

# The Castle School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	110182
<b>Local Authority</b>	West Berkshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	325102
<b>Inspection dates</b>	4–5 March 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Heather Yaxley HMI

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

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<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	2–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	116
Sixth form	11
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Brian Connolly
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Kerry Gray
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	14 June 2006
<b>Date of previous funded early education inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Date of previous childcare inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>School address</b>	Love Lane Donnington Newbury RG14 2JG
<b>Telephone number</b>	01635 42976
<b>Fax number</b>	01635 551725

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<b>Age group</b>	2–19
<b>Inspection dates</b>	4–5 March 2009
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## Introduction

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

## Description of the school

The Castle School is an all-age community special school. Pupils present a wide range of learning needs. In addition to pupils with severe, moderate, and profound and multiple learning difficulties, the school has a specialist resource for pupils with autism. The school population has changed since the last inspection, with increasing proportions of pupils with more complex learning needs. There are currently nine children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and they are taught in one of two mixed-age classes in the main school or in the Nursery class, according to their age and ability. The Nursery class is co-located within Victoria Park Nursery and Children's Centre, a few miles away from the school. The school's sixth form takes students with severe and profound learning difficulties. In September 2008, the school became a specialist college for communication and interaction. The majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds and boys outnumber girls. The proportion of pupils entitled to a free school meal is above the national average. A small proportion of pupils are looked after by their local authority.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

Castle School provides a good standard of education and care for its pupils. This includes the provision for students in the sixth form and for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Over recent years, the school has successfully kept in step with the changes required to meet an increasing range of pupils' complex learning needs. Parents and carers are quite rightly very pleased with the support that they get from the school, particularly pointing out that their children enjoy coming to school very much. It is most certainly the case that pupils of all ages are confident and happy and benefit from warm, secure relationships with adults and with one another. Staff work very effectively to remove pupils' anxieties, making a significant contribution to their good attitudes to learning, which in turn creates a calm and purposeful learning atmosphere.

Good teaching delivers a good curriculum and, as a result, pupils make good progress in their academic and personal skills. Many pupils join the school at an early age and then stay until the age of 16. Well-established systems to support children and their families through the first weeks and months at the school enable pupils to settle with relative ease and to gain confidence with the staff. By the time pupils reach the end of Year 11 they are well prepared to continue their education at the local college, or in the case of those students with more complex needs, to join the school's sixth form. The sixth form curriculum is outstanding because it meets the students' needs particularly well, preparing them for adulthood within the wider community. Teaching across the school is good overall but variable. This is often because teachers' use of signs, symbols and objects of reference are more effective in some classes than in others at helping pupils to access the curriculum.

Pupils' attainments are tracked carefully and regularly, giving staff and families a clear picture of what pupils can do and contextualising their accomplishments. This helps staff to set individual targets for pupils at the right level so that they can build upon what they know and what they can do. Pupils' individual education plan targets give a good level of challenge but the way that the school uses targets to ensure sufficient challenge for groups of pupils and classes is less well developed. Nevertheless, the tracking of pupils' progress has come a very long way since the last inspection and it continues to evolve in the capable hands of senior managers. They have already revised their system to make better use of the assessment information to measure the rate of progress made by pupils of different abilities.

Good leadership of the school is characterised by a steadfast approach to improving the provision. Wide consultation and professional dialogue is very much a part of the approach to school development. Although the senior leadership team know their school well, this is not always easy for others to see because the team do not always plan and document the process systematically enough. In most instances this does not adversely affect the development of the provision. But it does mean that there are aspects of the school's work that are not reviewed as regularly and methodically as others. For example, the Early Years Foundation Stage has not been given sufficient attention to ensure a coherent approach to its leadership and management, and the wealth of information that the school has about pupils' personal skills is not tracked systematically enough. Nevertheless, improvements made since the last inspection quite rightly give the school confidence that they have good capacity to improve what they do even further.

## **Effectiveness of the sixth form**

### **Grade: 2**

The leadership of the sixth form is good and good quality education is provided for all students. There is a very strong emphasis on the transition from school to the wider community and planning for this begins the moment students enter the sixth form. Relationships between students and staff are very good. The quality of teaching is good, enabling students to achieve well and make good rates of progress as they follow a range of carefully planned courses. It is because these courses are tailored to meet students' individual needs and interests particularly well that this outstanding curriculum is much enjoyed by all. The emphasis is on preparing students with the social and practical everyday skills that they will need in order to live as independently as possible when they leave school. By the time they leave, many students gain unit awards for independent living skills, money management and water safety skills, based on the ASDAN programmes (Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network). Students also experience the world of work through placements that are organised either within school or the local community. The school's specialism in communication and interaction has had a positive impact on students' use of signing and symbols in their daily activities, helping to increase their self-esteem. Students take responsibilities for the general cleaning of the sixth form building, and this in turn generates a small income that is used to provide special activities and outings. In this way students make a very positive contribution to the school community as well as improving their personal skills.

## **Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage**

### **Grade: 2**

The provision for the youngest children in the school is good and, as a result, they make good progress from very low starting points. This is made possible because staff get to know them very well, very quickly and their knowledge of the children is used effectively to plan for their physical, social and learning needs. This knowledge is shared effectively with other staff as children move from the Nursery to other classes in the 'big school'. The school is currently developing assessment and recording systems that allow for more consistency and continuity in practice between the Nursery, Children's Centre and the main school.

In the Nursery, children benefit from opportunities to work and play inside and outside at a range of exciting activities within the wider facilities of the host Children's Centre, as well as in their own classroom. Opportunities for learning in an outside environment are more limited on the Castle School site. Nevertheless, teaching is very well targeted for individual children in all classes. Curriculum planning between the Nursery class, the Children's Centre and the main school is being developed so that there is greater consistency and continuity. The monitoring, evaluation and development of the Early Years Foundation Stage has not been given sufficient priority and for this reason the leadership and management of this key stage is satisfactory rather than good. The roles and responsibilities of key staff are not clear enough and so, although the provision is good and the children make good progress, the strengths and areas for development have not been sufficiently thought through.

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

- Strengthen the leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage in order to evaluate and monitor the effectiveness of the provision more effectively.

- Ensure greater consistency in the use of communication strategies to support pupils' learning and access to the curriculum.
- Further develop the roles and responsibilities of senior leaders to focus more effectively on evaluating pupils' progress against challenging targets.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

As expected in relation to their complex learning needs, pupils enter and leave the school with standards of attainment that are exceptionally low for their age. But more importantly, pupils make good progress from their individual starting points. Having identified that some pupils were not making enough progress in mathematics, for instance in the ability to handle data, the staff have put in place additional sessions and this has improved the pupils' skills in this area. Similarly, analysis of pupils' reading ages identified that some pupils were not making sufficient gains and the school is in the process of ensuring a more coordinated and systematic approach to the teaching of reading. It is still too early to see the difference that this has made. The school's specialist college status has focused the school's attention on the expected progress and attainment for pupils in Key Stage 3. This is currently being extended to other key stages to ensure a greater emphasis on pupils making good or better progress in English, mathematics and in personal, social and health education.

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

### **Grade: 2**

Pupils clearly develop good personal skills but opportunities for them to demonstrate even greater independence and responsibility are not always carefully planned. Their behaviour in class, around the building and when out on school visits is good. Pupils are confident in one another's company and they know how to keep themselves and others safe. Their social skills are developed well and, according to the level of their ability, this helps them to think about and understand that others have different needs, interests and preferences from their own. For example, over the past two years a group of older pupils have been working with staff to develop the play areas and they have made sure that those who use wheelchairs are able to play on the equipment together with their friends. Pupils' consideration and awareness of children in other countries is being effectively encouraged through appropriate links with a school in Uganda. 'Candle time', a time for reflection and prayer, supports this consideration and thought for others. All of these skills prepare pupils well for life after school, not only so they know that they can play their part in society but also successfully helping them to develop into mature, happy and sociable young people.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

Teachers and support staff have good knowledge and understanding of pupils' individual learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Staff have very good relationships with pupils and manage them well. Pupils are well motivated and lessons are planned well to meet their needs. The climate for learning is good and pupils enjoy their lessons greatly. Staff make good use of plasma screens to increase pupils' motivation. In the very best lessons, teachers and support staff use signing and symbols consistently to support pupils' understanding and communication.

But this is not consistent across the school and the need for further development of signing to support pupils is acknowledged. Other areas identified for improvement include the assessment of pupils' work and ensuring that they have more time to respond to questions. The school's status as a specialist college for communication and interaction has already helped to focus the school's work in these areas.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 2**

The curriculum is appropriate to pupils' needs and is matched well to their abilities. After a review, fully involving class teachers, subject leaders and pupils, a revised and very carefully planned curriculum is now in place. It ensures that pupils of different abilities follow courses of study that are varied and appropriate to their developing maturity. Good consideration is given to the particular needs and demands of pupils with autism. The curriculum is enhanced with activities leading to awards for arts and sports, as well as appropriate work experience placements. Older pupils follow courses that allow them to work towards nationally accredited certificates and some achieve levels that are the equivalent to entry-level GCSE and sometimes even higher. Lunchtime clubs are very popular with pupils and include gardening, sing and sign, skipping and lacrosse. The school has its own hydrotherapy pool that is of great benefit to pupils with particular physical difficulties and/or disabilities. The school works hard to ensure that the whole curriculum is available to all pupils despite the difficulties presented by the premises.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 2**

Levels of care and support for pupils are good and they speak very positively about the help that they have from staff. They know that there is always someone to turn to if they are upset or worried about anything at school or at home. Incidents of inappropriate or racist behaviour are rare. Procedures for safeguarding pupils are robust and meet statutory requirements. Detailed risk assessments ensure that pupils have appropriate opportunities to develop good social skills through a wide range of activities on- and off-site. There are very strong links with parents, carers and support professionals and these have been strengthened through the school's work as a specialist college. Pupils' individual education plan targets are reviewed appropriately and their attainments are carefully recorded. Academic guidance to help pupils know what to do to improve their work is not always evident in lessons and this sometimes limits pupils' involvement in their own learning.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

The successful bid to become a specialist college has been a major focus since the last inspection. The senior leadership team, many of whom are new to the school since that time, together with the governing body, have very sensibly used this major piece of work to further develop the work of the school. As a result, the provision has improved and pupils make good progress from their individual starting points. Good training for staff has ensured that the needs of the changing pupil population have been met effectively. Approaches to promoting community cohesion are satisfactory and senior leaders are currently reviewing the effectiveness of this

area of their work. A greater level of consistency, such as for using signs and symbols and for measuring pupils' progress, has been accurately identified as a key area for further improvement.



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**Annex A**

**Inspection judgements**

<b>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</b>	<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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

**Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage**

<b>How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?</b>	2	
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2	
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2	
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2	
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2	
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	3	

**Achievement and standards**

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	2	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> 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/or disabilities make progress	2	

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<sup>1</sup>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.

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	2	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	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
The behaviour of learners	2	
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	2	

### The quality of provision

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

### 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	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

## Annex B

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

17 March 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Castle School, Newbury, RG14 2JG

When we came to inspect your school we were pleased with what we saw. Thank you for talking to us and for showing us your work. We know that you are very happy in school and that you enjoy your lessons very much. You also enjoy the clubs at lunchtime and the new things on the playground.

The Castle School is a good school and Mrs Gray and the rest of the staff take good care of you. They help you to learn lots of new things so that you can go to college or the sixth form when you are older. To make your school even better we have asked them to look more carefully at how well you are doing and to help you more with signs and symbols.

Thank you.

Yours faithfully

Heather Yaxley

Her Majesty's Inspector