ISI Independent Schools Inspectorate

School inspection report

14 to 16 January 2025

Castles Education

12 Acland Street

Gainsborough

Lincolnshire

DN21 2SU

The Independent Schools Inspectorate is appointed by the Department for Education to inspect association independent schools in England. Our inspections report on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards and other applicable regulatory requirements are met, collectively referred to in this report as 'the Standards'.

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Summary of inspection findings

1. The proprietor ensures that leaders and staff have the knowledge and skills to carry out their roles effectively. The proprietor and school leaders have created an environment and school culture which is focused on promoting pupils' learning and their wellbeing. Pupils develop confidence in themselves and their aspirations for their future lives.

2. All pupils attending the school have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and have an education health and care (EHC) plan. Leaders and staff demonstrate a deep understanding of pupils' social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs and how to support pupils effectively in their learning. Staff are well trained.

3. The proprietor and school leaders have maintained a consistent focus on their work to improve the quality of education pupils receive. Leaders have developed a well-structured curriculum that is adapted well to match pupils' individual needs. Pupils develop their knowledge and skills across a broad range of subjects.

4. Pupils gain qualifications and accreditations, including functional skills and GCSEs, in a number of subjects, including English, mathematics and science. The range of qualifications and accreditations available to pupils does not fully reflect the breadth of the curriculum that they study.

5. Pupils' behaviour is consistently well managed. Pupils demonstrate respect towards adults and towards each other. Pupils learn strategies that help them to manage their emotions. This includes developing pupils' understanding of their responses to particular situations. Pupils develop the language that helps them communicate their needs.

6. There is a suitable programme in place for pupils' personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) and relationships and sex education (RSE). The programme is adapted well to take account of pupils' age and needs.

7. The arrangements in place to ensure the health and safety of pupils and staff are rigorous. Scheduled checks are carried out diligently. Records are detailed. Leaders ensure that maintenance tasks are carried out promptly to ensure that the site is maintained to a consistently high standard.

8. Safeguarding is effective. Leaders ensure that staff are confident to identify and report any concerns that a pupil may be at risk of harm. Regular safeguarding training, briefings and updates help keep safeguarding at the forefront of everyone's mind. There is a strong culture of safeguarding across the school.

9. Prior to the inspection, the school's published complaints policy did not specify that a complaints panel should consist of at least three people who are independent of the matters detailed in the complaint. During the inspection it was identified that a required prohibition from management check had not been carried out at the time of the appointment of an existing member of staff to a new management role. These issues were rectified promptly during the inspection.

10. The proprietor has made good use of external advice to enable them to bring about the necessary improvements in the school. However, there are currently no formal arrangements in place to provide routine governance oversight and to support the proprietor in their strategic development of the school.

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The extent to which the school meets the Standards

- Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance are met.
- Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society are met.
- Standards relating to safeguarding are met.

Recommended next steps

The proprietor should:

- ensure that the complaints policy clearly specifies that a complaints panel should consist of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint
- ensure that the required checks for existing staff who are promoted to management role are carried out prior to their appointment
- strengthen the arrangements for governance to enable the proprietor to hold leaders even more effectively to account for their work and to inform the strategic development of the school
- extend the qualifications and accreditations that are available to reflect the broad range of subjects pupils study.

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Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

11. Leaders have established a positive school culture and ethos based on the school's 'PRIDE' values of purpose, respect, integrity, determination and excellence. Leaders, staff and pupils refer to these values in lessons and through their daily interactions. These values help reinforce leaders' and staff's high expectations of pupils' learning and behaviour. Pupils can explain how the school's values help them develop positive attitudes towards themselves and their learning and help them prepare for their future lives.

12. Leaders work closely with local authorities children's services, parents and pupils to put in place suitable provision based on pupils' SEMH and associated educational needs. Leaders actively promote pupils' wellbeing through all aspects of school life. They have ensured that pupils access a broad curriculum alongside the pastoral and emotional support they need.

13. Leaders have developed a collegiate approach across the staff team. Leaders prioritise staff training and development to enable staff to be well equipped for their roles. Staff are confident to develop and share their knowledge of effective teaching strategies and ways in which they can help pupils develop their motivation and determination for learning. This has led to a consistent approach to the planning and implementation of the school's curriculum so that pupils make good progress. Senior leaders are developing the knowledge and skills of leaders at all levels. This is enabling the school to continue to develop its work through new initiatives, such as the development of therapeutic provision.

14. School policies are detailed and comprehensive and are published together with all other required information on the school's website. The proprietor and school leaders demonstrate a consistent and conscientious approach to identifying and managing risk. They maintain high standards of health and safety through all aspects of the school's work. Staff who carry out risk assessments are suitably trained. Risk assessments are detailed and thorough. This includes risk assessments relating to visits and trips, school transport, and specialised provision such as the mechanics workshop.

15. The proprietor has appointed leaders who have the appropriate skills and knowledge to ensure that the independent school Standards are met consistently. The proprietor has sought expert advice and guidance to help them fulfil their proprietorial role and hold leaders to account for their work. However, there are no formal arrangements in place to provide governance oversight to support the proprietor in holding leaders to account and support the strategic development of the school.

16. Leaders provide detailed financial information to each local authority in relation to the funding for pupils' EHC plans. Leaders work effectively with pupils, parents and relevant agencies to ensure that leaders have the information they need to enable all pupils to access the full range of provision that the school offers. This includes through the regular review of the school's accessibility plan. The proprietor ensures that leaders fulfil their responsibilities to meet the requirements of the Equality Act.

17. Leaders take prompt and effective action in the handling of complaints. During the inspection it was identified that the complaints policy lacked the specific detail relating to the number of panel members required who are not directly involved in the matters detailed in a complaint. This was rectified during the inspection and an updated policy published on the school's website.

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The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance

18. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

19. Leaders have carefully considered the school's curriculum and wider experiences so that pupils gain knowledge and skills across a broad range of subjects. Leaders have devised a curriculum that supports pupils to develop their interests and make connections in their learning. Pupils make good progress and are well prepared for the next stage of their education and for future employment

20. Leaders ensure that pupils' needs are accurately identified so that the appropriate provision can be put in place to support their learning and progress. Staff are able to access detailed and comprehensive information about each pupil's SEMH and associated educational needs, their EHC plan targets, and the strategies that will help them learn. Staff adapt the curriculum and teaching thoughtfully to help pupils build on what they know and understand. Staff work closely with pupils to help them develop their learning confidence and self-belief. Staff are well trained to help pupils address misconceptions and overcome barriers to their learning. Pupils develop confidence in themselves and in their ability to learn. This motivates pupils to make the most of their time in school.

21. Lessons are meticulously planned. Staff skilfully help pupils make connections with pupils' own experience and with their learning in different subjects. This helps pupils extend their knowledge and develop the confidence to ask questions that help them deepen their understanding. Teaching resources and approaches are adapted well to suit the stage of pupils' learning and to support their emotional and social development. For the youngest pupils this includes learning through play. Pupils have access to appropriate and well-chosen resources that support their learning.

22. Leaders ensure that pupils are taught subject-specific vocabulary. This helps pupils secure their subject knowledge and understanding of subject-specific concepts. For example, in science, older pupils learn the principles of Hooke's law while carrying out practical work exploring the effect of force on a spring. They practise using the appropriate terminology as part of their practical work to describe the effect of a force needed to extend or compress a spring.

23. In mathematics, pupils develop their knowledge and understanding through the use of concrete resources. This helps pupils deepen their understanding of abstract mathematical concepts. Pupils develop fluency in calculations through regular practice. Pupils apply their mathematical knowledge to solve real-life problems, such adapting quantities in a recipe or calculating compound interest.

24. The well-structured curriculum in subjects such as music and art enables pupils to learn relevant knowledge and develop their skills. Pupils learn how to manage musical elements of rhythm, pitch, and texture to structure their musical compositions. They modify sounds and create their own musical motifs. In art lessons, pupils explore different techniques and media. They learn about the work of different artists. There are opportunities for pupils to share and perform their work and celebrate their creative achievements.

25. Assessment is used purposefully in lessons and informs staff's planning for pupils' next steps. Pupils learn to respond to focused feedback that helps them improve their work and deepen their understanding. Pupils show determination in their learning and are eager to build on their success. Parents receive regular updates and termly reports about their child's progress and achievement.

26. Leaders have developed a rigorous framework for assessment that enables them to review each pupil's progress against the targets and aspirations set out in their EHC plans. Leaders monitor

pupils' progress carefully. This includes the extent to which pupils are increasing their knowledge and skills, as well as monitoring indicators of pupils' social and emotional development.

27. Reading is promoted across the school. Staff are well trained in phonics. Pupils who are at the early stages of learning to read are given the help they need to become confident and fluent readers. Pupils can readily access a suitable range of well-chosen texts to read as part of their studies and for enjoyment. When reading fiction, pupils explore characters' feelings and responses to situations through group and individual discussion. They consider the language and techniques writers use to create a particular effect or response from the reader. Teachers use core texts well to develop pupils' writing purposefully.

28. Pupils study for a range of GCSE and functional skills qualifications and accreditations in a number of subjects, including English, mathematics and science. Leaders ensure that pupils gain qualifications that support their aspirations and interests and help prepare them for their future employment. However, the qualifications and accreditations that are currently available to pupils do not fully reflect the broad range of subjects that pupils study.

29. Pupils access a suitable range of extra-curricular activities that are thoughtfully incorporated into the school day. Pupils have opportunities to socialise indoors and outdoors during break times. They organise games of football and pool, play board games, or explore their interests in the library. Pupils regularly take part in swimming, horse riding, fishing, golf and football. Pupils benefit from opportunities to spend time in nature through forest school and outdoor learning. They are excited to grow produce at a local allotment. Through trips and visits to the library, theatre and to the zoo, and through participation in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme, pupils broaden their experience and develop their confidence, wider interests and life skills.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation

30. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 3: Pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing

31. The school's PRIDE values are well understood by staff and pupils and promote positive interactions and relationships across the school. Pupils are proud of their school. They talk willingly about their learning, interests and achievements. Pupils know that adults will listen to what they have to say. Leaders and staff speak with pupils throughout the school day and reflect on pupils' feedback. Leaders and staff are responsive to pupils' suggestions. Pupils make a positive contribution to the development of the school's provision and are valued members of the school community.

32. Staff demonstrate a clear and consistent approach in helping pupils manage their behaviour in school. Interactions between staff and pupils are positive and respectful. Pupils are well supervised at all times. Staff respond calmly and sensitively when a pupil is anxious or upset. Staff support pupils well to develop strategies that help them to manage their emotions and behaviour. This includes helping pupils develop the language they use to identify and describe how they are feeling. Thoughtfully located resources, such as climbing walls and nurture spaces, help pupils to regulate their emotions for themselves. This also helps pupils make the most of their learning and social time when they are in school.

33. Leaders ensure that any allegations of bullying are followed up swiftly and thoroughly. This includes where an incident may have occurred outside school or online. There are clear rules in place in relation to the use of mobile phones in school which pupils and staff understand and follow.

34. A suitable curriculum is in place for RSE. Lessons are adapted well to match pupils' age and understanding. Pupils learn the importance of respect and consent in all relationships. Staff enable pupils to reflect on their learning in RSE through their daily interactions. Staff check pupils' knowledge and understanding through focused discussions. They present pupils with real-life scenarios. This helps pupils question and apply their knowledge in different ways.

35. Pupils access a range of therapies in school such as speech and language therapy, Lego therapy, counselling and emotional literacy support. All staff receive training in speech therapy which informs their teaching and wider work with pupils. Pupils develop their confidence and skills in social interactions and overcome challenges they have previously experienced in communicating with others.

36. Pupils share their views and experiences of the school through the school council. Arrangements are in place to enable older pupils to act as mentors and role models for the younger pupils in the school. Pupils take seriously the responsibilities associated with this. Pupils value these opportunities to contribute positively to the school community.

37. Pupils participate regularly in physical activity and sport. They learn the contribution that exercise and diet make to their health and their physical and emotional wellbeing. The recently developed school gym has improved the provision for physical education. Pupils learn techniques and skills and the rules of basketball, badminton and football. Well-equipped fitness rooms enable pupils to develop core and muscle strength and fitness. There is suitable outdoor provision for exercise and team games.

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38. Leaders have fully implemented the most recent statutory guidance in relation to attendance. The school's admissions register contains all required information, including information about leavers' destinations when a pupil moves to another provision. Any pupil absence is followed up promptly to ensure that pupils are safe. Leaders work closely with parents, pupils and other agencies to maintain pupils' positive attendance in school.

39. Part-time timetables are in place for pupils who are unable to attend school full time as a result of their SEMH needs. These arrangements are reviewed regularly by the SENCo. Pupils and their families, together with school staff, the local authority SEND team and social services are also involved in reviewing this provision, which includes home visits and learning support by the school's outreach worker and packages of online learning for pupils to access when they are at home. Plans are focused on gradually increasing pupils' participation in learning and their attendance at school. Leaders closely monitor and review these arrangements to help pupils to sustain improved attendance and participation in their education.

40. Leaders have carefully considered the development of the school site and provision to accommodate an increase in the number of younger pupils joining the school. This includes a well-equipped play area suitable for younger pupils. Classrooms, corridors, social and outdoor spaces are well maintained to a high standard. They provide a welcoming environment in which pupils can learn and relax. Colours have been carefully chosen to contribute to the calm atmosphere of the school. This includes in the nurture and sensory rooms. Leaders ensure that staff receive appropriate training and guidance in health and safety and promptly report any risks or damage so that this can be followed up and quickly remedied.

41. Leaders are systematic and rigorous in their approach to maintaining high standards of health and safety across the school site and school transport arrangements. Regular routine checks are detailed. Leaders ensure that all remedial work is carried out promptly. Leaders prioritise the security of the site for the safety of pupils and staff. Routines are well established at the start and end of the school day to ensure the safe management of pupils and transport on and off the school site.

42. The school's legionella and fire risk assessments are detailed and thorough. All risk assessments relating to the school site are reviewed regularly. Any additional work is followed up promptly. Leaders have developed effective arrangements for the maintenance and storage of fire extinguishers so that they are ready in the event of an emergency. Fire drills take place each term. Alarm systems are checked each week. Arrangements for fire safety and prevention are effective.

43. Suitable provision is in place for pupils who require first aid or who may be unwell in school. First aid boxes are checked each week to ensure that first aid resources are always available in the event of an accident. This includes first aid boxes across the school site and school transport. Effective records are maintained of any accidents and injuries. These are followed up with reports to the relevant authorities, including RIDDOR, when required.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing

44. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 4: Pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society

45. During lessons and through their interactions with pupils during the school day, staff make explicit links between pupils' learning in PSHE, the school's PRIDE values and fundamental British values. The PSHE curriculum is organised in a way that enables pupils to revisit topics and themes as they progress through the school. This helps pupils deepen their understanding and consider themes with increasing complexity and maturity. Pupils can talk about themes such as the rule of law and the role of democracy in society.

46. Pupils learn about different cultures and beliefs. They learn about different types of relationships. They understand the importance of the law to protect people from discrimination and exploitation. Pupils understand the difference between right and wrong and how this influences the choices we make. Staff regularly challenge pupils' thinking and encourage them to consider issues from different points of view.

47. Pupils learn the factors that need to be considered to manage risks that we encounter in everyday life. This includes checking that information is accurate before acting on it. Through the curriculum and wider discussions in school, pupils learn to be alert to the risks of social media and the law relating to sharing information online.

48. Life skills lessons help pupils develop the knowledge and skills that will help them to lead independent lives. In cooking, pupils learn how to handle sharp knives safely and how to maintain high standards of hygiene. Pupils develop the confidence and skills to plan and purchase ingredients from the local supermarket and to use public transport safely. Pupils apply their mathematical knowledge to help them manage money and understand personal finances. Staff help pupils make connections between their learning in mathematics and real-world experiences. This also helps pupils develop their financial literacy in preparation for leading independent lives.

49. The PSHE curriculum includes aspects of careers education for all pupils from the youngest age. Lessons are adapted based on the detailed information available to all staff about pupils' identified interests, strengths and aspirations. Pupils learn the relevance of what they are learning across the full range of subjects that they study to their possible future employment. In English, pupils learn skills such as writing letters of application and writing a curriculum vitae.

50. Older pupils receive focused careers guidance that is broad and personalised. This is provided by staff under the guidance of the careers lead. Staff ensure that pupils are well-informed about different pathways to employment, including apprenticeships. Leaders adapt the school's provision so that pupils can gain relevant and specific qualifications that will enable them to follow their chosen career paths.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society

51. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

52. The proprietor and school leaders have established a strong culture of safeguarding across the school. School policies and procedures have been developed to take account of pupils' SEMH needs. The proprietor ensures that leaders and staff take prompt and effective action to safeguard and promote the wellbeing of pupils.

53. The designated safeguarding leader (DSL) and deputy designated safeguarding leaders (DDSLs) are well trained and coordinate their work effectively. The DSL and DDSLs work closely with other agencies, including local authority children's services SEND teams, social services, virtual schools and the police to put in place appropriate plans and provision to support pupils and their families when there is a potential safeguarding risk. DSLs and staff are well informed of contextual safeguarding risks and have a detailed understanding of the individual needs of pupils. DSLs and school leaders are persistent and tenacious in ensuring that the right support is put in place at the right time.

54. Staff take part in regular safeguarding training. They understand how to recognise the signs that a pupil may be at risk of harm. Staff are confident in the arrangements for recording and reporting safeguarding concerns. Staff are vigilant and knowledgeable about local contextual safeguarding risks and the individual needs of pupils. In reporting a safeguarding concern, staff provide the DSLs with detailed, accurate and relevant information so that the DSL can follow up safeguarding concerns promptly and thoroughly.

55. Leaders take prompt action to follow up any allegations that are made in relation to staff conduct. They work closely with the local authority designated officer (LADO) to ensure that appropriate action is taken. Staff understand their professional responsibility to pass on any concerns. Staff understand their role in maintaining high standards of professional conduct.

56. Regular checks are carried out to ensure the effectiveness of the systems in place for internet filtering and monitoring. Leaders receive monthly reports which are reviewed as part of their safeguarding procedures. Through the curriculum and wider discussions in school, pupils learn what they should do to help keep themselves and others safe then they are using the internet. Pupils understand leaders' rationale to limit their access to their mobile phone during the school day. Leaders and staff work continuously to highlight to pupils the potential risks and benefits associated with the use of social media.

57. Recruitment procedures are robust. Thorough checks are carried out prior to the appointment of a new member of staff. The single central record of appointments is well maintained. New staff receive detailed induction training. Leaders ensure that new staff from the start of their employment know and understand the school's context and the arrangements that are in place to safeguard pupils.

58. Leaders ensure that the required management checks are carried out for staff who join the school to take up a management role. During the inspection it was identified that the prohibition for management check had not been completed for an existing staff member at the time of their appointment to a management role within the school. This was rectified promptly during the inspection.

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The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

59. All the relevant Standards are met.

School	Castles Education
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Address	Castles Education Acland Street Gainsborough DN21 2SU
Phone number	01427 253117
Email address	info@castleseducation.co.uk
Website	www.castleseducation.co.uk
Proprietor	Castles Education LLP
Chair	John Marsden
Headteacher	Andy Fyfe
Age range	7-16
Number of pupils	114
Date of previous inspection	27 March 2024

Information about the school

60. Castles Education is a specialist provision for pupils who have social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs.

61. All pupils are identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). All pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.

62. The school has identified no pupils as having English as an additional language.

63. The school is registered to take pupils between the ages of 7 and 16. At the time of the inspection the school was also providing education for a small number of pupils aged 17. This temporary provision has been put in place for existing pupils who may need additional time or support to enable them to access the next stage of their education. This arrangement has been agreed with the Department for Education.

64. The school's aims are to provide a welcoming and purposeful environment where young people can flourish and where their needs and aspirations are met.

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Inspection details

Inspection dates	14 to 16 January 2025

65. A team of three inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

66. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration and form time
- discussions with the proprietors
- discussions with the headteacher, school leaders, managers and other members of staff
- discussions with pupils
- visits to the mechanics provision, outdoor learning and facilities for physical education
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

67. The inspection team considered the views of members of staff and parents who responded to ISI's pre-inspection surveys. Inspectors spoke with pupils to gather their views.

68. The school was previously inspected by Ofsted. This is the first inspection of the school by ISI.

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How are association independent schools in England inspected?

- The Department for Education is the regulator for independent schools in England.
- ISI is approved by the Secretary of State for Education to inspect independent schools in England, which are members of associations in membership of the Independent Schools Council.
- ISI inspections report to the Department for Education on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards, the EYFS statutory framework requirements, the National Minimum Standards for boarding schools and any other relevant standards are met.
- For more information, please visit **www.isi.net**.

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