

Inspection of The Castle School

Wellington Road, Taunton, Somerset TA1 5AU

Inspection dates: 3 and 4 October 2023

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

The quality of education

Outstanding

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Previous inspection grade

Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

The headteacher of this school is James Lamb. This school is part of Blackdown Education Partnership, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Lorraine Heath, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Max Graesser.

Ofsted has not previously inspected The Castle School under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. However, Ofsted previously judged The Castle School to be outstanding, before it opened as an academy.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils flourish at The Castle School. Staff care about them and have very high expectations of pupils. Pupils feel valued as individuals within the school 'family'.

The behaviour of pupils is exemplary. They strive to live in accordance with the school's ethos. Pupils are courteous and helpful to their peers. The atmosphere is warm, friendly and harmonious.

The school provides pupils with a rich set of experiences. The multitude of clubs are very well attended. As a result, pupils explore their passions and interests, including long swordsmanship, Doctor Who and basketball. Myriad trips provide a breadth of different opportunities, including cultural, academic and sporting. The school ensures that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those who are disadvantaged take part in clubs and trips.

Pupils are proud to represent the school. They aspire to the many leadership positions available to them. Roles such as house or sports captain and librarian are highly prized. Pupils make a tangible contribution to the life of the school and wider community. For instance, they raise funds for charities and volunteer in the community. Pupils instigated and led a support group for Ukrainian refugees and a recent event to celebrate different cultures.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The curriculum is broad and highly ambitious. The school knows exactly what knowledge pupils need to know and remember. Leaders ensure that pupils revisit key learning often and can apply what they know. Consequently, pupils remember what they have learned and feel confident to tackle complex ideas or problems.

Teachers have expert knowledge of the subjects that they teach. They explain new learning clearly so that pupils build on what they already know. Teachers rigorously check pupils understanding. They rapidly identify and close any gaps in pupils' knowledge or skills. Pupils, including those with SEND or pupils who are disadvantaged, achieve very well.

The school has increased the number of pupils who continue to learn a language at key stage 4. This means that more pupils now continue to study the suite of subjects that make up the English Baccalaureate. Plans are in place to increase this even further.

The school's approach to reading is highly ambitious. Pupils at an early stage of reading get the precise support they need. As a result, they quickly develop their accuracy, fluency and comprehension. They then get further support to improve their confidence and enjoyment of reading. The texts pupils read with their tutors broaden their vocabulary and expose them to different genres. Pupils enjoy reading books in their free time, recommended by staff and by their peers.

Pupils want to do well. They work hard in lessons. Pupils conduct themselves sensibly and are respectful of one another. Learning is rarely interrupted by poor behaviour. Pupils who need to improve their behaviour get support to do so. The school identifies the underlying causes of any repeated misbehaviour and tackles them. The way that the school develops pupils' characters contributes strongly to the excellent standards of behaviour.

The school provides exceptional personal development. Pupils learn to be good citizens, and they learn the value of making a positive contribution to society. They know how to challenge attitudes and behaviour that are not acceptable. This is because of the 'not at my school' work that the school has undertaken. Pupils say that tolerance is not good enough; people deserve respect. Consequently, they celebrate those from different backgrounds. High-quality careers information, advice and guidance prepare pupils well for their next stages in employment, education or training.

The school is highly ambitious for all pupils. Leaders are determined to improve the school even further, and they are mindful of staff workload. Staff get the training they need to continually develop. The views of pupils, parents and staff are actively sought and acted upon. Governors, trustees, trust and school staff work together closely to ensure rigorous oversight of all aspects of the school's work.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	136916
Local authority	Somerset
Inspection number	10267843
Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,199
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Max Graesser
CEO of the trust	Lorraine Heath
Headteacher	James Lamb
Website	www.castleschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school uses two unregistered alternative provisions and three registered alternative provisions. Very few pupils attend these alternative provisions, and all of them attend school for the majority of the time.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: mathematics, science, geography, drama, modern foreign languages and physical education.
- For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- An inspector met with one of the unregistered provisions used by the school and with pupils who attend alternative provisions.
- Inspectors met with senior leaders from the school and the trust, including the CEO.
- An inspector met with the chair of trustees and members of the local governing body.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View, and the views of staff and pupils in Ofsted's online survey. Inspectors also spoke to pupils and staff in meetings and around the school site.
- Inspectors also visited assemblies, tutor times and guided reading.

Inspection team

Sarah Favager-Dalton, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Jerry Giles	Ofsted Inspector
Benjamin Houghton	Ofsted Inspector
Teresa Hill	Ofsted Inspector
David Simons	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
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