

Castle School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	134972
Local Authority	CAMBRIDGESHIRE LA
Inspection number	316298
Inspection dates	15–16 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Susan Aldridge

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	2–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	149
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Janet Davison
Headteacher	Mrs Carol McCarthy
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Courtney Way Cambridge CB4 2EE
Telephone number	01223 442400
Fax number	01223 442401

Age group	2-19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school opened in September 2006, following the closure of four special schools, and is one of two area special schools for pupils of all ages in Cambridge. It has been built on the site of one of the predecessor schools, with a new building added to the existing school. The local authority offered parents a choice between the two area special schools, and the Castle opened with almost the full complement of pupils. Arrangements for the redeployment of staff from the four predecessor special schools resulted in a high proportion of experienced staff joining Castle. As a result, staffing costs are higher than is usually found in similar schools. The school provides accommodation for staff employed by the Primary Care Trust, including therapists. There is also a hydrotherapy pool that it used by the school and the community. The school building is therefore open for 50 weeks each year.

All pupils have statements of special educational need. The largest group of pupils has moderate learning difficulties, followed by pupils with autism, then those with severe learning difficulties. Smaller proportions of pupils have profound and multiple learning difficulties, behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, physical difficulties, speech, language and communication needs, visual impairment or multi-sensory impairments. Just under a quarter of pupils are eligible for free school meals. When they enter the school, pupils' knowledge and skills are well below those expected at their age. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds. This is the school's first inspection.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Inspectors agree that the school's overall effectiveness is satisfactory and that it has some good features. Provision for children in the Foundation Stage is good and so is that for students in post-16. Leadership and management, including governance, are satisfactory. The headteacher provides strong leadership and sets the tone for a school where pupils are listened to and all are equally valued. Staff share and are committed to the headteacher's clear vision for an inclusive school. Although there was an unsettled period when the school first opened, morale is now good and staff show that they are keen to take the school forward. Staff work well with the multi-disciplinary health team on site and with parents, mainstream schools and external agencies to ensure that pupils are well supported. Care, guidance and support are good. This is reflected in pupils' personal development which is also good. The great majority of pupils enjoy coming to school. They are developing a good awareness of how to lead healthy lifestyles and keep themselves safe. They contribute strongly to school life and the wider community. Taking account of how well pupils develop personal skills and basic skills, their preparation for the future is satisfactory.

Most parents are very pleased with the school, but a significant minority have concerns, in particular about behaviour and how well their children's needs are met. There were difficulties last year, when a small group of older disaffected pupils found it hard to settle in, but this has been resolved and behaviour is now satisfactory overall, and often good in lessons. As a result of training, staff are better able to manage pupils with challenging behaviour and incidents of disruption have been significantly reduced. Standards in the school are well below average as a result of the nature and extent of pupils' learning difficulties. However, pupils make acceptable progress, because teaching is satisfactory. Although many staff have long experience of working in special education, they are not equally skilled in teaching pupils across the full range of needs. The school recognised this from the outset and planned a full programme of training. It has been unable to fully implement the training programme because of a large deficit in the school's budget. An increasing proportion of teaching is good, because staff are sharing expertise and finding ways of improving their skills using cost effective or cost neutral strategies. Pupils' varied needs are met satisfactorily through the curriculum. Most pupils are served well by the range of experiences provided. However, for a small group of pupils with complex needs, there is limited use of signs, symbols and objects to help them understand and attach meaning to places and events.

The school is working successfully with the local authority (LA) to reduce the deficit budget that has accrued due to the school's unusual circumstances rather than mismanagement of funds. The school has demonstrated that it can improve rapidly when it has the necessary resources. For example, by responding to audits commissioned by the LA since it opened. The commitment of staff, leadership of the headteacher and progress made since the school opened indicate that it has a satisfactory capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Although the Reception class only opened in September 2007, it is well established and provision is good. Parents are particularly pleased with how quickly their children have settled in and with the progress they are making. The teaching is good and children make good progress. The diverse needs of the pupils are well planned and provided for and children are well supported.

Assessment is thorough and children are set suitable targets, some of which are being achieved well within the timescale set. There is a suitable emphasis on developing communication, numeracy and social skills. Several children are learning well to use the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) to communicate. The curriculum is satisfactory. The school acknowledges that the outdoor area could be used more effectively to provide more choice and a wider range of activities across all areas of learning, and training is planned for this. The provision is well led and managed.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop the skills of staff so that all are equally competent and confident in teaching pupils across the full range of needs.
- Ensure that signs, symbols and objects are used widely to encourage pupils' understanding, particularly of the school environment.
- In conjunction with the local authority, agree and implement realistic strategies to eradicate the deficit budget.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Achievement is satisfactory in Years 1 to 11. Because the school has been operating for only a short time, it does not yet have sufficient assessment information to analyse progress made by different groups. However, it has systems in place to do this when more data becomes available. Nevertheless, the school does analyse the proportion of individual targets that pupils reach and outcomes show that the great majority of pupils reach their targets in the timescale set. Where the proportion of targets reached is lower, there are convincing reasons to explain the shortfall. A small number of pupils with autism make limited progress in developing their communication skills because staff have not yet been trained in using specialist approaches. Last summer, five Year 11 pupils were successful in achieving GCSE passes in mathematics and art. Others were successful in achieving Entry Level passes in English, mathematics, science, religious education, design and technology, information and communication technology, motor vehicle studies and physical education. A few achieved this in a single year, which represents good achievement. Students over 16 make good progress; they are taught well and the curriculum is matched well to their needs. In the summer of 2007, all were successful in achieving 'Moving On' accreditation.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good. Many show positive attitudes to learning and cooperate well with adults that support them. Most pupils are enthusiastic about school and attendance is good. They are increasingly tolerant of differences. Pupils adopt healthy lifestyles and take part in many physical activities. They are sensible and adopt safety rules. Most feel safe in school, although a few are disturbed by outbursts from pupils with challenging behaviour. Overall the behaviour of pupils is satisfactory; pupils and parents say that behaviour has improved this academic year. The school council shows promise in further influencing improvements in the school, For example, in the

development of playtime rules, healthy lifestyles and pupil contributions to the community. Of particular note are the funds raised for charitable causes. Most older pupils display good levels of maturity and self-esteem. Several help younger pupils. They develop a sound awareness of the workplace, and improve satisfactorily the basic skills they will need as adults. All that left in the summer went on to further education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching is at least satisfactory and there is some good teaching in all parts of the school. Teachers and their assistants work effectively as teams to help pupils learn, and they have good relationships with pupils of all ages. Thorough assessment contributes well to adults' knowledge of pupils and their needs, and this is used to plan suitable targets for pupils. Much has been done to develop the skills of staff so that pupils of the same age but who have a wide range of needs can be taught together. However, difficulties caused by the deficit budget limit the school in its ability to pursue the training identified. In particular, PECS training has had to be postponed. As a result, not all staff are equally skilled in meeting pupils' individual learning needs. Across the school, a suitable range of approaches is used, such as multi-sensory methods, use of visual timetables, workstations for pupils who need areas with little distraction, PECS, signing, and the use of symbols and objects to help pupils understand. However, the potential of these methods is not always exploited to the full.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Most pupils are catered for well, but provision for developing the communication skills of those with complex needs is not evenly developed across the school and the environment is not rich in objects and symbols to help these pupils understand. Additional programmes, such as physiotherapy, support pupils' development effectively. The curriculum promotes pupils' personal development well, because there is a good programme of personal, social and health education and a wide range of extra-curricular clubs and activities, including residential journeys and visits. There are at least two hours of physical education each week and the excellent outdoor area, developed since the school opened, provides a wealth of choices of physical activity as well as opportunities for learning in mathematics and about road safety. Good quality specialist rooms for secondary pupils and links with a secondary school enable pupils to follow an increasing range of examination courses. Links with two colleges add vocational and social opportunities for pupils and students, and good opportunities for workplace learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils are confident in raising any concerns they have because staff know their pupils well and work hard to build trusting relationships with them. Good child protection and risk assessment procedures ensure pupils are safe. A strong working relationship with the multi-disciplinary team on site ensures a collaborative approach to meeting pupils' additional needs and external agencies are called upon where necessary. Health and safety matters are taken seriously and the school has addressed all the outstanding matters within their control from a recent audit. Parents and all pupils are involved in annual reviews and there is good practice in post-16 where

students are involved in setting their own targets. Targets in individual education plans are not always changed when pupils achieve existing targets before the timescale set, even though staff move pupils onto more challenging tasks. This means that the rate at which pupils make progress cannot always be easily tracked. Well-earned praise and acknowledgements such as stickers are readily given by staff so pupils know when they are doing well.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The school has a strong, skilled leadership team who share leadership and management responsibilities effectively. Middle managers, such as subject leaders, have been well trained so that they are clear about how to carry out their duties. Therefore, the school's ability to monitor provision is developing well; subject leaders observe lessons and assist staff in developing their teaching and support skills. They are poised to evaluate pupils' progress in their subjects when there is sufficient data available. Staff are given ample time for preparation, planning and assessment and there are good facilities for them to prepare materials. Governors are most supportive. Much of their time and energy has been spent dealing with budgetary matters, but they have the structures and systems in place for developing their roles further and individuals are linked to areas of the school's work. School self-evaluation is satisfactory. It involves pupils, parents and staff and identifies areas that need to be strengthened. Analysis of pupils' performance is being developed. The development plan contains the right priorities but its implementation is limited by a shortage of funding. Staff and governors are working hard to ensure that policies are developed to guide all areas of the school's work, and ensure statutory requirements are met, such as publication of a school profile and provision for sex education.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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?	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

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

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

17 January 2008

Dear Pupils and Students

Inspection of Castle School, Cambridge, CB4 2EE

We enjoyed our visit to Castle School. Thank you for making us welcome and talking to us about school. This is what we found out.

- You are all getting on well enough with your work.
- You are growing up well.
- You choose to eat healthy food and take plenty of exercise.
- You help out at school and staff listen to what you have to say.
- You raise lots of money for charity.
- Most of you like school.
- You behave well even though a few of you find it hard.
- The staff take good care of you and the teaching is fine.
- There are lots of interesting things to do at school and the outdoor area is really great.
- All the adults are working very hard to make the school better.

These are the main things the school needs to do next.

- Make sure that all your teachers and assistants know as much as they can about how to help you learn so that you all do as well as you can.
- Use more signs, symbols and objects to help some of you understand more quickly.
- Make sure the school budget is spent very carefully so that staff can do all the things they want to do to make your school even better.

We both wish you all the best.

Mrs Sue Aldridge

Lead inspector