

Inspection of NCEA Castle School

Academy Road, Ashington, Northumberland NE63 9FZ

Inspection dates: 8 and 9 November 2022

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Good
Sixth-form provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

What is it like to attend this school?

NCEA Castle School is a warm and welcoming place. All pupils are encouraged to achieve their best and 'shine their light'. Pupils enjoy coming to school and are proud of how well they do.

Pupils feel safe at NCEA Castle School. They say that bullying rarely happens. They know that they can let adults know if this were to happen and it would be sorted out. Relationships between pupils, and with the adults working alongside them, are extremely positive and respectful.

The school is highly inclusive. The core values of love, inclusivity, goodness, hope and truth are shared by pupils and staff alike. Pupils learn how to be a good friend and about being kind to others. They learn how to make choices and be independent.

Leaders, trustees and governors are ambitious for all pupils to achieve their best. Pupils' well-being and development are at the heart of the school. Leaders ensure that all pupils are provided with the means to communicate their individual needs and wants.

All staff share leaders' ambitions for pupils to be the best they can be. Teachers and their class teams, from early years through to sixth form, are proud of the difference they make to pupils' lives.

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

The members of the new leadership team have acted quickly to make positive changes. They have ensured that pupils' learning is both appropriate and meaningful. They have introduced different curriculum pathways, which support pupils well. Each of these pathways develops pupils' communication, reading and mathematical skills. They also support pupils' physical development and allow pupils to be creative and inquisitive. Teachers plan activities that help pupils to build on their knowledge and skills. As a result, pupils build on what they have learned before.

Leaders have also introduced new assessment processes. These make it easier for staff to check the small steps of progress in pupils' learning. As a result, teachers can plan for the next steps in learning. Leaders check pupils' progress to identify when pupils can be taught a 'blend' of the curriculum pathways.

The early years environment provides a good foundation for children. There is a clear focus on establishing routines which calm children and allow them to settle well. Students in the sixth form also benefit from a supportive environment. Post-16 students conduct themselves in a responsible and considerate way. Person-centred plans place an emphasis on their next steps and preparation for adulthood.

Leaders have implemented a well-considered programme of continuous professional development. As a result, the expertise of all staff, including curriculum leaders, has developed. Curriculum leaders now work closely with all teachers across school to share subject knowledge. They have started to check that all pupils have suitable planned learning activities in each subject.

Staff work alongside other professionals to understand how best to meet each pupils' specific needs. These professionals include nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, and speech and language therapists. These partnerships mean staff have the knowledge and skills to support pupils with complex needs. Staff carefully consider how to support pupils in communicating and socialising. This might include the use of technology, Makaton signing and other special resources.

Pupils enjoy learning. The school environment is carefully considered to enable pupils to engage in their surroundings. Support plans are in place to help pupils who find it difficult to regulate their behaviour at times. This results in learning environments which are calm and purposeful.

Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe. They are taught about relationships and that everyone should be treated the same. They take part in events such as Red Nose Day and the Christmas fair. However, pupils would benefit from the chance to experience a much wider range of opportunities. For example, pupils do not learn enough about democracy and life in modern Britain.

Staff feel proud to work at the school. New leaders have ensured that all staff have the training and support they need to develop. Staff recognise this and feel empowered and valued. They feel that leaders take their well-being into account.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders ensure that all staff are well trained and understand the additional needs and vulnerabilities of their pupils. Staff know how to keep pupils safe. They pass concerns on to leaders, who deal with them appropriately.

Leaders closely monitor individual cases. They refer to outside agencies when this is needed. Leaders work with other agencies to make sure that pupils get the help and support they need in a timely fashion.

Trustees and governors check that safeguarding policies and procedures are robust.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Processes for quality assurance of the curriculum are not well embedded. As a result, subject leaders do not yet have a clear enough understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum in their subject areas. Leaders should ensure that there are robust systems to check that the curriculum is securely embedded and implemented as planned.
- While pupils' well-being and development are at the heart of the school, the personal development programme does not explicitly outline a breadth of wider opportunities for pupils. This means that pupils do not learn enough about fundamental British values. Leaders need to refine the personal development programme so that pupils experience a wide range of opportunities and are fully prepared for life in modern Britain.

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](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	145957
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	10241406
Type of school	All-through Special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	2 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	118
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	16
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	John Brearley
Acting Headteacher	Caroline Vardy
Website	https://castle.ncea.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- NCEA Castle School is a special school for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Most pupils attending the school have severe or profound and multiple learning disabilities. Many pupils have been diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The pupils are grouped into pathways which reflect the level of their special educational needs. Pupils can move between the pathways on their journey through the school.
- The school does not use alternative education providers.
- NCEA Castle School is part of the Northumberland Church of England Academy Trust.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the acting headteachers, the director of special school improvement and the acting deputy headteacher. The lead inspector met with trustees, including the chair of the board of trustees, representatives from the local governing body, the Diocesan Director of Education, the Local Authority's Deputy Director of Education and the external school improvement partner.
- Inspectors met with those responsible for safeguarding. Inspectors looked at a range of documents linked to safeguarding, including the single central record which records recruitment checks made on staff. Inspectors talked to pupils during the inspection and asked them about how safe they feel.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in reading/communication and language, cognition and learning, and personal, social and health education. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with the subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers and pupils and looked at samples of work.
- Inspectors also spoke to leaders about the curriculum in mathematics, science, physical education and art.
- Inspectors visited pupils across the school, including children in the early years foundation stage and students in the school's sixth form.
- Inspectors spoke to parents and took account of the views of parents and staff through surveys, including by looking at responses to Ofsted Parent View. There were no responses by pupils to Ofsted's survey, but inspectors spoke with pupils and considered surveys that school leaders had conducted with pupils.

Inspection team

Moira Banks, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Malcolm Kirtley

Senior His Majesty's Inspector

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