education, design and technology, and English literature.

The school identifies subjects where progress is not as strong and takes action to bring about improvement. Improved results in French and resistant materials this year are as a result of steps taken by the school. The school has correctly identified where progress in English is less robust and has put in place strategies to address this issue.

The school sets itself challenging targets. In national tests at 14 it narrowly missed its 2005 targets in English and mathematics, whilst exceeding its target for GCSE results.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Students' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is outstanding. The school has a strong sense of community and the way in which students of all ages readily accept responsibilities within the school is most impressive. They effectively develop leadership skills through, for example, being school and sports college council representatives, mentors and elected senior students.

Students feel they are listened to and that their views on important subjects are welcomed and valued. They have made a difference in many ways, including the introduction of healthier choices in the canteen and the review of the anti-bullying policy. Students told inspectors that they feel safe and secure in school. They say that if they have a problem they know they can get help and are confident that issues will be dealt with swiftly. This includes prompt responses to the infrequent incidents of bullying and racism. Particularly noticeable is the appreciation of Year 7 students for the support given to them by older students. Students greatly enjoy school. Their attendance is excellent and their behaviour very good. They adopt safe practices.

Students are increasingly choosing healthy lifestyles with sport and PE making a significant contribution to the development of their understanding. A very high number of students are involved in physical activity through an excellent range of opportunities provided by the school. Students make very positive contributions to the community, for example, through house activities and the excellent qualified sports leaders who provide valuable training to pupils in local primary schools. Students' experiences in school prepare them very well for adult life. With the exception of ICT, they effectively acquire the skills necessary for economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching is good with some outstanding features. In excellent lessons, teachers involve students in a wide range of stimulating activities, including independent work, and they give excellent feedback. These qualities, along with students' very positive attitudes towards learning, result in excellent progress, as seen, for example, in a Year 8 lesson on persuasive writing, when students responded eagerly to very high expectations.

Where teaching is less successful, students are not actively involved in the lesson and teachers give low level tasks to all students in classes with a wide range of ability. Students demonstrate around the school their ability to accept responsibility. Classroom teaching, however, does not consistently encourage them to follow up ideas and work independently. The school has correctly identified this as an important priority to be addressed.

As students themselves recognise, the quality of marking is variable. In some subjects, teachers make good use of assessment to improve the quality of learning and raise students' achievement. Assessment in PE, for example, is exemplary. The school recognises, however, that such practice is not consistent across the school. It has a priority to improve this aspect of teaching and learning.

A particular strength is the school's success in identifying and meeting the needs of students with learning difficulties and disabilities. These students make good progress with the help of intensive support.

The school successfully involves parents and carers in their children's learning, for example, enabling them to access students' records of progress on line.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good with some notable strengths. There is an exceptionally high participation rate in the outstanding range of clubs and out of school activities. There is also an excellent range of activities, such as research projects and opportunities for more advanced qualifications, for gifted and talented students. Students have an excellent awareness of the importance of a healthy lifestyle, promoted through the school's specialist sports status. Although provision for ICT has improved, it is still underdeveloped. Many students feel that there are restricted opportunities and that their ICT work is insufficiently challenging. Older students enjoy a good range of options, tailored to their particular needs and preferences. There is a good range of vocational as well as GCSE courses, assisted by excellent links with local schools, colleges and employers.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school provides exceptional care and support to students and this is a great strength. There is an excellent focus on each student as an individual and members of staff give generously of their time to help them. Complementary provision through the house system, special educational needs arrangements, the 'Return to Learning' centre and links with external agencies ensure that student needs are accurately identified and met.

Staff, students and parents and carers have access to a very effective computer system with information about students' target grades and their termly progress towards these. Parents and students have regular meetings with staff to review progress and agree the next steps for students to take.

Systems for safeguarding students' health and safety are well established. Students are very well prepared for entry to school and receive excellent advice about options at age 16, so that virtually all transfer to suitable further education or employment.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The leadership and management of the school are good with outstanding features.

The headteacher gives outstanding leadership and through his vision and drive for improvement the school has gone from strength to strength. He is well supported by an able and energetic school leadership team. There is no doubt that the whole school community is committed to doing the very best for every student within a culture where there is "no ceiling to achievement". The school's vision and values are known, understood and highly valued by parents and carers.

The school's evaluation of its strengths and areas for improvement is accurate. This self-knowledge is based on effective processes for asking itself how well it is doing. Students and parents and carers make valuable contributions to these reflections. The school knows what it wants and needs to do to keep improving. Inspectors agree with the priorities the school has identified.

The school has committed staff. Strong and outstanding subject leaders work effectively with the school's leadership team to improve students' learning. The school is rightly focusing on raising standards through these key people. Progress is being made but good practice is not yet consistent amongst all those who have leadership and management responsibilities.

The governing body has a good understanding of its role and provides effective support and challenge to the leaders of the school.

The school has made very good progress since the last inspection in addressing accommodation and health and safety issues. Progress in improving ICT has been slower. The school recognises this and is acting on plans to improve provision further.

The school has demonstrated its capacity to improve in a variety of ways, not least through the strong impact of specialist school status. Its success in securing improvements is recognised through awards such as Charter Mark and Artsmark Gold Award. It has the capacity to be outstanding.

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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>	School Overall	16-19
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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	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

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

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

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

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave to me and my colleagues during our recent visit. We enjoyed meeting you and listening to your views about your work and the school.

It is our judgement that your school is good with outstanding features. The school is committed to doing the very best for all of you and it gives you outstanding care and support. This helps you do well in national examinations and means that the school is working hard to make sure that you make good progress in every subject.

Your personal development is outstanding. We are particularly impressed by the way in which you take responsibilities within the school. You told us that you feel you are listened to and that your views have made a difference. A good example of this is the way in which you led the campaign for healthier choices in the canteen. You told us that you feel safe and secure in school. You also told us that if you need help you know who you can go to and you feel confident that you will receive good support. It was pleasing to hear how appreciative Year 7 students are of the support they receive from older students.

It is clear that you enjoy school. Your attendance is excellent and your behaviour very good. You participate in exceptionally high numbers in the outstanding range of clubs and out of school activities the school provides for you. You in your turn make excellent contributions to your local community, including those of you who are qualified sports leaders and provide training for pupils in primary schools.

Your school is determined to keep improving. We agree with your school that some of your teachers need to give you more opportunities in lessons to develop ideas and work independently. We also agree that your school needs to make sure that information about how well you are doing is used in every lesson to provide you with work that is right for you. We have asked the school to make sure that this is particularly the case in your ICT lessons.