

Information for Applicants

March 2021

Casterton College Rutland is an 11-16 academy just outside the beautiful historic town of Stamford. Our ethos is 'ability is not fixed' and we are incredibly proud to be a high performing comprehensive school but most important thing for potential applicants to know about Casterton is that we put our staff first, which means doing things differently to most schools. Putting staff first means we get to recruit the best teachers and look after them. Above all we trust them and treat them as professionals. That is the secret of our success.

Trust means no lesson observations, except for newly qualified teachers, and no learning walks, 'Mocksted's', work scrutiny's or individual pupil progress targets. It also means proper consultation and trusting to staff expertise. Good people set their own high standards because they want to do a good job. The job of senior leaders is to support them.

Staff well-being is at the heart of everything we do at Casterton, but we don't treat it as just another initiative or simply a document to please Ofsted and it certainly doesn't mean working you into the ground, then giving you a croissant, or even worse, empty praise! It means a carefully considering workload and only asking people to do what *really* matters. It also means backing them up and not covering to the unreasonable demands and complaints from others and definitely not doing things just for the sake of appearances.

At Casterton we understand that the greatest barrier to good teaching is consistent low level disruption, so we have stamped it out with a radical approach to behaviour we call *Ready to Learn*. There are three simple classroom rules, respect the teacher, respect and do not disrupt each other and focus on your own work. If a student breaks one of these rules they have one formal warning and if that doesn't work they are sent to isolation until 4.30 pm, an hour after school, whereupon they are picked up by their parents. It works because students hate being in isolation and parents hate being inconvenienced. Meanwhile, the teacher has a restorative conversation with the student before they return to the classroom to ensure they fully understand why they were sent out in the first place and what will be expected of them when they return which helps reduce resentment and re-set the relationship.

Ready to Learn is led by a superb team of specialist education support staff; student services. Student Services are open to students all day and they oversee all pastoral and behaviour management in the school. They are not teachers; they are specialists in the fields of behaviour management, attendance, pastoral care and mental health support. This is why there are no year heads at Casterton, only form tutors. Student Services are the experts and we trust them. The result is we have virtually no low level classroom disruption at Casterton and if we ever do it is not tolerated for long. Behaviour management is the job of student services and senior team not teachers. All teachers have to do is apply the system consistently without exception or favour.

At Casterton we are a professional learning community, basing our decisions on the best educational research available. We look closely at the internal data but in an intelligent way and we don't rush

Principal: C Smith, MA

Vice Principal: N J Rawes, MA

Director of Finance: T Green

Director of Student Wellbeing: K Quigley

Chair of Governors: S Ball

into new initiatives without careful thought or proper consultation. Our curriculum statement is also based on the very best academic research (see attached) and updated regularly. It provides a broad framework of ideas and their underlying rationale but it doesn't force teachers to teach in a certain way. Each department interprets the statement to suit their own circumstances. We strongly recommend that you familiarise yourself with this statement before applying.

At Casterton we hate wasting people's time or having meetings for meeting sake but we do place a high priority on providing staff with the best quality professional development, so every Friday we finish school an hour early and have RAT (Raising Achievement Time), which consists of a 15-minute briefing on a key topic and a further hour of high quality training and discussion, either in departments or with the staff as a whole. We also place a high importance on supporting new staff and particularly newly qualified staff because it takes time to adjust to a new school and properly understand its culture and systems. Fortunately, we are blessed with some of the best teachers in the business, people with great experience and a long track record of success and these are the people who support you on a day to day basis. If you follow their lead you are sure to do well.

Paradoxically but perhaps because our accountability systems are looser than most other schools, our outcomes are much better. Our last official progress 8 in 2019 was 0.68 (well above average) and our three-year average is 0.66, easily the highest in Stamford and Rutland and amongst the best in the East Midlands. Attendance is well above average and exclusions are well below. Tellingly, staff turnover is also very low.

All this may sound too good to be true so you may be wondering what is the catch. Well, there isn't one. All we ask of staff is that they are very good at what they do and understand the culture they are buying into. We take collective pride in being excellent and our parents seem to agree, which is why we are so heavily oversubscribed but we want staff to enjoy working with us and understand how we do things. It works for us and we hope it works for you.

Don't expect the latest modern facilities at Casterton. We were built in 1939 and some parts of the building now definitely show their age. From the outside, it looks like a rather drab post war collection of typical school buildings, though you'll immediately notice we are in a beautiful rural location overlooking open fields and with plenty of fresh air. Claustrophobic it certainly isn't and during the pandemic, ventilation hasn't been a problem. Having said that, we take enormous pride in dressing our building smartly with art work and superb displays. Every classroom is a cornucopia of colour, organised, clean and child friendly. Staff dress smartly and understand their professional appearance is important. Let's just say, our building has an abundance of warmth and character.

Unfortunately, tours of the school are not possible at the moment, though you might take a look at a short virtual tour designed for year 6 parents on our website, in the admissions section. I appreciate this is far from ideal as you'd want to see our classes in action, meet our staff and get a proper feel for our school but until we can relax our Covid restrictions that can't happen, unfortunately. You may be interested to know that we have operated very strict Covid restrictions throughout the pandemic including the compulsory wearing of facemasks by students in class, because we want our staff to feel extremely safe when they come to work. It's another example of how we put staff first.

Finally, I could go on about all our achievements, for example how we were on the final shortlist of 6 for Secondary School of the Year in 2019 or how we got best Maths Department in England in 2017 (note our English, Science and History Departments are pushing them all the way), but you can find that out for yourself. Our last Ofsted was in December 2016, not long after I had just become Principal, and we achieved good, but even then I thought that was very harsh (I would say that of

course) and since then results have soared and we've improved in so many other ways. We aim for world class and I'm not kidding, though there's plenty more to do to get there.

Each department has written their own guide and I'll leave you to read that but if you have any more questions for me don't hesitate to ask, just email me and I'll do my best to answer as honestly as I can. Similarly, if you have any questions for the Head of Department email them too.

Best Wishes

Carl Smith

Principal

cs@castertoncollege.com