

Inspection of Castledon School

Bromfords Drive, Wickford, Essex, SS12 0PW

Inspection dates: 8 and 9 July 2025

The quality of education **Outstanding**

Behaviour and attitudes **Outstanding**

Personal development **Outstanding**

Leadership and management **Outstanding**

Sixth-form provision **Outstanding**

Previous inspection grade Good

The headteacher of this school is Simon Holliday. The school is part of Zenith 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 (CEO), Andy Hodgkinson, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Stewart Taylor.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils flourish at this highly successful school. Staff prepare pupils exceptionally well for life beyond the school. This is because staff have a thorough understanding of pupils' individual needs and aspirations. Staff have very high expectations of what pupils and students can do and achieve. Pupils live up to these expectations because staff nurture, help and guide pupils to success.

In class, pupils focus on their learning. Pupils get the right help and behaviour support at the right time. Whether it is staff standing back as pupils work independently or effective one-to-one guidance, expert staff know what to do to get the most out of pupils. If a pupil struggles, adults get them quickly back on track.

Pupils show high levels of respect to adults and each other. Their behaviour is exemplary. They play well together on the outdoor equipment or socialise in the sixth-form common room. The school carefully helps pupils build their confidence and independence.

There is an exceptional array of well-considered activities and experiences that complement school life. From residentials, to trips abroad and driving lessons, each activity is meticulously planned and takes pupils beyond their day-to-day lives.

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

The curriculum is very well designed. It is highly ambitious for all pupils. The school continually refines and evaluates the curriculum to ensure that it works for the changing needs of pupils. In the sixth form, students access a curriculum that combines suitable, relevant academic subjects with other appropriate opportunities to prepare students for adulthood. This includes raising aspirations through relevant work experience with a range of employers or building effective social skills in the school's Aspire Café. Pupils and students in the sixth form are exceptionally well prepared for life beyond the school.

The school has thought carefully about the most important knowledge pupils need to know. Staff break down learning into helpful chunks so that pupils have the necessary small steps to help them succeed. Staff expertly check what pupils know and understand. They help and guide pupils to build confidence in themselves and in what they can achieve. Consequently, pupils achieve highly from their varied and often complex starting points.

Pupils enjoy reading because books are central to the school's work. Staff regularly share books or sensory stories with pupils. They carefully track the books pupils read to introduce new vocabulary or give pupils extra help if they need it. Well-trained staff ably support pupils to build their reading, word and communication knowledge.

Staff work closely with pupils and their parents and carers to thoroughly understand pupils' needs and what help and support they might need. Staff support pupils' behaviour exceptionally well, aided by appropriate guidance and intervention from the school's therapy teams. Staff know and use very effective strategies to help pupils manage their

behaviour. The school's culture is incredibly positive. Pupils treat each other with kindness and respect. They cheer on and celebrate each other's successes. Older students are excellent role models for younger pupils.

Effectively preparing pupils for their next steps is the backbone of school life. An outstanding careers and employability programme is integrated seamlessly into the curriculum. The school thinks carefully about what they want students in the sixth form to be able to do. The programme raises aspirations, builds on pupils' interests and helps them to be successful with work or further study when they leave the school. For example, students learn to manage their own finances, use transport or drive a car so many can live an independent life. The programme has a profoundly positive effect on pupils' lives and aspirations.

A rich range of meaningful experiences complement the exceptionally well-planned personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education curriculum. For instance, pupils learn about positive relationships and social interactions. This learning is then reinforced and brought to life through highly purposeful activities, such as running community events in their school café. Trips abroad, visits to museums or the local nature reserve make learning memorable and meaningful. The school's approach to pupils' personal development is exceptional.

Staff learning and training is central to the success of the school. The school ensures that all staff have effective training to fulfil their roles. This includes implementing the curriculum or supporting pupils with their needs and behaviour.

Leaders, ably supported by governors and the trust, are unrelenting in their drive to improve the school. A palpable sense of community ensures that pupils' 'belonging, opportunity and achievement' are at the heart of the decisions the school takes.

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	141765
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10378542
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	5 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	236
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	56
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Stewart Taylor
CEO of the trust	Andy Hodgkinson
Headteacher	Simon Holliday
Website	www.castledon.org
Dates of previous inspection	24 and 25 April 2024, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school caters for pupils with autism and moderate learning difficulties. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The school is part of Zenith Multi-Academy Trust
- The school uses three unregistered alternative provisions to support the delivery of the curriculum.
- 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.
- During this inspection, substantial building work was taking place on site as the school prepares to open a new building in September 2025.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024 will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Due to the specialist nature of the provision, inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, information and computer science, physical education and PSHE. 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.
- Inspectors also considered aspects of the curriculum in art, science and the specialist curriculum in the primary phase.
- Inspectors met with a range of leaders, including the CEO of the trust, trustees, governors, the headteacher and other senior leaders.
- The lead inspector spoke to the school's school effectiveness partner.
- 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.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted's staff and pupil surveys, and Ofsted Parent View, including parents' free-text comments.

Inspection team

Damian Loneragan, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Alex Tomkins	Ofsted Inspector
Nicola Shadbolt	Ofsted Inspector

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