

The Castle School

Address: Park Road, Thornbury, Bristol, Gloucestershire, BS35 1HT

Unique reference number (URN): 139348

Inspection report: 31 March 2026

Exceptional	
Strong standard	
Expected standard	
Needs attention	
Urgent improvement	

Safeguarding standards met

The safeguarding standards are met. This means that leaders and/or those responsible for governance and oversight fulfil their specific responsibilities and have established an open culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and concerns are actively identified, acted upon and managed. As a result, pupils are made safer and feel safe.

How we evaluate safeguarding

When we inspect schools for safeguarding, they can have the following outcomes:

- **Met:** The school has an open and positive culture of safeguarding. All legal requirements are met.
- **Not met:** The school has not created an open and positive culture of safeguarding. Not all legal requirements are met.

Expected standard

Achievement

Expected standard 

Pupils learn the planned curriculum as they move between year groups. They make progress from their starting points. In many subjects, pupils produce high-quality work. Pupils are rightly proud of their achievements and keen to show their work to others. They are supported effectively to develop their reading expertise. However, some pupils do not improve their basic writing skills, such as handwriting and punctuation, to the same extent.

Pupils achieve well in national examinations. Outcomes for pupils in key stage 4 have risen over time. For many subjects, these are above the national average. Disadvantaged pupils typically achieve as well as their peers nationally. While these pupils do not achieve as well as their non-disadvantaged peers within the school, for most subjects the gap is closing. At post-16, students achieve in line with their peers nationally. This means that pupils are well prepared for their next steps into education, employment and training.

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

Leaders and those responsible for governance have prioritised raising the attendance of pupils. They set high expectations for attendance and punctuality. Staff closely monitor and track attendance. They work with pupils and their families to identify any barriers to attending school. Together, they plan appropriate support for the pupil. Leaders have recently opened the 'bungalow', a bespoke support facility to help pupils re-engage with education. Pupils currently working in this space speak highly of how it has helped them return to school to complete their qualifications. Attendance is beginning to rise and persistent absence is reducing as a result of leaders' actions.

Leaders set high expectations for behaviour. They ensure that there are clear routines which mean that the school is calm and orderly. Pupils appreciate the clarity and consistency of the behaviour policy, as it means they can learn without disruption. They are proud of the rewards that they receive for their work and contributions to school life. Bullying rarely occurs and pupils are confident to report any concerns to staff. Prefects and anti-bullying ambassadors act as positive role models for other pupils. Staff and pupils are clear that unkind behaviour has no place within the school community.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Leaders, with the support of the trust, have planned a broad and ambitious curriculum for pupils in each key stage. Curriculum leaders adjust and adapt the sequencing of content to ensure that pupils build on their prior knowledge. Teachers have the subject knowledge they need to teach the curriculum successfully. They typically present information clearly and check pupils have understood concepts before moving on. Leaders have an accurate understanding of the quality of the curriculum and teaching. They use this to plan additional professional learning for staff when required.

When pupils have gaps in their knowledge or understanding these are quickly identified. For example, pupils who do not read with confidence take part in additional reading sessions to

develop their skills. Increasingly, teachers support pupils who struggle with handwriting and punctuation to improve the accuracy of their written work.

Typically, staff use the specific advice contained in 'pupil profiles' for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) to adapt the curriculum. This helps pupils with SEND understand and remember key topics. However, these adaptations are not consistently provided. Without these adaptations, pupils cannot learn as well as they should.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Leaders ensure that pupils' individual needs are quickly identified. Staff work with other professionals, and parents and carers to carefully plan the help that pupils need to thrive. For example, the new 'bungalow' facility supports pupils to complete qualifications after a period of absence. There is a clear commitment that all pupils will achieve well and move on to aspirational next steps into education or training.

Leaders ensure that staff have information about pupils' educational and/or wellbeing needs. They provide staff training as needed. Staff typically adapt and adjust the curriculum to ensure that pupils can be successful in their learning. Where staff identify that pupils would benefit from additional help, for example with reading, this is swiftly provided. Leaders monitor any additional interventions to make sure they are effective in helping pupils to catch up and keep up with their peers.

Additional funding, such as the pupil premium grant for disadvantaged pupils, is spent appropriately. For example, leaders use it to help pupils take part in school activities such as trips and clubs. They work effectively with the local authority to support pupils who are in care to achieve their chosen qualifications. Leaders consider the best interests of pupils when selecting any alternative provision.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Leaders and those responsible for governance have a clear shared vision for an inclusive and caring school that is part of the local community. They make decisions with the best interests of pupils in mind. Pupils, parents and carers, and staff are proud of the school. They recognise the improvements leaders have made to behaviour and the curriculum. Leaders have identified priorities for improvement, such as further raising attendance and ensuring that teaching is highly effective in all subject areas. These will continue to enhance the experience of pupils, particularly those with barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing.

Those responsible for governance work together effectively to meet their statutory duties, such as overseeing the school's safeguarding systems. The trustees and community committee are clear about their respective roles. They use their oversight of the school to both challenge and support leaders. The trust invites external scrutiny from other professionals. This helps leaders to assure themselves that their actions are having a positive impact for pupils, and to adjust their plans as required.

Leaders ensure that staff have a range of professional learning opportunities to improve their expertise. This includes sharing practice with other schools in the trust. Teachers who are at an early stage of their career are particularly well supported. Leaders are considerate

of the workload and wellbeing of staff when planning changes. They listen carefully to the feedback of staff and pupils so that, together, they can continue to improve the school.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

Leaders have planned a personal development programme that is well matched to the school's local context. Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe and healthy. For example, they understand the risks of being online. The relationships and sex education and health education curriculum is age-appropriate. Pupils are confident to talk about their understanding of topics such as consent.

Pupils learn about different religions and cultures. They enjoy discussing ethical issues and are typically respectful of others' views. Pupils are developing an understanding of values such as democracy and tolerance. They understand that these are important in modern Britain.

Pupils can take part in a wide range of clubs to develop their talents and interests. They relish performing in the school production. Leaders consult with pupils about what they would like added to the clubs menu as they have an aspiration for more pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, to take part. Pupils are proud to represent the school in sports competitions and community events. They develop citizenship skills through charity fundraising and volunteering to help others.

The junior leadership team gives pupils a powerful voice within the school. For example, members worked with school leaders to develop the rewards shop. They act as exemplary role models for younger pupils through events such as 'Prefect chatter' drop-in sessions and assemblies. Sixth-form student leaders are proud of their roles and the legacy they are leaving behind for others.

The careers curriculum is extensive. Pupils are aspirational and consider all the options for education, training and employment. Guest speakers, employer engagement events and visits to higher education settings provide impartial information to pupils. Leaders pay close attention to any pupils who do not have a clear plan for their destinations after Year 11 or Year 13. Consequently, pupils move successfully on to their chosen paths.

Post 16 provision

Expected standard 

Leaders have planned a 16-19 study programme that is both ambitious and aligned with students' needs and aspirations. The curriculum extends well beyond the academic, so that students have opportunities to develop their individual characters and life skills. For example, there is a range of sports, clubs and societies to develop students' talents and interests. Students display exemplary behaviour and attitudes towards their learning, which means they act as excellent role models for younger pupils.

Teachers have the skills and expertise they need to teach effectively the range of qualifications offered. Students, including those with barriers to their learning, are well supported to learn the curriculum. Teachers check understanding and typically ensure that students receive the feedback they need to make improvements to their work. As a result,

post-16 attainment and progress outcomes in examinations are in line with national averages.

The careers information and guidance programme is a particular strength of the post-16 provision. The 'Beyond The Castle' event is just one of many that enables students to learn about higher education, apprenticeships and employment. These events, alongside life-skills education, mean that students are very well placed to make informed decisions about their adult lives.

What it's like to be a pupil at this school

Pupils are proud to attend The Castle School. The warm respectful relationships between pupils and staff are the foundation of this school community. Pupils feel safe and trust staff to help them with any concerns. Bullying is rare and never tolerated.

Older pupils act as positive role models for younger pupils. The junior leadership team works alongside school leaders to give pupils a voice in how to improve their school. They provide support to other pupils as anti-bullying ambassadors and mentors. Pupils take these responsibilities very seriously. They are proud of the legacy that they are leaving for the next generation of pupils.

Pupils enjoy their learning. Teachers plan lessons that help pupils to understand and remember the curriculum. Trips and guest speakers bring subjects to life for pupils. Where pupils have barriers to their learning or wellbeing, they typically receive the support that they need to learn as well as their peers. Consequently, pupils achieve well in their chosen qualifications in Year 11 and Year 13.

Pupils appreciate the clear expectations for behaviour in lessons and around the school site. This means that lessons are rarely disrupted and pupils can focus on their learning. Pupils attend school regularly. Leaders support pupils who have been absent to return to lessons quickly.

Pupils are well prepared for adult life. They understand that as citizens of Britain they need to be respectful and tolerant of others. Pupils develop these skills through charity fundraising and hosting community events. A range of extra-curricular activities, accessible to all, helps pupils to find their own talents and interests. They learn to play chess, work backstage in the drama production or compete on the sports field. A particular highlight for pupils and staff is the annual school music festival which brings the school community together.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that the curriculum is consistently taught in a highly effective way so that all pupils, regardless of their barriers to learning, achieve as well as possible.
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About this inspection

The school is part of the CSET multi-academy trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, William Roberts, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Simon MacSorley.

Inspectors carried out this full inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Following our renewed inspection framework, all inspections are now led by His Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

Inspection activities:

Inspectors spoke with school and trust leaders during the inspection. Inspectors also spoke with teaching staff, support staff and representatives of those responsible for governance.

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.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school makes use of 7 alternative provisions, including 6 that are unregistered.

Headteacher : Jessica Lobbett

Lead inspector:

Sara Berry, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Alison Naylor, Ofsted Inspector

Jo Butler, Ofsted Inspector

Kathy Maddocks, Ofsted Inspector

Craig Follett, Ofsted Inspector

Mike Foley, Ofsted Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

The data was used by the inspector(s) during the inspection. More recent data may have been published since the inspection took place.

 This data is from 31 March 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

1,449

Above average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils currently at this school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 1,067

School capacity

1,733

Well above average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils who can attend the school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 1,153

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

15.01%

Below average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years.

National average: 28.9%

Pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan

2.83%

Close to average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan. This covers pupils with more support than is available through special educational needs support.

National average: 3.09%

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

7.18%

Well below average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with reported special educational support needs at the school.

National average: 13.4%

Location deprivation

Below average

What does this mean?

Based on the English Indices of Deprivation (2019) and the school's location, we have calculated whether the school is located in a more or less deprived area.

Resourced Provision or SEND Unit (if applicable)

No resourced provision

What does this mean?

Whether school has Resourced Provision or SEND unit (if applicable).

All pupils' performance

English and maths GCSE

Percentage of pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	58.3%	45.4%	Above
2023/24 (final)	52.1%	45.9%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	54.4%	45.3%	Close to average

Attainment 8

A measure of pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	52.4	46.0	Above
2023/24 (final)	50.6	45.9	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	52.5	46.3	Above

Progress 8

How much progress pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	0.33	-0.03	Above
2022/23 (final)	0.26	-0.03	Above

Disadvantaged pupils' performance

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after.

Disadvantaged pupils' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	25.8%	25.8%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	4.2%	25.8%	Below
2022/23 (final)	3.4%	25.2%	Below

Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	34.6	34.9	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	30.0	34.6	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	29.4	35.0	Below

Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	-0.67	-0.57	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	-0.76	-0.57	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils' performance gap

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after. The school disadvantage gap is the difference between the performance of the school's disadvantaged pupils compared to the performance of all non-disadvantaged pupils nationally.

Disadvantaged pupils' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (revised)	25.8%	53.1%	-27.3 pp

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2023/24 (final)	4.2%	53.1%	-49.0 pp
2022/23 (final)	3.4%	52.4%	-49.0 pp

Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (revised)	34.6	50.4	-15.8
2023/24 (final)	30.0	50.0	-20.0
2022/23 (final)	29.4	50.3	-20.9

Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2023/24 (final)	-0.67	0.16	-0.83
2022/23 (final)	-0.76	0.17	-0.92

Destinations after 16

Destinations after 16

Percentage of pupils staying in education or employment for at least 2 terms after the end of secondary school (key stage 4).

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023 leavers (provisional)	96%	91%	Above
2022 leavers (revised)	99%	93%	Above
2021 leavers (revised)	99%	94%	Above

16 to 18 performance

A-level average point score

The average points that students achieved per A-level entry.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	33.84	34.99	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	33.56	34.38	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	35.10	34.16	Close to average

A-level value added

A score showing students' progress between the end of key stage 4 and the end of their academic qualification studies.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	-0.1	0.0	Close to average
2023/24 (revised)	-0.2	0.0	Below

Absence

Overall absence

The percentage of all possible mornings and afternoons missed due to absence from school (for whatever reason, whether authorised or unauthorised) across all pupils.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (2 term)	7.3%	8.1%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	7.7%	8.9%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	7.6%	9.0%	Below

Persistent absence

The percentage of pupils missing 10% or more of their possible mornings and afternoons.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (2 term)	20.0%	21.9%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	21.5%	25.6%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	21.5%	26.5%	Below

Our grades explained

Exceptional

Practice is exceptional: of the highest standard nationally. Other schools can learn from it.

Strong standard

The school reaches a strong standard. Leaders are working above the standard expected of them.

Expected standard

The school is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standard set out in statutory and non-statutory legislation and the professional standards expected of them.

Needs attention

The expected standards are not met but leaders are likely able to make the necessary improvements.

Urgent improvement

The school needs to make urgent improvements to provide the expected standard of education and/or care.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) inspects services providing education and skills for children and learners of all ages, and inspects and regulates services that care for children and young people.

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