

The Castle School Self Evaluation 2025



Overview of The Castle School

The Castle School is a community special school based on two sites in Newbury and one site in Theale. This consists of a the main Primary and Secondary school located at Love Lane and a Post-16 centre situated adjacent to Newbury College. The Theale site has provision for students with social, emotional and mental health needs.

The Castle School's catchment area is predominantly the Western half of West Berkshire. However, a small, but increasing number of pupils are placed here from Wiltshire, Hampshire and Oxfordshire.

The school has experienced significant growth over the past 14 years. In 2011 the school catered for 130 students. As of September 2025, there are 227 students on role.

Year	Number of pupils
2011/2012	130
2012/2013	136
2013/2014	143
2014/2015	150
2015/2016	157
2016/2017	162
2017/2018	169
2018/2019	163
2019/2020	173
2020/2021	165
2021/2022	170
2022/2023	180
2023/2024	181
2024/2025	199
2025/2026	227
Total increase since 2011	97 (75%)

Characteristics of learners

The Castle School comprises 3 sites. Love Lane and Post-16 sites are known as Castle @ Newbury. Castle @ Newbury caters for students from 4 to 19 years of age with complex learning difficulties and disabilities. Our Castle @ Theale provision caters for students from 11 to 16 years of age with social, emotional and mental health needs.

Admissions profile September 2025

On roll	Joined	Left	CIC	PPG	Dual roll	Boys	Girls
227	38	10	7 (3.1%)	83 (37%)	0	162 (71%)	65 (29%)
Key Stage 1&2	Key Stage 3	Key Stage 4	Key Stage 5				
50	83	48	46				

Vision and Values

Our Purpose

The Castle School exists to provide a caring, nurturing and outstanding educational community for the learners of West Berkshire and beyond. Our key purpose is to educate, motivate, inspire and celebrate all children with additional needs and to provide a quality educational experience which encourages equality for all; to develop individual self-worth, esteem and potential in all learners and uphold their rights.

Our vision is to create a happy, secure and stimulating learning environment which will encourage and challenge our learners to develop their skills and knowledge as far as they can and provide the best education possible.

Our aims are to:

- encourage all our learners to be curious and hungry to learn, now and in the future
- enable our learners to become valued citizens who contribute positively within their community and beyond
- set high expectations in all areas of learning and create an environment that enables our learners to flourish
- deliver outstanding provision that is at the cutting edge of good practice
- develop positive, mutually-trusting partnerships with families to improve the outcomes of our learners
- empower our learners and equip them with the skills to achieve a full and independent adult life
- engender confidence, resilience, self-worth and a passion for life-long learning

We believe that anyone with the drive and desire can reach their goals. Our role is to inspire young people to achieve and provide the support to enable our learners to become independent, self-confident and resilient members of the community.

We will strive to do this together by:

- providing each learner with the skills, resilience, drive and passion needed to be successful and happy through a well-differentiated broad, balanced and inspiring curriculum
- celebrate everyone's achievements and talents and embrace the wonderful diversity of our inclusive school community
- having a highly trained, creative and innovative staff team
- empowering each learner through a total communication environment enabling everyone to express themselves and to remove barriers
- supporting each learner with engaging and active challenges to encourage everyone to become life-long learners.
- working together with learners, parents, carers, professionals and members of the community to improve outcomes for all.

SEF Judgements

	Date	Overall effectiveness Grade	Comment
Last OFSTED Inspection	April 2024	1	Outstanding
Current grade based on SEF judgements	Sept 2025	1	Outstanding

OFSTED inspected the school in April 2024. The Castle School was judged as continuing to be Outstanding in all areas. This is the third time in a row that we have received this judgment.

Some key quotes from the report:

"The Castle School is a very special place. It is a vibrant and exciting place to learn."

"Pupils, who all have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), are exceptionally well prepared for their futures."

"Pupils are happy and feel safe."

"Pupils have an exceptional understanding and appreciation of their peers."

"The school has high ambitions for pupils."

"Pupils access a broad curriculum" and "The school's curriculum is highly effective."

"Skilled staff know their pupils exceptionally well."

"The school strongly promotes a love of reading."

"Pupils behave exceptionally well."

"The curriculum promotes excellent personal development."

“Parents and carers are effusive in their praise for the school.”

“There is a clear focus on making sure that all pupils learn to be as independent as possible so that they can become active citizens.”

“Governors are highly ambitious. They robustly hold leaders to account and check the positive impact of the school’s work.”

Pressure on places

We have seen a significant increase in demand for places at The Castle School. This is a national issue and is placing huge pressure on special schools across the country. We have seen a huge increase in requests for visits to see our school as well as a very significant increase in placement requests from other local authorities.

To give some scale to this, as recent as 2018, it would be unusual for me to have to refuse a placement request for a student whose needs we could meet. However, due to lack of physical capacity, I am now regularly sending out response letters stating that we cannot offer a place due to the incompatibility with the efficient education of others. Consultation activity has continued to rise and remains a significant aspect of our operational landscape. As of 8 October 2025, we have received 54 consultations for this academic year. If this trend continues, we anticipate a total of 421 consultations by the end of the academic year — an increase of 45 compared to the previous year, representing a 12% year-on-year growth. Recent consultations have come from Oxfordshire, Reading, Hampshire, Swindon, Wiltshire, Wokingham and Bracknell. This upward trajectory underscores the growing recognition of our school’s provision and the increasing demand for specialist placements.

Tribunal activity has also intensified. We concluded last year with one tribunal where we were directed to admit a pupil, and we conceded another case in consultation with the local authority due to the high likelihood of an unfavourable outcome. Currently, we are managing seven active tribunal cases in which our school has been named as the parental preference. This reflects both the complexity of placement decisions and the high regard in which our school is held by families.

We continue to advocate strongly during the consultation process to ensure that placements are appropriate and do not compromise the efficient education of existing pupils. Our approach is firmly grounded in the legal framework provided by Section 39 of the Children and Families Act 2014, and we remain committed to upholding the integrity of our educational environment.

Progress at The Castle School 2024-2025

At The Castle School, we are committed to delivering a highly individualised educational experience that recognises and nurtures the unique strengths, needs, and aspirations of each pupil. In line with Ofsted's approach to evaluating progress in special schools, we do not measure attainment against national benchmarks. Instead, we assess progress by comparing each student's achievements against their starting points and by evaluating how effectively the education provided meets their individual needs.

This philosophy underpins our practice across the school, where we pride ourselves on looking beyond standardised measures to challenge every learner to achieve their personal best in the areas most meaningful to them. Our approach is rooted in the belief that progress should be purposeful, relevant, and reflective of each pupil's journey.

Frameworks for Assessment

To support this personalised model, we utilise nine distinct assessment frameworks within the Earwig platform. Each framework represents a structured set of criteria designed to track and report pupil progress in a way that is both rigorous and adaptable. These frameworks are allocated to students based on their curriculum pathways and learning profiles, ensuring that assessment is aligned with their individual educational experiences.

How Frameworks Are Used:

- Teachers select and apply the appropriate frameworks for each student, guided by curriculum pathways and developmental priorities.
- The platform enables staff to track progress over time, attach evidence of learning, and generate a variety of reports to inform planning and review.
- Frameworks vary in scope: some are broad and cross-curricular (e.g., the Core framework), while others are subject-specific or skill-focused (e.g., the Phonics framework).

Current Frameworks in Use:

- Communication
- Core
- EHCP (Education, Health and Care Plan outcomes)
- DEYO (Developing Early Years Outcomes)
- Discoverer
- FS Maths and English
- Phonics
- Skills Builder
- NC – KS3 Core

Progress Data Report: Academic Year 2024–2025

During the 2024–2025 academic year, The Castle School supported 198 pupils. To monitor and evaluate progress effectively, we hold five dedicated pupil progress meetings throughout the year. These meetings take place in November, January, March, April, and June, and serve as key data capture points.

During each meeting, staff review pupil progress using data collated within Earwig. The central question guiding these discussions is: *“Is learning, engagement, and progress good, taking into account the needs and context of the student?”* This reflective inquiry ensures that progress is evaluated holistically and meaningfully.

Progress meetings are collaborative in nature. Teachers engage with their immediate class teams and also share insights with colleagues across departments. These discussions often incorporate input from the nursing team, pastoral support staff, and the behaviour team, ensuring that all aspects of a pupil's development are considered.

This multi-disciplinary approach reinforces our commitment to whole-child development and ensures that progress is not only measured academically, but also in terms of wellbeing, communication, independence, and social engagement.

This table shows the pupils, as organised into their teams. This shows the progress at the point of capture. Yes in green and no in red.

Team	Nov 24	Jan-25	Mar-24	Apr-25	Jun-25
Wessex	3	1	1	0	0
	25	27	27	28	28
Norman	1	1	1	1	0
	26	26	26	26	27
Tudor	0	1	2	3	4
	38	37	36	35	34
Stuart	8	7	10	10	11
	30	31	28	28	27
Lancaster	1	0	0	3	2
	40	41	41	38	39
Theale	8	5	8	8	6
	18	21	18	18	20
Total	21	15	22	25	23
	177	183	176	173	175

This table looks at percentages across the year for the whole school.

Team	Nov 24	Jan-25	Mar-24	Apr-25	Jun-25
No	10.61%	7.58%	11.11%	12.63%	11.62%
Yes	89.39%	92.42%	88.89%	87.37%	88.38%

At the end of the academic year across the teams this shows the students on target for expected progress.

Wessex

100%

28/28 pupils

Norman

100%

27/27 pupils

Lancaster

95%

39/41 pupils

Tudor

89%

34/38 pupils

Theale

77%

20/26 pupils

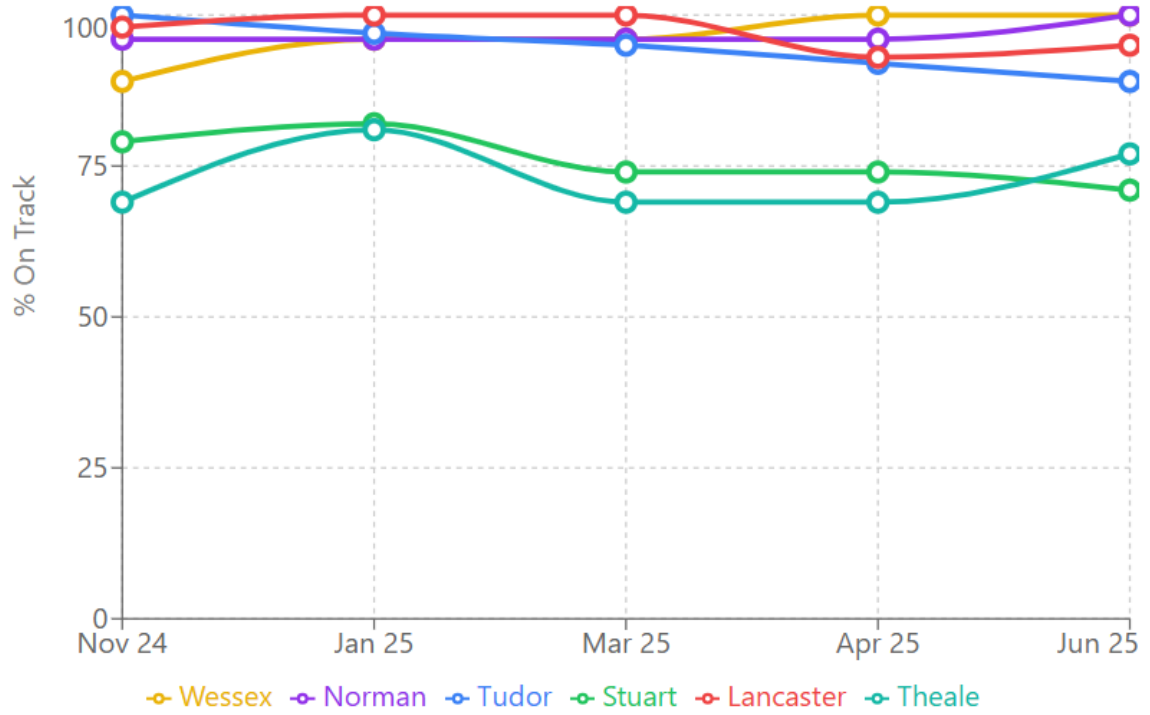
Stuart

71%

27/38 pupils

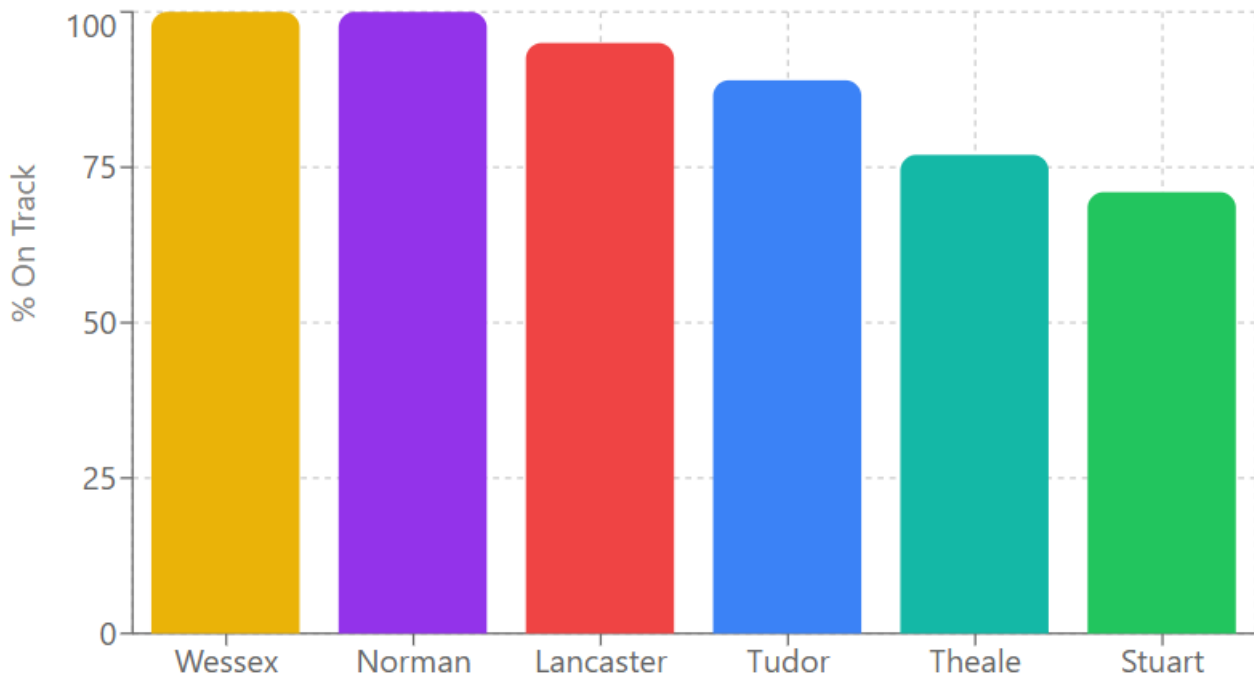
This graph shows the team progress over the course of the year.

Team Progress Over Time



This graph shows the current performance of students in June 2025 and the % of students on track.

Current Performance (June 2025)



This provides a more detailed insight into how progress has changed over the course of the year.

This data provides us with the key insights to take forward into the next academic year.

Detailed Breakdown

Team	Pupils	Nov 24	Jan 25	Mar 25	Apr 25	Jun 25	Change
■ Wessex	28	89%	96%	96%	100%	100%	+11%
■ Norman	27	96%	96%	96%	96%	100%	+4%
■ Lancaster	41	98%	100%	100%	93%	95%	-3%
■ Tudor	38	100%	97%	95%	92%	89%	-11%
■ Theale	26	69%	81%	69%	69%	77%	+8%
■ Stuart	38	79%	82%	74%	74%	71%	-8%

Key Insights that the data tells us

- Wessex and Norman reached 100% in June 2025
- Stuart and Theale need targeted support (below 80%)
- Tudor shows declining trend - requires attention
- Lancaster maintains strong performance (95%)

Key insights and action points for The Castle School

Issue Identified	Action
<p>Inconsistencies of interpretation of progress</p>	<p>To promote consistency, clarity, and strategic alignment across all teams, a formal agenda is currently being developed for pupil progress meetings. This structured framework will serve as a guide to ensure that discussions are focused, evidence-informed, and conducive to effective decision-making.</p> <p>The agenda will support staff in evaluating pupil progress holistically, incorporating both quantitative data and qualitative insights. It will also help ensure that all relevant documentation—including pupil progress forms, pastoral and behaviour notes, and therapeutic plans—is systematically referenced during meetings. By embedding this approach, we aim to strengthen cross-team collaboration, enhance accountability, and ensure that every pupil's development is reviewed in a comprehensive and meaningful way.</p> <p>This initiative reflects our commitment to continuous improvement and to maintaining high standards of educational provision across the school.</p>
<p>Rewording of the progress question to promote a more accurate reflection</p>	<p>As part of our ongoing commitment to improving the quality and impact of pupil progress meetings, we are undertaking a review of the pupil progress spreadsheet. The aim is to refine its structure and functionality to better support staff in evaluating individual pupil outcomes and identifying appropriate next steps.</p> <p>This review will focus on enhancing clarity, streamlining data presentation, and ensuring that</p>

key indicators of progress are easily accessible. By doing so, we intend to help staff engage more effectively with the data, enabling them to make informed, timely decisions that directly benefit pupil learning and development.

The revised spreadsheet will serve as a practical tool for guiding discussion, highlighting areas of concern or celebration, and prompting targeted interventions. It will also support consistency across teams, ensuring that all staff are working from a shared understanding of pupil progress and priorities.

This initiative aligns with our broader goal of embedding a data-informed, reflective culture across the school—one that places each learner's unique journey at the heart of our planning and practice.

Data represents only one dimension; significant support levels not captured in quantitative measures alone

To strengthen the quality and depth of decision-making during pupil progress meetings, it is essential that staff consistently reference a full range of holistic records alongside quantitative data. This includes pupil progress forms, pastoral and behaviour notes, and therapeutic plans. These documents provide critical context that supports a more comprehensive understanding of each pupil's development, wellbeing, and engagement.

By integrating these records into the review process, teams are better equipped to interpret progress data meaningfully, identify emerging needs, and plan targeted interventions. This approach ensures that decisions are not made in isolation but are informed by the broader picture of each learner's experience—academic, emotional, behavioural, and therapeutic.

Embedding this practice into the meeting agenda will promote consistency across teams, encourage multi-disciplinary collaboration, and reinforce our commitment to personalised, pupil-centred education.

Example of report from Earwig

The Castle School



TRACKING REPORT

YEAR 2024 / 2025

CASTLE SCHOOL: CORE

DATE: 29/09/2025
PRACTICE CLASS

Benjamin Zylla

Progress

Subject	Aut 1	Aut 2	Spr 1	Spr 2	Sum 1	Sum 2
Reading	193 30%	193 30%	193 30%	197 30%	197 30%	197 30%
Writing	10 1%	10 1%	10 1%	10 1%	13 2%	13 2%
MATHEMATICS	41 3%	41 3%	41 3%	41 3%	41 3%	45 3%
Numbers	39 4%	39 4%	39 4%	39 4%	39 4%	43 5%
Shape, Space and Measure	2 0%	2 0%	2 0%	2 0%	2 0%	2 0%
COMMUNICATION AND LANGUAGE	349 29%	349 29%	349 29%	349 29%	349 29%	349 29%
Speaking (including talking for play)						
Understanding, Listening and Attention	349 52%	349 52%	349 52%	349 52%	349 52%	349 52%
HEALTH AND WELLBEING	26 1%	26 1%	26 1%	26 1%	26 1%	26 1%
Making Relationships and Responding to Others	3 1%	3 1%	3 1%	3 1%	3 1%	3 1%
Self-confidence, Self-awareness and Independence	10 3%	10 3%	10 3%	10 3%	10 3%	10 3%
Managing Feelings and Behaviour	7 2%	7 2%	7 2%	7 2%	7 2%	7 2%
Health and Self care	6 1%	6 1%	6 1%	6 1%	6 1%	6 1%
Physical Skills						

Outcomes for Children and Other Learners - Areas for development 2025-2026:

- Address inconsistencies of interpretation of progress
- Ensure rewording of the progress question to promote a more accurate reflection
- Data represents only one dimension; significant support levels not captured in quantitative measures alone
- Establishing a clear system where outcomes of EHCP objectives are used to measure progress
- To review, refine and embed assessment and tracking practices within Earwig to ensure they generate meaningful data that informs individual learning plans, enhances Pupil Progress Reviews, and aligns with Key Stage 4 curriculum pathways and expected outcomes.

Teaching is monitored 3 times annually through Practice Enhancement sessions and any issues addressed through methods such as action plans, coaching and team teaching. The school is confident that teaching is outstanding because observations are moderated by the Senior Leadership Team. OFSTED further support this in their most recent inspection in April 2024

“The school has high ambitions for pupils. It enables pupils to achieve strongly from their starting points.”

“Pupils access a broad curriculum. This results in them gaining the relevant qualifications to pursue their aspirations. The curriculum is enriched through a myriad of well-chosen activities.”

A Quality of Teaching summary gives a holistic view of the impact of teaching and learning and includes book looks, practice enhancements and progress data, along with information gathered from learning snapshots.

Parents are invited in to school 3 times per year to attend a SAP Parents evening. At these meetings they will review and set new targets with the teaching staff, based on EHCP objectives. Parents can also request a telephone conversation if they are unable to attend in person.

The Castle Curriculum

At The Castle School, we are committed to delivering a dynamic and inclusive curriculum that supports the diverse learning needs of all our students. As outlined in the accompanying Pupil Progress Report, we have developed a comprehensive range of educational pathways designed to foster academic growth, personal development, and lifelong learning.

Our curriculum is thoughtfully structured and fully integrated across all key stages, ensuring consistency and continuity in teaching and learning. It reflects our core values and educational philosophy, promoting high standards, creativity, and resilience. Each pathway is tailored to provide appropriate challenge and support, enabling every student to achieve their full potential.

We continuously monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of our curriculum through rigorous assessment and feedback mechanisms. This allows us to remain responsive to emerging needs and to make timely adjustments where necessary. Whether through differentiated instruction, targeted interventions, or enrichment opportunities, we strive to ensure that every learner is engaged, inspired, and well-prepared for future success.

The Castle School remains dedicated to evolving our curriculum in line with best practices and educational research, maintaining a learning environment that is both aspirational and nurturing. The details on the curriculum can be found on the school website at

<https://www.thecastleschoolnewbury.org.uk/page/?title=The+Castle+Curriculum&pid=27>

Quality of Education/Early Years - Areas for development 2025-2026:

Castle @ Newbury

- To create documentation for all areas of the curriculum and ensure that they are easily accessible, clear and concise. Focus for this year will be ongoing topic cycle three and four and Post 16 documentation.
- To embed the Life Skills Passport document across all pathways.
- To develop the core curriculum offer that sits across all pathways.
- To launch subject specialist planning document as part of the core curriculum package.
- To monitor the termly overviews to look at curriculum spread and use of documents and planning.

Castle @ Theale

- To design and implement a tailored Key Stage 4 curriculum that provides clear academic and vocational progression pathways aligned with individual learner needs, incorporating Functional Skills English and Maths up to Level 1, Level 1 BTEC Applied Science, and a diverse range of Level 1 BTEC option subjects.
- Embedding Skills Builder Framework into learning for all students.

Personal Development, Behaviour and Welfare – judged to be **Outstanding**

Safeguarding and Wellbeing at The Castle School

At The Castle School, safeguarding is not just a statutory obligation—it is the cornerstone of our ethos and practice. We are unwavering in our commitment to ensuring the safety, wellbeing, and holistic development of every student in our care. Safeguarding remains our highest priority and is embedded throughout all aspects of school life.

Our safeguarding framework is led by Caroline Whitlock, our Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL), supported by a robust team of six Deputy DSLs, including the Headteacher. This structure ensures that safeguarding responsibilities are distributed effectively and that there is always a trained professional available to respond to concerns. The Pastoral Team works in close collaboration with the DSL and the Senior Leadership Team to ensure that support is targeted, timely, and impactful.

We maintain strong partnerships with the local authority's Children's Services, particularly in the areas of early intervention and proactive support. These relationships enable us to respond swiftly to emerging needs and to provide coordinated care for our students and their families.

Continuous reflection and the pursuit of best practice are central to our safeguarding culture. Caroline Whitlock plays a key role in shaping regional safeguarding strategy through her membership in the Berkshire West Safeguarding Partnership. She also Co-Chairs the Independent and Special School Safeguarding Group, which brings together representatives from all school

sectors, the Education Welfare Service, Children's Services, and other strategic partners to share insights, review concerns, and promote excellence in safeguarding.

All staff are trained to use the MyConcern online platform to report any safeguarding issues. These reports are promptly reviewed and actioned by the DSL or a Deputy DSL. The most frequently reported concerns relate to behaviour, emotional wellbeing, attendance, and general welfare. It is important to note that many cases span multiple categories—for example, a concern about attendance may also be linked to high levels of anxiety.

Caroline Whitlock and James Whybra serve as Designated Teachers for Children in Care. They work closely with class teachers and external agencies to contribute meaningfully to social care plans, ensuring that the educational and emotional needs of these students are fully supported.

To maintain a high standard of safeguarding knowledge across the school, Universal Safeguarding Training is delivered throughout the academic year. Six sessions are scheduled across the terms, ensuring that all staff—including those who join mid-year—receive mandatory training without delay. As part of our induction process, the HR Officer ensures that all new staff are directed to a comprehensive Safeguarding Induction.

Online safety is a prominent feature of our safeguarding strategy. Students receive tailored education on digital safety through PSHE lessons and targeted interventions. Whole-school initiatives, such as external drama workshops and participation in Online Safety Awards, further reinforce awareness and responsible online behaviour.

All teaching staff and Teaching Assistants complete mandatory online training modules covering Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), and Domestic Violence (DV). In addition, all new staff and governors undertake Prevent training to ensure they are equipped to identify and respond to signs of radicalisation.

Pupil Voice and School Culture

Student voice is integral to our school community. We operate a rotating representative group that ensures all pupils have the opportunity to contribute to decision-making processes. The School Council plays a vital role in evaluating and shaping school life. Recent initiatives include the development of our Anti-Bullying Charter, where students collaborated to create key messages and produced a video to share their vision with the wider school community.

Behaviour across the school site is exemplary. Our students consistently demonstrate politeness, friendliness, and kindness. They are welcoming to visitors and new peers, and they engage positively with staff and one another. This culture of respect and inclusion is a testament to the strength of our Behaviour Policy.

Our Behaviour Policy is rooted in a person-centred approach that promotes self-awareness, self-esteem, and mutual respect. It provides a clear framework for fostering meaningful learning experiences in a supportive and nurturing environment. We recognise that behaviour is a form of communication and respond with empathy and tailored support to meet individual needs.

The policy is underpinned by therapeutic principles that prioritise relational development. We understand that the way adults interact with students—through communication, response, and engagement—shapes their experiences and learning outcomes. Our inclusive approach ensures that all students feel valued, understood, and empowered.

Creative Arts and Enrichment

The Creative Arts curriculum at The Castle School is a vibrant and essential component of our educational offering. We are proud to have specialist teachers in music, art, drama, and design

and technology. These subjects are delivered through whole-class instruction, small group work, and one-to-one sessions, depending on the needs of the students.

Creative Arts play a significant role in supporting academic achievement, therapeutic development, and personal growth. Our Creative Arts Team actively fosters connections with local and national community groups, enriching the cultural experiences of our students. The School Choir is a popular and well-attended initiative, and many students have participated in regional and national competitions, with several achieving notable success.

Our commitment to the arts is recognised through the Artsmark Award. Having achieved Gold Standard, we are now ambitiously working towards Platinum, reflecting our dedication to excellence and innovation in arts education.

Pastoral Support

At The Castle School, our pastoral team is deeply committed to enhancing the wellbeing of our students and strengthening the support available to their families. Our current strategic focus is to further improve how we meet the evolving needs of children, parents, and carers through a compassionate, proactive, and relationship-driven approach.

We recognise that meaningful engagement begins with trust and accessibility. To foster this, our team initiates regular contact with families through informal text messages, personal phone calls, and warm invitations to visit the school for a cup of tea and conversation. These touchpoints are designed to build rapport, reduce barriers, and create a welcoming environment where families feel heard, valued, and supported.

Drawing on our extensive expertise in communication, behaviour, sensory integration, social care, and education, we work collaboratively with families to develop tailored strategies and practical support plans that can be implemented at home. Our message is clear and consistent: families are not alone—we are here to walk alongside them.

Impact Over the Past Six Months:

The Pastoral and Behaviour Team have made significant strides in outreach and support, with measurable outcomes that reflect our commitment to inclusive care:

- **Parents/carers engaged:** 46 individuals supported through at least one meaningful interaction
- **Face-to-face visits:** 24 home or school-based meetings conducted to strengthen relationships and assess needs
- **Pastoral event attendees:** 12 parents/carers participated in targeted support events
- **Student initiatives:** 2 bespoke in-school programmes launched—Boost and Play Dates
- **Student participation:** 36 students engaged in additional pastoral support and enrichment activities

These figures highlight the breadth of our engagement and the growing impact of our pastoral provision.

Building Capacity and Embedding Best Practice

We are proud to now have five staff members trained as PROACT SCIP-r (Proactive Behaviour Support) Instructors across our three school sites. This specialised training enables us to embed proactive behaviour strategies more deeply into our daily practice, ensuring consistency and

effectiveness. Looking ahead, we aim to extend this approach to families by offering introductory training sessions for parents and carers, empowering them with tools to support their children at home.

Looking Forward: New Initiatives for 2025–2026

As part of our ongoing development, we are excited to launch several new initiatives this academic year:

- **Sleep Workshops:** Designed to support families in understanding and improving sleep hygiene and routines
- **Pastoral Events:** A series of themed gatherings for current parents and carers to share experiences and access resources
- **Coffee Afternoons:** Informal meet-and-greet sessions for new parents and carers to build community and connection
- **Pastoral Mentors Programme:** A new initiative that will train and empower additional staff members to deliver immediate, targeted pastoral support to students in need

These developments reflect our commitment to continuous improvement and our belief that strong pastoral care is foundational to student success and family wellbeing.

Effectiveness of Leadership and Management – judged to be *Outstanding*

Leadership and Strategic Development at The Castle School

The Castle School benefits from a broad and highly skilled leadership team whose collective expertise drives continuous improvement and innovation across all aspects of school life. Leadership is strategically distributed, enabling individuals to lead on key areas of development while fostering a culture of collaboration, accountability, and high expectations.

Extended Leadership Structure

The extended leadership team comprises a diverse group of professionals, each bringing specialist knowledge and experience to their roles:

- **Headteacher**
- **2 Heads of School**
- **3 Assistant Headteachers**
- **School Business Manager (SBM)**
- **Behaviour and Pastoral Lead**
- **Lead Teacher**
- **6 Team Leaders**
- **Maths Lead**
- **English Lead**
- **PSHE Lead**

This structure ensures that leadership is embedded at every level, with clear lines of responsibility and communication. The team works cohesively to identify areas of strength and development, aligning these with the School Development Plan (SDP) to ensure strategic priorities are met.

Monitoring and Evaluation

A robust and transparent monitoring schedule underpins the school's commitment to excellence. This includes:

- Practice enhancement reviews
- Learning walks
- Termly overview evaluations
- Staff appraisals
- Moderation of pupil work
- Pupil progress meetings

These mechanisms provide valuable insights into teaching and learning, enabling leaders to respond swiftly and effectively to emerging needs.

The leadership team employs the FADE model (Focus, Analysis, Do, Evaluate) to guide strategic planning and decision-making. This structured approach ensures that initiatives are evidence-based, purposeful, and continuously reviewed for impact.

Staff Development and Induction

The school maintains very high expectations of all staff and invests significantly in their professional development. A comprehensive induction package is provided for all new staff, covering:

- Safeguarding (including PREVENT)
- PROACT SCiPr-UK
- Makaton
- Manual Handling
- Roles and Responsibilities

New teaching staff also attend a pre-induction day prior to their start date, which includes sessions on assessment, curriculum planning, risk assessment (EVOLVES), and orientation across all school sites.

Support staff benefit from a newly established training system that ensures consistent development across key areas of practice. All teachers and Teaching Assistants participate in weekly training sessions—two dedicated hour-long slots—which are evaluated. This feedback informs ongoing adjustments to the training programme, ensuring relevance and responsiveness to staff needs.

In addition to internal training, the school invests over £30,000 annually in external professional development opportunities, reflecting its commitment to staff growth and excellence.

Curriculum Innovation and Student Achievement

The Castle School maintains a dynamic and responsive curriculum that is continually adapted to meet the diverse needs of its students. The curriculum is underpinned by effective assessment systems that enable staff to set ambitious targets and monitor progress rigorously.

The **World of Work** curriculum is a flagship initiative embedded within Key Stages 4 and 5. Led by a dedicated team, this programme has attracted attention from schools across the region and is recognised as a model of best practice by organisations such as BASE. It equips students with essential skills, experiences, and aspirations for life beyond school.

Pupil Premium funding is utilised with precision to ensure maximum impact on student achievement. Strategic deployment of resources is regularly reviewed to ensure equity and effectiveness.

Empowered Leadership and Safeguarding

Leadership at The Castle School is both inclusive and empowering. Staff at all levels are encouraged to take initiative, make informed decisions, and contribute to the school's strategic direction. This culture of distributed leadership fosters ownership, innovation, and resilience.

Safeguarding remains a cornerstone of the school's practice. Rigorous systems are in place to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all students, with clear protocols, training, and oversight embedded throughout the organisation.

Communication and Stakeholder Engagement

The school website serves as a vital communication portal, providing accessible and up-to-date information for parents, carers, and stakeholders. The Headteacher ensures that statutory requirements are met and that the site reflects the vibrant life of the school. The news blog is updated weekly, showcasing positive stories, achievements, and events through engaging content and imagery.

Governance and Strategic Oversight at The Castle School

The governing board at The Castle School plays a pivotal role in shaping the strategic direction of the school and ensuring that high standards are consistently maintained. Governors are deeply engaged with the life of the school and possess a thorough understanding of its strengths, priorities, and areas for development. Their involvement is both supportive and challenging, contributing significantly to the school's continued growth and success.

Strategic Engagement and Communication

Governors receive information through a variety of structured and purposeful channels, ensuring they remain well-informed and actively involved in decision-making processes. These include:

- **Regular meetings between the Headteacher and Chair of Governors**
- **Annual Strategic Planning Session** to develop and review the School Transformation Plan
- **Governor visits to the school** to observe practice and engage with staff and students
- **Subcommittee meetings** focused on key areas such as curriculum, staffing, and finance
- **Pay Panel meetings** to oversee staff remuneration and progression
- **Full Governing Board meetings** held regularly to review strategic objectives
- **Budget setting meetings** to ensure financial sustainability and resource allocation

This comprehensive engagement model enables governors to maintain a clear and current understanding of school operations and priorities.

Training and Development

Governors are committed to their own professional development and regularly participate in training to enhance their effectiveness. This includes:

- **Universal Safeguarding Training**
- **Prevent Training**
- **Bespoke sessions** tailored to the school's context, including training on progress and achievement

Governors also attend staff training sessions where appropriate, fostering a shared understanding of school initiatives and reinforcing their connection to the wider school community.

Performance Management and Accountability

Governors hold high expectations for the Leadership Team and all staff, promoting a culture of excellence and continuous improvement. They are actively involved in the **Headteacher's Performance Management Review**, which is supported by an external School Improvement Advisor. This process includes:

- **Clear alignment with the School Development Plan (SDP)**
- **Three formal review meetings per year** to monitor progress against agreed objectives
- **Oversight of staff performance targets** to ensure accountability and impact

This rigorous approach ensures that leadership remains focused, strategic, and responsive to the needs of the school.

Financial Stewardship

The governing board demonstrates a robust and responsible approach to financial management. Through the **Finance Committee**, key governors meet termly with the School Business Manager and Finance Officer to:

- **Reconcile school accounts**
- **Review budget allocations**
- **Ensure effective use of resources**

This oversight has resulted in strong financial health, enabling the school to grow sustainably and ensure that all classes are appropriately staffed and resourced.

Monitoring of Pupil Premium

Governors take an active role in monitoring the use and impact of Pupil Premium funding. This is achieved through:

- **Curriculum and Staffing Committee reviews**
- **Headteacher Performance Review Panel discussions**
- **Analysis and challenge of leadership reports**

This ensures that funding is deployed strategically to support disadvantaged students and maximise educational outcomes.

Leadership and Management - Areas for development 2025-2026:

- Build and deliver the Castle 'Foundations' suite of training staff
- *PACEful Pedagogy* - Deepen and strengthen culture of PACEFUL Practice throughout Castle @ Theale. Students are supported to feel a deep sense of safety and connection in all interactions in order that they connect with their emotional brains to be ready for connection with thinking brains.
- *Culture of Restorative Practice* - Supporting for development of positive and pro-social behavior. In response to behaviours that challenge or conflicts with others, all staff are confidently using Restorative Practice Approach. Students are supported to reflect in safe, nurturing and consistent ways in order to develop their own intrinsic values to be able to make positive choices and actions now and in the future and to repair harm caused by behaviours.
- As a school specialising in Social, Emotional, and Mental Health (SEMH) needs, we recognise the importance of providing structured, reflective space supervision to enable teams to process experiences constructively and maintain emotional balance.

Long term Areas for Development 2025-2028

Outreach Development

- To develop an outreach programme for mainstream Primary and Secondary Schools
- To reduce pressures for places at The Castle School and other special schools
- To empower staff in mainstream to support children with learning difficulties

Recruitment

- To create plan so that recruitment is carried out in a timely manner each academic year to ensure adequate staffing in place at the start of each year.
- To utilise a variety of methods including:
 - TES Adverts
 - Other advertising platforms
 - School website
 - Open days staffing events
 - Video presentations
 - School comms and social media
 - Local Authority social media
 - Local Authority Residents Bulletin
 - Local Paper articles

Funding and Budget Pressures

- To ensure that The Castle School has sustainable finances