

Inspection of a school judged outstanding for overall effectiveness before September 2024: Castle Hill School

Newsome Road South, Newsome, Huddersfield, West Yorkshire HD4 6JL

Inspection dates:

26 and 27 November 2024

Outcome

Castle Hill School has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

The principal of this school is Steve Perren. This school is part of Together Learning 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), David Lord, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Jan Wallis.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils at this school thrive in an environment tailored to their individual needs. This is a happy, encouraging and caring school where the vision to 'innovate, communicate and empower' is not just a statement but a lived reality. From the moment they arrive, pupils are surrounded by staff who deeply understand their strengths and the challenges they face. There is a culture of trust and care that allows pupils to feel secure and be ready to learn.

The school is committed to ensuring that every pupil can reach their potential. Staff set ambitious yet achievable goals, focusing on meaningful progress in areas such as communication, independence and life skills. Success is celebrated at every step, whether it is a new word, a new skill or increased confidence in social situations. These small but significant milestones build pupils' self-esteem and prepare them for life beyond the school.

There is a calm and supportive ethos throughout the school. Staff respond swiftly and effectively to any behaviour issues, understanding and addressing pupils' underlying needs. As a result, pupils feel safe and supported. Many develop greater self-regulation and become increasingly confident in expressing themselves in ways that work for them.

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

The curriculum is carefully designed to meet the diverse needs of all pupils, providing opportunities for every pupil to learn and succeed. Core subjects, such as literacy (including communication), numeracy and physical development, are at the heart of the curriculum. The curriculum has a strong focus on helping pupils develop essential life skills. Alongside this, pupils engage in carefully chosen topics that spark their curiosity and broaden their understanding of the world around them. Lessons are highly individualised, with teaching staff tailoring learning to match each pupil's developmental abilities and interests. The curriculum emphasises personal development, independence and social interaction. Parents and carers frequently share observations about the confidence and skills their child develops over time.

Staff at the school feel supported and valued. Both new and long-standing members describe an open culture that prioritises their well-being and workload. Many highlight the positive relationships they have with both colleagues and pupils. One member of staff captured the thoughts of many when they said, 'Everything we do here is about well-being – we are a nurturing environment that cares for everybody.'

Teachers at the early stages of their career receive the guidance and support they need to thrive. Professional development, particularly in areas such as communication, sensory learning and emotional regulation, ensures that staff have the knowledge and skills to check the progress that pupils make and adjust learning approaches effectively. As a result, teaching staff are highly skilled, with a clear understanding of how pupils with special and complex needs learn and develop. Staff tailor learning experiences precisely to each pupil's individual strengths and challenges. Over time, this approach empowers pupils to make meaningful progress through their curriculum, develop independence and experience genuine success.

Supporting communication is a key strength of the school, with a range of approaches designed to meet the diverse needs of pupils. For example, visual aids, sign language and assistive technology help pupils to develop essential communication skills. The school also provides structured phonics and early literacy support for those beginning to learn to read. This helps pupils to build their reading knowledge well. This individualised and communication-focused approach helps pupils to express themselves, engage socially and gain confidence.

Pupils are well supported through every stage of their time at school. For those entering the early years, staff work closely with parents and previous settings to provide tailored support that helps children to settle and thrive. Songs, rhymes and visual cues, such as relevant objects and photographs, help children to understand what is happening next. Many children love their sessions in the hydrotherapy pool, and excitedly point at the photo of the pool by the door as they leave their classroom.

The curriculum is designed to build towards increasing independence and readiness for life beyond school. Some older pupils support younger pupils in sing-and-sign sessions, while others practise real-life skills such as shopping and engage in work experience

placements to further develop their independence. Sixth-form students are well prepared for their next steps. There is a dedicated post-16 learning area, which includes a kitchen, that pupils can use to prepare them for adulthood by learning associated housekeeping skills. The 'reworks' space provides a supportive environment where students can gain vocational skills, engage in meaningful work and prepare for post-school placements.

Leaders, governors and the trust ensure a positive and supportive environment. Governors challenge and support the school to make sure it stays focused on its goals. The school's recent move into the trust has brought extra resources and expertise. This helps the school to improve further. In recent surveys, parents have praised the school for its strong support systems and the progress their children make. Many parents highlight the improvements in their children's confidence and happiness. Parents and staff know the positive difference that the school makes to the pupils who attend.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Background

Until September 2024, on a graded (section 5) inspection we gave schools an overall effectiveness grade, in addition to the key and provision judgements. Overall effectiveness grades given before September 2024 will continue to be visible on school inspection reports and on Ofsted's website. From September 2024 graded inspections will not include an overall effectiveness grade. This school was, before September 2024, judged to be outstanding for its overall effectiveness.

We have now inspected the school to determine whether it has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at that previous inspection. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school's work has improved significantly or that it may not be as strong as it was at the last inspection, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection. A graded inspection is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the predecessor school, Castle Hill: A Specialist College for Communication and Interaction, to be outstanding for overall effectiveness in December 2012.

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	142420
Local authority	Kirklees
Inspection number	10346573
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	3 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	129
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	20
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Jan Wallis
CEO of the trust	David Lord
Principal	Steve Perren
Website	www.castlehillschool.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	2 July 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Castle Hill School is a special school for pupils aged between three and 19 years. All pupils have an education, health and care plan. The school makes provision for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties, severe learning difficulties, multi-sensory impairments, physical disabilities and autism spectrum disorder. Many pupils have complex communication, medical and health needs.
- The school joined Together Learning Trust in February 2024. Since the last inspection, some new governors, including the chair of the governing body, have taken up post.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation 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 met with senior leaders, including the CEO of the trust and the vice-chair of the trust board. A meeting was held with representatives of the local governing committee. Inspectors reviewed documentation related to governance, including minutes of the governing committee and wider governance meetings.
- Inspectors visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning and experience at school, and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, 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.
- The views of staff were considered through discussions with them and from the responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire. Inspectors considered the views of parents through the responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents, Ofsted Parent View.

Inspection team

Eleanor Belfield, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Jenni Machin

Ofsted Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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

© Crown copyright 2024