

Castledon School

Bromfords Drive, Wickford, Essex SS12 0PW

Inspection dates

11–12 December 2018

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leadership is aspirational and outstanding and has enabled the school to successfully build on excellent practice from previous years.
- Leaders ensure that pupils' welfare is paramount. Staff provide outstanding support because of their detailed understanding of pupils' often complex needs.
- Pupils develop strong personal, social and emotional skills that help them to become confident and enthusiastic learners.
- Leaders have ensured that opportunities for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are woven successfully throughout the curriculum.
- Pupils develop as confident individuals. They talk maturely about life in modern Britain, diversity, equality and current affairs.
- Leaders have carefully designed a curriculum to successfully meet the needs of the pupils. Leaders consult with parents, carers and pupils to adapt learning to meet pupils' ever-changing needs.
- The highly effective leaders of the 16 to 19 provision ensure that students access a range of valuable experiences that help them become more independent, improve their life chances and prepare them for their next stage.
- All staff contribute to the strong safeguarding culture. They are acutely aware of pupils' circumstances and provide support swiftly.
- Pupils receive comprehensive advice and guidance on how to keep safe. Pupils say that they feel safe and that they can talk to an adult in the school if they have worries or concerns.
- Pupils' behaviour is outstanding. They are very polite and respectful to each other and to adults. They socialise well at breaktimes and develop strong friendships.
- Most teachers plan work to successfully meet pupils' individual targets. Pupils make strong progress over time.
- Leaders check what pupils know and can do when they first start at the school. Leaders monitor pupils' progress against their aspirational targets. Most pupils are on course to meet their personal learning intentions.
- Leaders are successfully equipping new staff with the specialist skills required to match the consistently high standards in teaching, learning and assessment seen elsewhere.
- While staff have had some success in engaging parents in their child's development and learning, they recognise that there is still more to do and they have firm plans in place to develop this aspect of their work further.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning and pupils' outcomes by continuing to:
 - develop new staff by sharing the excellent practice already in the school
 - strengthen partnerships with parents so that they can support their children at home using the strategies for independent learning taught at school.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- The quality of leadership across the school is outstanding. While the headteachers are new in post, they are ensuring that this outstanding leadership is being maintained. Their individual skill sets and extensive knowledge within their different areas of expertise are supporting the leaders' exceptionally high aspirations. There is significant strength in the leadership capacity of the school, including governors and school leaders at all levels.
- Leaders are striving towards excellence and building an enviable reputation as a centre of expertise. One example is through becoming an autism hub school of support and outreach to educational settings. Commissioned by the local authority in 2016, this is a real strength at the school.
- The passionate and committed leadership team shares the vision to give pupils the best life chances possible by preparing them for independent life. Phase leaders have a detailed knowledge of their areas of responsibility. They have an accurate understanding of the strengths and the areas they need to develop further. They are successfully addressing them through their well-considered improvement plans.
- Leaders are wholeheartedly committed to ensuring that pupils get the appropriate support to be the best they can. This is seen through the comprehensive staff training and professional development programme in place. Leaders ensure that all staff have every opportunity to develop their skills and expertise for the benefit of all pupils.
- Leaders' systems for assessing pupils' work are accurate. Leaders use a range of expertise to moderate work, internally and externally, to check that their judgements are correct.
- Leaders routinely monitor the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Leaders know where teaching and learning are strongest and where further improvement is needed. Staff are given clear guidance and specific support to successfully improve their teaching practice.
- Leaders have developed a curriculum that precisely meets pupils' needs. In doing so, leaders have taken careful account of valuable contributions from parents and pupils to carefully design the curriculum. The school offers a wide range of exciting learning opportunities. These opportunities engage pupils and give them the chance to gain an understanding of the world around them, while supporting them to be independent.
- The curriculum topics are focused on the local area and teach pupils historical and geographical aspects. This is strengthened by local walks and trips to local amenities. As a result, pupils become familiar and confident to be out and about within their local community.
- With the recruitment of specialist tutors, there are firm plans in place for pupils to have an even wider range of subjects and courses that they can study that will improve outcomes further.
- Leaders promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development very well through visits to places of religion and the Houses of Parliament and visiting older

people in nursing homes. Pupils can talk maturely about the diverse cultures within British society and the current political landscape.

- Leaders have a detailed knowledge and understanding of individual pupils' specific needs. Leaders use this information well to make very effective use of the pupil premium grant. Hence, disadvantaged pupils get the precise support they need to make good or better progress.
- The primary sports funding is used effectively to provide pupils with a range of sporting opportunities. Pupils participate in autism movement therapy, gymnastic sessions in the local community and community sports afternoons. They make good progress in developing their fine and gross motor skills and successfully learn how to access sports and activities within the local community.
- Almost all parents who responded to Ofsted's free-text survey and online questionnaire, Parent View, are overwhelmingly positive about the quality of education provided at the school. One parent commented: 'Castledon is an outstanding school.... [my child] is making exceptional and accelerated progress in all areas of his studies and life.' Another added: 'The way the school has set up the learning plans for all pupils' needs is a credit both to teaching staff and the school ethos for every pupil to achieve to the best of their ability.'
- Leaders and teachers recognise the very important role parents play in their child's development and learning. Although leaders have had some success in engaging parents, they are taking effective actions to help parents further support pupils' independence at home and travelling to and from school.

Governance of the school

- Governors are passionate and highly ambitious for the pupils at Castledon. They share school leaders' vision for ensuring that all pupils get the best and right support to help to prepare for independence within the wider community. They are very effective in their roles and regularly visit the school to meet with pupils and staff to gain a clear understanding of leaders' work. They have an accurate view of where the school is on its journey to be a centre of excellence for special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) provision.
- Governors seek advice appropriately from other sources to guide them. For example, they met with the local authority and other school leaders before deciding on the dual headteacher model which they have adopted this year.
- The governing body receives detailed and comprehensive reports from school leaders. Governors attend training and school events, which leaves them well placed to challenge leaders about each aspect of the school's work.
- Governors ensure that their statutory duties in relation to safeguarding are met. They keep their own safeguarding training under review and work well with school leaders to ensure that they are well informed of current safeguarding issues.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

- Leaders and teachers are committed to ensuring that pupils are safe and attend school regularly. Leaders make sure that there are strong systems and procedures in place for keeping pupils safe. Records of concerns are well maintained, and any concerns are recorded in appropriate detail. Inspection evidence shows that leaders monitor, review and follow up concerns in a timely fashion.
- All staff have received mandatory safeguarding training. Other training needs for all staff have been met, including training on protecting pupils from radicalisation and the latest advice on county lines relating to criminal exploitation.
- Pupils have an age-appropriate understanding of the potential dangers from working online, including social media and uploading personal content. Leaders ensure that e-safety is taught regularly in lessons so that pupils know how to protect themselves. In addition, e-safety training sessions are also offered to parents.
- Staff know pupils well and are acutely aware of changes in pupils' circumstances and provide support swiftly where it is needed. Pupils say that they feel safe and that they can talk to an adult in the school if they have any worries or concerns.
- The school's single central record of employment checks and employee files are well maintained and contain all required statutory information. All adults have undergone the necessary checks to determine their suitability to work with children.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment, in line with leaders' own evaluation, is good.
- Teachers ensure that pupils' individual needs are very well supported through precise teaching and learning activities that ensure that all pupils make good progress. Teachers consider carefully the types of activities that will engage different pupils and help them to learn best. For example, pupils in the primary school were thoroughly engaged practising addition and subtraction while shooting at a target board with a sticky ball to randomly select numbers. They carefully wrote their number sentences corresponding to the numbers on the board and used addition and subtraction confidently to calculate the answer.
- Mathematics is taught well across the school. The school's chosen approach of a 'daily countdown' provides pupils with practical experiences to build on their numeracy skills. Pupils' work shows that they can effectively apply their skills to tackle harder tasks over time. For example, pupils build up to solving more complex problems involving two- and three-step calculations.
- Phonics is taught well across the school. The school's chosen programme for teaching phonics enables pupils to apply their phonics knowledge immediately to their writing. Teachers meticulously monitor pupils' progress in phonics understanding and adapt teaching and learning for individuals where necessary. Pupils across the school make good progress in using their phonics skills when forming corresponding letters and sounds.
- Teachers' consistent approach to teaching and learning ensures that pupils focus on key writing skills, such as forming letters correctly and writing sentences clearly. Pupils' work shows that they make good progress because of teachers' high expectations and

precise next steps.

- The teaching of reading over time is good. Teachers ensure that pupils are given the necessary skills and strategies to make good progress from their different starting points. Reading records show that pupils' reading comprehension and fluency are monitored closely and that teachers and additional adults provide clear guidance through their comments on where pupils are in their learning. They give next steps that support pupils so that they make good progress.
- Teachers ensure that pupils have regular reading opportunities and, as a result, pupils read with confidence and are able to explain the author's choice of language. Pupils are able to explain why they like a particular author. One pupil told an inspector that he enjoyed the Harry Potter stories and, when asked why, commented, 'I just love magic.' The less able pupils were enthusiastic about their books and were able to sound out unfamiliar words by using secure phonics knowledge.
- Leaders and teachers have worked hard to promote a love of reading. They have introduced a number of incentives to engage pupils. In addition, reading packs are sent home and workshops too have been successful in informing parents how best they can support their children at home. This has successfully helped pupils to make good progress across all year groups.
- In all lessons, teachers model language carefully. Pupils are supported to successfully develop their speaking and listening, communication and language skills through high-quality teaching, using a range of strategies and well-established routines. Teachers' clear verbal and visual instructions support pupils in accessing their learning tasks. Additional adults support pupils well. They challenge and support pupils through effective small group support, with teachers and additional adults known as learning facilitators.
- The quality of teaching and learning is not yet outstanding across the school. In some instances, teachers are not yet proficient at consistently matching tasks to the many complex needs of the pupils. Experienced teachers effectively share their exceptional teaching practice with new staff across the school. In addition, leaders are successfully equipping all staff with specialist skills, for example in autistic spectrum condition and behaviour to meet the consistently high standards seen elsewhere.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Leaders have successfully made sure that pupils' personal, social and emotional development (PSED) is a strong focus in all teaching. This includes specific training for staff and thoughtful structuring of the school day to support pupils to independently travel to school. In addition, leaders' provision of appropriate resources such as soft play and a sensory room has contributed significantly to pupils' PSED. Pupils have clear strategies that they can use to help them take ownership and make choices to regulate their behaviour effectively.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are excellent. They engage well in lessons and are enthusiastic about sharing their learning. Pupils have a strong sense of justice and

caring towards others. They have an acute awareness of potential dangers in the wider world of technology and engage intelligently in discussions around current affairs, such as Brexit. They support each other and build strong friendships with their peers.

- Leaders have placed great emphasis on the importance of health and personal fitness at the school. The school's own swimming pool not only supports pupils to learn to swim but has also provoked interest from some pupils to embark on programmes that lead to gaining lifeguard qualifications.
- Pupils attend lessons at the local gym. They learn the route to the local gym so that some are confident enough to travel independently to enjoy the range of fitness equipment. One pupil shared his enjoyment of improving his fitness using the rowing machine. Pupils also have opportunities to try a range of ball games, such as table tennis, snooker, pool and golf. The 16 to 19 curriculum is adapted so that, if students prefer not to use equipment, they can choose to take part in other activities such as swimming.
- Parents report their children are safe and happy, with one saying: 'This school has made my child feel safe and happy. He is more content and confident than he has ever been. Teachers use a variety of strategies to meet his needs and he is making extraordinary progress.'
- Pupils are taught about bullying and know about its impact. Both the pupil and student councils told inspectors that they felt safe and that they knew what bullying was. They said that bullying was rare, and they could all name an adult they could talk to who would deal with their concerns.
- Leaders ensure that every pupil can realise their potential through personalised plans linked closely to their education, health and care (EHC) plans. This successfully enables them to develop valuable skills and knowledge needed in readiness for their learning into adulthood.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Pupils demonstrate very positive behaviour throughout the school. They are polite and respectful to each other and adults.
- Pupils are very effectively supported to access their learning with a high level of independence. Teachers have exceptionally high expectations of pupils' behaviour, provide clear instructions and are extremely well organised. Inspectors observed pupils in Year 8 making and cooking pizza, following a clear set of visual prompts that ensured safety and effectively supported pupils' independence.
- Breaktimes and lunchtimes are sociable and pleasant times of the day. Pupils have access to a range of high-quality purposeful equipment that they can use during these times. Inspectors observed pupils socialising happily, and adults interacting and modelling with pupils 'how to play' effectively.
- Teachers are highly skilled at supporting pupils with a range of behavioural needs. Pupils' personal plans – 'passports' – identify behaviours that can potentially cause pupils anxiety. This information is readily available and easily accessible to all staff. This means that staff are fully informed of circumstances that could trigger specific behaviours and can act swiftly to pre-empt and stop any potentially challenging pupil

behaviour. One parent's comment about specific support was echoed by many, saying: 'His teacher and learning facilitators understand his needs and put in place suitable rewards and boundaries for him to know what is expected of him.'

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils make good progress in English and mathematics, across each key stage, from their varying starting points. Pupils in key stages 2 and 3 make very good progress in reading due to the very effective support in place.
- Pupils benefit from a range of courses and pathways specially designed to meet their needs. They leave with valuable accreditations, including entry level certificates, functional skills qualifications and GCSEs. By Year 11, pupils gain good vocational qualifications to help them in their next step of development.
- Over the last three years, all pupils have moved successfully into education, employment or training. The valuable careers advice and guidance help a high proportion of pupils move on to mainstream further education provisions or apprenticeships that strongly support pupils' career plans. The school delivers the Employability for Life Award. All Year 11 pupils leave with silver or gold level. This has supported pupils in gaining apprenticeships and college placements.
- Pupils who are looked after and those who are disadvantaged are well supported to make good progress in line with all other pupil groups. Leaders use the pupil premium funding to ensure that pupils get the support they need to make the progress they should.
- Leaders look closely at what pupils can do when they join the school. Each pupil is set personal targets and the guided support from staff helps pupils across different subjects and year groups to make at least good progress.
- Leaders successfully use alternative providers such as Circles Farm and Rally Sport Engineering Academy to help pupils develop a range of skills to supplement their formal education. However, the progress of a small number of pupils in key stage 4, particularly in English and mathematics, is not as strong as elsewhere in the school.

16 to 19 study programmes

Outstanding

- Leadership of the 16 to 19 provision is outstanding. Students experience a rich curriculum that is preparing them for employment, further education and independent or supported living. Students are happy and confident and, along with parents, appreciate the personalised curriculum they receive.
- The college offers an extremely nurturing environment. The college team seeks every opportunity to help students to gain a wide range of experiences and receive the necessary support they need to be successful learners and adults. Students enjoy the challenge of responsibility, such as organising specific events, for example student residential trips to the coast.
- There is an undeniable mutual respect and trust between students and staff that enables students to thrive and feel safe to challenge themselves. They told inspectors

of their appreciation and trust for the adults in the college. They also spoke about how much they enjoy their learning at the college and how the skills learned will help them get the job they want.

- The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding. In all lessons observed, students were engaged and most were challenged appropriately. Students could explain what they were doing and the learning intention. Throughout the curriculum, students are successfully taught highly valuable and necessary skills to be able to grow in confidence by learning skills that will help them get jobs in a safe environment.
- Teachers ensure that students have every opportunity to be successful in their learning. They support and guide and adapt teaching and learning to suit individual needs. Inspectors observed pupils being taught bicycle maintenance in the well-equipped workshop area. Pupils were able to work independently in pairs, successfully carrying out tasks using clear structured visual prompts.
- Leaders design individualised timetables for their students so that they feel confident and familiar with routine. Leaders work closely with secondary schools and colleges and, where possible, use alternative external providers. For example, some students attend Rally Sport Engineering Academy where they learn and can gain accreditation in motor mechanics. Students discussed with inspectors their work on rebuilding cars and spoke about the technical aspects of mechanics and that, when they leave the college, they would like to work in mechanics or with cars within a dealership.
- Leaders make excellent use of community facilities to enhance students' independent learning. Inspectors visited Poppy's cafe, which is a cafe set up and run by the students for the people within the community. This was particularly impressive. Students involved all have a specific role, whether to meet and greet, serve customers, prepare food or be in charge of finance. They learn to make a positive contribution to the community. This opportunity ensures that they develop self-esteem and have regular opportunities to experience life in the local community through teamwork. Students relish these opportunities and the responsibilities that come with them.
- Now in its second year, the sixth-form college offers 26 places to Year 12 students. The college offers a range of vocational opportunities, including painting and decorating, horticulture, bicycle maintenance and animal care. It promotes the creative pathways, offering music and art qualifications. There is appropriate accreditation for the students.
- Students make excellent progress in developing social skills and independent skills. This is because learning life skills is a strong part of the curriculum. Students learn how to carry out household tasks, such as washing, ironing, cooking and cleaning. Their progress is continually shared with parents, who can then support students to develop these skills further at home.
- Leaders' ambitious vision to raise awareness of inclusion and special needs is gradually being realised through the exciting work pupils do within the community. The school's family and inclusion team works determinedly with the community organisations and employers to ensure that professionals and parents gain a better understanding of the needs of the students with SEND.
- All students experience employment placements that give them the skills, knowledge and confidence to be part of community life. This is leading to greater engagement and

understanding by parents and the local community.

- There are many opportunities for most-able students to access a range of learning and to access national curriculum qualifications. A few students are currently studying for A levels. Parents are extremely positive about the new college facility. One said: 'Castledon has gone from strength to strength. Well done, so proud of the new college too.'
- Over half of students take up the Essex travel training service. Many Year 13 students travel independently to their work placements. Some report meeting friends in the town at weekends. This demonstrates that the many vulnerable students with high and complex needs are exceptionally well supported to feel safe and develop a high level of independence to prepare them for adulthood.

School details

Unique reference number	141765
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10053409

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	5 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	194
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	49
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr Oluyemi Adeeko
Headteachers	Jonathan Brewer and Simon Holliday
Telephone number	01268 761 252
Website	www.castledon.org
Email address	admin@castledon.org
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Castledon is a single academy trust special school for pupils aged five to 19 years.
- In 2017, the school expanded its provision to include a sixth-form college.
- The proportion of pupils supported through the pupil premium is almost twice the national average.
- All pupils have an EHC plan. The majority of pupils have severe learning difficulties or moderate learning difficulties. Several pupils are also on the autistic spectrum and some pupils have behaviour, emotional and social difficulties. Some pupils have complex medical needs.

- The school uses Rally Sport Engineering Academy, Circles Farm and Bromfords School for alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection team observed teaching and learning across all year groups.
- The inspectors held meetings with the headteachers, phase leaders, subject leaders, governors and school staff, and met with a representative from the local authority.
- The inspection team observed the school's work and looked at pupils' written work, information on pupils' attainment and progress, curriculum planning, and records of behaviour and safety. Inspectors also looked at the minutes of governing body meetings, safeguarding documents – including mandatory checks made on the recruitment of new staff – and the school's website.
- Discussions were held with pupils across the school and college, and informal conversations took place during lesson times.
- The lead inspector listened to pupils read and talked to them about the books they enjoy.
- Inspectors took account of the 18 responses to Ofsted's online parental questionnaire, Parent View, and the 15 free-text responses. In addition, inspectors spoke with parents informally at the start of the school day and considered the school's own recent staff survey.

Inspection team

Cindy Impey, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

John Randall

Her Majesty's Inspector

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