

Castle Community College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	136300
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	373147
Inspection dates	13–14 June 2011
Reporting inspector	Helen Hutchings

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

Type of school	Academy
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	656
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	137
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Sylvia Jones
Headteacher	Mr Philip Bunn
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Mill Road Deal, Kent Kent CT14 9BD
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Age group	11–19
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by four additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 31 lessons involving 31 teachers, observed tutorial sessions and attended an assembly. They held meetings with the Chair of the Governing Body and representative governors, staff and groups of students. They observed the college's work, and looked at planning documents, assessment information and students' work. In addition, inspectors received and analysed questionnaires from 385 parents and carers, and looked at others from staff and students.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the academy's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The extent to which the college is closing the gap between college and national performance levels for the proportion of students achieving five good GCSE grades including English and mathematics.
- The impact of the flexibility within curriculum, particularly at Key Stage 4, in meeting the full range of students' needs.
- The progress that students make from their starting points in the sixth form.
- How well the college systems and organisation as an academy have been established to ensure that there is capacity for sustained improvement.

Information about the school

The academy is smaller than the average-sized secondary school. Most students are of White British heritage. Other ethnic heritages are represented in small numbers and few students speak English as an additional language. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. There are more looked after children than is usual in most schools, including unaccompanied refugees. The percentage of students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those who have a statement of special educational needs, is above average. Students' additional needs are wide ranging, with most relating to behavioural, emotional and social or moderate learning difficulties.

The college converted to academy status in October 2010 as part of the government's 'fast track' policy for outstanding schools. It operates within an area where approximately 35% of pupils attend selective schools for their secondary education. The college has held specialist status in sport since 2005 and was awarded high performing specialist status in January 2009. The academy works in collaboration with another school in the town for sixth form and some Key Stage 4 provision. It provides accommodation for adult education, and a privately run nursery operates on the site. These additional services were not part of this inspection. The Principal joined the academy after Easter this year, shortly before the inspection.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

Castle Community College is an outstanding school where students achieve well. High-quality care, guidance and support are strongly embedded in everything the college does. This keen focus on treating each student as an individual, combined with good teaching and a rich curriculum, ensures that students make outstanding progress over their time in the college. Since the previous inspection, the trend in academic achievement is better than the rate of improvement nationally, and the proportion of students achieving five good GCSE grades has risen steadily. The increase in the proportion achieving this level of performance when both English and mathematics are included has been slower, but there is a significant increase this year, helping to reduce the gap between academy and national performance so that overall attainment is broadly average. A higher proportion of students have already achieved their qualifications in English and mathematics than previously through early entry to the examinations, and college data indicate that this improving trend is set to continue.

A strong ethos of mutual respect permeates the college so that students' behaviour is exemplary and they have an extremely positive attitude to learning. Students' enjoyment of all the academy offers is seen in above-average attendance. They respond very positively to encouragement to lead healthy lifestyles, shown in the high proportion of students taking part in the wide range of extra-curricular sport provided through the sports specialism. Another key factor in the academy's success is the outstanding curriculum, which makes learning highly relevant to students' experiences. An impressive programme of vocational and work-related learning at Key Stage 4 raises aspirations and helps students to develop confidence and make informed choices. This results in very strong progression to further study, preparing students well for their future working lives. Much good and outstanding teaching was observed during the inspection, but there are inconsistencies. This leads to some unevenness in the progress students make that is addressed effectively through additional help and lessons, which successfully boost students' achievement overall. However, the practice which has the strongest impact on students' learning in lessons has not been shared widely enough between departments.

There is no hint of complacency across the academy. The new Principal worked closely with the leadership team and previous Principal prior to taking up his appointment, which has ensured a smooth transition and not a moment being lost. Staff work as a cohesive team with a common purpose and commitment to ensuring the highest possible personal and academic outcomes for students. Evaluation is robust and accurate, and a rigorous approach is being taken to address areas of relative weakness. The strengths in the sixth form are reflected in good outcomes and rapidly increasing numbers. Leadership and management systems which served well with lower numbers are not fully fit for purpose to meet the current demands of larger numbers. Nevertheless, the academy's excellent track record of improvement shows its outstanding capacity for sustained improvement.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of students' learning further by ensuring that the most effective teaching practices are identified and used more consistently across the academy.
- Review and develop leadership and management systems to meet the demands of the rapidly growing sixth form.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Students are very proud of the college and are full of praise for the support they are given by teachers and other staff. Caring relationships are embedded in mutual respect. Consequently, students concentrate very well and are actively engaged in their work. Their enjoyment of school, and keenness and commitment to succeed in all aspects of college life, allow them to grasp opportunities to extend their learning. Consequently, students make outstanding progress from their below average starting points in Year 7. In lessons, students collaborate well which strengthens understanding when they articulate their thinking. For example, in a technology lesson when Year 7 students were designing skateboard ramps, they helped one another so that all mastered new software quickly. They find learning interesting because it is made relevant to them; for example, students knew that when they had constructed their ramps, they would be able to use them to play with model skateboarders at lunchtime. Students move around the site purposefully and are punctual to lessons, ensuring a prompt start and excellent use of time. Students who are vulnerable or who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make outstanding progress. This is because they are well known by teachers who organise their work very effectively so that they are fully engaged, and are often guided extremely well by teaching assistants.

Students feel exceptionally safe and secure because they work within a caring environment where bullying and other inappropriate behaviour is minimal. When incidents occur, the situation is well managed, for example using restorative justice, which helps students to develop a strong moral code. Students' feelings of safety are reinforced because of their strong relationships with each other and adults, and their excellent understanding of how to keep themselves and those around them safe. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils have a strong sense of common values and appreciate that their views are listened to and valued. They respect others and make responsible, reasoned judgements on moral dilemmas. Students see college as part of the wider community and are keen to contribute to it, as seen in a very successful first night performance of Our House when performing arts students managed and promoted the college theatre as a community facility. Leadership qualities are promoted through many initiatives, including sports leaders running activities in primary schools or through students' involvement in the appointment of the new Principal. College councillors speak warmly of how they are helped to develop confidence to participate beyond school, for example as youth mayors, organising local youth conferences or representing students' views to the governing body. Outside links and visits are increasing the range of opportunities to understand and appreciate diversity and difference, and students understand society beyond the immediate community. Their understanding is promoted further within lesson discussions, such as in a history lesson where students researched and shared information about the background to the 'Gunpowder Plot', relating it to civil rights.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

Teaching has many strong features which make a good contribution to students' increased attainment since the college was last inspected. Teachers use their expertise and subject knowledge effectively to plan and structure lessons which are often firmly based on real-life contexts, which makes learning really interesting. Information and communication technology is used very well as a tool in lessons and by students to extend their learning. Teachers effectively employ a range of strategies to promote students' literacy skills, although on occasion opportunities are missed to reinforce oral skills through extended responses to teachers' questions. Marking usually gives students excellent guidance about how work could be improved. Most teachers use a wide range of methods to help students to understand and evaluate their own work. There is much good and outstanding practice, with inspiring, energetic teaching seen during the inspection where teachers have high expectations and make learning challenging by requiring students to think for themselves. In general, teachers successfully match work to students' needs because their assessment is accurate and they know students well. However, there are inconsistencies and some teaching falls short of the college's expectations. In such lessons, expectations are unclear and teaching lacks pace and variety. Students then become passive learners and learning slows so that additional out-of-hours lessons are required to ensure strong progress over time.

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The curriculum gives students rich opportunities for high-quality learning because it is flexible and personalised, for example by enabling students to take examinations at times appropriate to individuals. The core academic curriculum is balanced exceptionally well by a very wide range of vocational and practical learning. Partnerships with employers make an impressive contribution to students' practical experiences, helping to develop personal skills which underpin their future economic well-being. A wide range of extra-curricular activities contribute significantly to students' enjoyment of college life and the progress they make.

The genuine trust between students and staff gives students very high levels of confidence in the school's ability to advise them appropriately and effectively, reflected in comments such as 'communication between us and staff is excellent, amazing'. Students are confident to express their concerns when they find learning difficult because additional help and support is given promptly. They greatly value teachers always being on hand to help with homework difficulties, either in the learning resource centre or in tutorial sessions at the end of the day. Very well-targeted support starts in Year 6, before students join the school, with a very strong transition programme where issues are identified early and followed throughout a student's whole school life. Advice and support is carefully tailored to meet students' individual needs so that all students, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, are helped to make outstanding progress. The support for students whose circumstances make them feel vulnerable is exceptional because staff 'go the extra mile' for them.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The proactive and dynamic governing body has ensured a smooth transition in converting to academy status at the same time as appointing a new Principal. The effectiveness with which this has been achieved is illustrated in the Principal's prompt evaluation and understanding of the college's work and planning for the future. For example, renewed action is in place this term to ensure that students' progress in mathematics is accelerated in Key Stage 3 so that they do not have so much to catch up with before GCSE. The governing body works with staff as a cohesive team with ambitious plans to drive improvement. Governors do not flinch from asking the school to justify its effectiveness. The governing body and senior leaders have effectively managed community disappointment that plans for a new building have been postponed with the cancellation of the Building Schools for the Future programme. Staff manage the inadequacies within buildings and facilities well and ensure that the environment is as bright and positive as possible. Regular observation of lessons by middle and senior leaders has been used

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effectively to improve aspects of practice. It has been particularly successful in ensuring that learning is interesting and fun, but has not focused enough on identifying and sharing those aspects which have the greatest impact on students' learning. Consequently, that there is an over-reliance on additional care and guidance to boost students' achievements.

The school's inclusive and cohesive ethos is highly effective in giving students a strong respect for difference. The impact of care for individuals and how it helps to remove barriers to learning illustrates the college's outstanding promotion of equality of opportunity and tackling of discrimination. Difference is valued, for example shown in the welcome given to refugees and how physically disabled students are fully integrated into the college. The academy takes its responsibilities with regard to safeguarding extremely seriously so that safeguarding is excellent. For example, staff work extremely closely with external agencies, including health and police services, to monitor and address potential sources of harm to young people when these are identified, such as internet risks or personal risks. Partnerships are a cornerstone of the school and are a key driver in its success, shown in extensive use of college facilities by community groups. Another example is seen in the link with a school in London, where students worked together on a setting up lighting and sound systems for a music festival in Canterbury. Such activities make a strong contribution to community cohesion and students' awareness of different communities. This is promoted further through first-hand links with schools in South Africa and Zambia, and more locally with care homes, where very well-organised activities enable students and vulnerable adults to learn from one another.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	1
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Sixth form

The strengths in the sixth form are reflected in students' confidence that outcomes are good. This has led to a doubling of numbers since the college was previously inspected.

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Students make good progress overall and some make outstanding progress from their starting points to meet the challenging targets that the college sets for their performance. Students work well independently and readily take responsibility for their own learning. The positive collaboration with the partner school enables students to choose from a broad range of subjects that the college could not otherwise afford to run alone. Programmes are closely tailored to students' needs and career aspirations, and the quality of the advice prior to students joining the sixth form is reflected in steadily improving progress and retention rates. Students are sensible and mature and have good regard for their own well-being and that of others. They are nurtured and given opportunities to flourish as individuals, making a strong contribution to the school and wider community and promoting their personal and academic development. For example, running after-school clubs, helping with sport in primary schools and organising fundraising events for local charities such as the Kent Air Ambulance are only a few of the numerous activities students are engaged in.

As in the main school, students and their achievements are known as individuals. Students appreciate that staff know them well, saying that 'they are great, marvellous' so that they know that there is always someone available to give help when it is needed. Leaders and managers know the major strengths and weaknesses of the sixth form. However, systems to evaluate effectiveness and monitor quality across all programmes have not been refined sufficiently as numbers have increased to ensure that nothing is missed. Consequently, attendance has not been effectively managed, leading to a declining pattern, and there are inconsistencies in teaching across programmes. Currently, there is no firm action being taken to address these issues. Nevertheless, teaching overall is good, and assessment gives students the information they need to learn well; in vocational courses it is outstanding.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

Views of parents and carers

Almost all parents and carers who returned the questionnaire were very positive about all aspects of the college. The return rate was higher than for most secondary schools and many parents and carers made very positive comments about the work of the college. In particular, they felt that students are safe and that the college is well led and managed. The inspection confirms these views. A few parents and carers did not agree that students make enough progress and that the college helps them to support their children's learning. Inspectors agree that some students do not progress quickly enough in mathematics in Key Stage 3. However, the inspection found that parents and carers are given good information about students' attainment and progress, and additional information which is useful to support students' learning at home.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Castle Community College to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 385 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 656 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	142	37	216	56	19	5	3	1
The school keeps my child safe	191	50	189	49	4	1	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	200	52	172	45	8	2	2	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	175	45	171	44	29	8	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	172	45	188	49	16	4	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	155	40	183	48	34	9	2	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	120	31	235	61	22	6	2	1
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	156	41	197	51	16	4	2	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	175	45	173	45	24	6	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	203	53	156	41	19	5	2	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	125	32	214	56	21	5	6	2
The school is led and managed effectively	184	48	185	48	6	2	1	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	206	54	159	41	12	3	1	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 December 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



15 June 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Castle Community College, Deal CT14 9BD

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave the inspection team and particularly to those who gave up part of your lunchtime to share your views about the school. I am writing to let you know the outcomes of the recent inspection.

Castle Community College is outstanding. Since the previous inspection in 2007, results have improved each year, with the best GCSE results achieved in 2010. Already the college is on course to improve further this year. Well done. Your new Principal has settled in well and is supported very well by the governing body and other leaders in planning for how the academy will develop further.

The college gives you exciting opportunities to develop your interests and talents. We hope that Our House was as successful during the whole week as it was on the first evening. You make outstanding progress because you choose from courses which interest and motivate you well. We saw some exemplary behaviour and concentration in lessons because teaching is good. We know that you appreciate that staff know you well and are unstinting in giving of their time to help and support you, particularly when individuals have particular difficulties. You are very considerate of one another around the college. The college works well with a range of partners to improve the quality of education, and you learn much from working with others beyond the college. Taken together, this means that you are very well prepared for the next stage of your lives.

Although you are served very well by the college and value its new academy status, there are always areas of its work which can be refined and developed. The college is clear about how this should be undertaken to ensure that your achievement remains good. The team has asked teachers to identify the ways in which you learn most effectively and to make sure that these are used consistently across the school. You told us that you know that your opinions are valued so we hope that you will share your views on this with teachers. Because the sixth form has grown rapidly, some of the management systems need to be updated to make sure that provision is kept under constant review.

The college has demonstrated that it will continue to improve and we wish you well in the future.

Yours sincerely

Helen Hutchings

Lead inspector

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