

The Castle Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113340
Local Authority	Devon
Inspection number	357323
Inspection dates	10–11 February 2011
Reporting inspector	Alex Baxter

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	318
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Tim James
Headteacher	Steve Jessop
Date of previous school inspection	10 June 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 28 lessons and observed 12 teachers. They observed the school's work, and attended a whole-school assembly and a singing assembly. Inspectors evaluated break times, before- and after-school activities, and held meetings with representatives of the governing body, staff, pupils, and parents and carers. They looked at plans and policies, records of assessments and the tracking of pupils' progress. The provision and planning for pupils who are potentially vulnerable or have special educational needs and/or disabilities were evaluated across the school and within the specialist Communication and Interaction Resource Base for pupils with communication and interaction difficulties. In addition, questionnaires completed by 88 parents and carers and 20 staff were analysed.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The consistency of teaching and learning across the school, especially in Years 3 and 4.
- The impact of the school's efforts to improve attainment and progress, especially across Years 3 to 6 and in mathematics.
- How well the relatively new headteacher and other leaders seek to bring about and sustain continuous improvements in provision and pupils' achievements.

Information about the school

This is an above average-sized primary school. The percentage of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. The large majority of pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is high and includes a higher than average proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs. The school also has a Communication and Interaction Resource Base currently for four pupils with communication and interaction difficulties. The proportion of pupils joining the school other than at the usual times is above average. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are taught as an integrated group across two Reception classrooms. A new headteacher commenced his duties in September 2010. A privately run pre-school operates on the school site and shares some of the school's facilities; it was not within the remit of this inspection.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

The Castle Primary is a satisfactory school. It is emerging steadily from an unsettled period during which instability in staffing, including at a senior level, constrained efforts to tackle a declining trend in pupils' achievement. By seeking a more team-centered approach to leadership within both senior and middle management, the relatively new headteacher has, with determination, established an agreed focus on driving up attainment. This can be seen in the improved and now broadly average levels of attainment in English and mathematics seen across the school and at the end of Year 6. These outcomes represent satisfactory pupils' achievement, including by those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those arriving from other schools.

The Castle Primary is an inclusive school where new pupils are warmly welcomed and those whose vulnerabilities may place them at risk are nurtured diligently. Pupils contribute well to a wide range of charitable activities, for example the recent collection to help in the prevention of polio, and they undertake willingly responsibilities such as friendship leaders. School clubs are well attended and enhance pupils' good behaviour and healthy living.

The headteacher and senior colleagues have developed a coherent method of tracking pupils' achievements and this has provided a more accurate picture of how well the school promotes pupils' progress. This has sharpened the views of school leaders and the governing body about where improvements need to be made, which underpin their sound self-evaluation.

New initiatives, such as changed class structures and teaching groups in Years 3 and 4 and better use of assessment to inform teachers' planning across the school, are increasing the frequency of good teaching and bridging gaps in pupils' basic literacy and numeracy skills. Pupils' at least average attainment and quickening progress illustrate the school's satisfactory capacity for sustained improvement.

Teaching, learning and the curriculum are satisfactory but improving, and as teachers identify next steps in pupils' learning with more precision, so gaps in prior learning are being filled. Inconsistencies remain, however, in teachers' marking and the way pupils are taught to evaluate their own and each other's work. This means that some pupils of average ability in Years 3 to 6 are not developing the level of basic skills in literacy and numeracy of which they are capable.

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in the Communication and Interaction Resource Base benefit from consistently good teaching and, because their needs are met consistently well, make good progress. Pupils increasingly do well in Years 1 and 2; however, because of inconsistent practice, variable progress continues through the school.

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Music is strong throughout the school. Pupils enjoy singing and this is a notable feature, with the choir being respected for its contributions in the local community.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- By January 2012, raise pupils' attainment, especially in mathematics and particularly for pupils of average ability, by:
 - involving pupils more consistently in self-evaluation so that they develop greater proficiency in using and applying basic number facts to solve problems
 - making sure that learning activities are always matched well to pupils' needs and abilities.
- By the end of the current academic year, ensure that the large majority of teaching in Years 3 to 6 is consistently good or better by:
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to engage in practical and independent learning
 - ensuring that teachers' written guidance through marking makes closer reference to the pupils' targets and gives them a clear picture of what they have to do to improve.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Attainment is improving across the school. In particular, progress and enjoyment in learning in most lessons observed in Reception, in the Communication and Interaction Resource Base and in Years 1 and 2 are good. This is often because of the increased emphasis on pupils enjoying learning first-hand by using practical equipment. For example, this was seen in a successful English lesson in Year 2, where pupils fruitfully shared ideas with their 'talk partners' and extended their writing skills well by first setting their ideas out as word maps. Progress is satisfactory and improving for most other pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those arriving from other schools at different times. Lesson observations and a scrutiny of pupils' written work show that previous underachievement in Years 3 to 6 is now being steadily reduced because learning activities are more often relevant to pupils' abilities and readiness to learn. Good learning, for example, was seen in a mathematics lesson in Year 5 when more-able pupils were enthused and challenged by the teacher's expectation that they should explain how they translated and moved shapes. However, progress is variable across Years 3 to 4. This means that, although improving, too many pupils, particularly some of average ability, still have underdeveloped basic literacy and numeracy skills. As a result, they are not always sure what they have to do to improve and, for example, have difficulty solving problems in mathematics.

Pupils' behaviour is good in this inclusive school, where pupils do their best to get along together and where pupils new to the school are warmly welcomed. Pupils are aware of what are safe and unsafe situations and feel safe as they move around the school. The pupils' enjoyment is evident in their good contributions to the school and local community, notably as members of the choir. Pupils also take on a wide range of responsibilities such as becoming play leaders on the playground, where they help each other to resolve disagreements. Pupils demonstrate a clear sense of fairness, appreciate music and local

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festivals and show genuine empathy towards the needs of others, for example when writing and talking about the Chilean mining disaster. These features show their good spiritual, moral and social understanding and their improving, but less developed, cultural awareness. Pupils show good attitudes to school and have a good awareness of healthy living, as seen in their active participation in sports at school and in the local community. The pupils' good social skills and their satisfactory academic achievement contribute to their sound preparation for future economic well-being.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	3
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

More effective tracking of pupils' progress is helping teachers and their assistants to tackle slow learning at an earlier stage and to reinforce basic skills. Consequently, the quality of teaching and learning is improving. Teaching is good in the Communication and Interaction Resource Base and in Reception classes, where children benefit from close adult support. In most lessons, teachers and their assistants promote warm relationships, manage pupils' behaviour well and use interactive whiteboards and questioning effectively to prompt pupils to think about their learning. In the most effective lessons observed, teachers actively encouraged pupils to explain their ideas, as, for example, in a Year 5 English lesson where pupils were encouraged to pose their own questions to a mythical character. Other emerging strengths, as seen in an English lesson in Year 1, included the teacher using hand gestures and body movements to help pupils construct accurate

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sentences. Learning was seen at its very best in an excellent mathematics lesson in Year 5, precisely because the pupils' interest was lifted by the teacher's development of new learning from their own ideas and evaluations. However, such involvement of pupils in self-evaluation is at an early stage of development across the school. Although improving, there is also inconsistency in the way teachers and their assistants set targets to challenge pupils and use marking to raise pupils' expectations and to help them to improve. At times, this constrains progress, and such inconsistency in learning means that some pupils still have difficulty in expressing their ideas in writing and in devising their own ways to solve mathematical problems.

The governing body and senior staff complete the necessary regular safeguarding checks and policy reviews, but recognise that recording procedures are not always robust enough. Nevertheless, child protection procedures are robust and well known to all staff. Adults are diligent in ensuring that pupils are given good guidance on how to relate to other people and how to stay safe. The protection and support given to pupils most likely to be at risk because of their vulnerability, including in the Communication and Interaction Resource Base, are consistently strong.

Extra-curricular activities in the form of sports clubs and residential visits are positive features which contribute well to the pupils' adoption of healthy lifestyles and enjoyment of school. Pupils enjoy investigating in science and show well-developed skills. However, there is too much variation in the way pupils' learning is developed through practical activity and opportunities are not always taken to further develop the pupils' literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills across other subjects. The new headteacher has plans to rectify this by enhancing the school's underdeveloped grounds to support more practical learning.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	3

How effective are leadership and management?

Determined team leadership by the new headteacher has strengthened the procedures for checking the effectiveness of the school and has promoted a shared vision and drive for improvement. Checks now include better monitoring of teaching and pupils' progress, which is enabling teachers to challenge and stimulate pupils more effectively. Senior managers and members of the governing body are increasingly involved in monitoring and, as they become more informed, enabling them to contribute satisfactorily to school improvement. Sound governance promotes the school's inclusive ethos, ensures good levels of staffing and secures equal opportunity and freedom from discrimination for all pupils. These are seen, for example, in the pupils' equal and confident enjoyment of

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school and by the school's determined efforts to tackle prior underachievement. However, as with other initiatives, strengthened management structures have not been in place long enough to secure good provision and outcomes across the school.

Pupils are safe in school because procedures for safeguarding pupils' welfare are satisfactory. Partnerships with parents and other agencies are satisfactory. While such partners make effective contributions in support of pupils with complex special educational needs and/or difficulties and for children in Reception and Communication and Interaction Resource Base classes, such links are not developed as fully in support of other pupils. The school promotes community cohesion satisfactorily. School, local and international dimensions of community are developed well through assemblies and fundraising. The school welcomes visitors from minority ethnic members of the wider community, but accepts that the pupils' awareness of the cultural diversity of the United Kingdom is not fully developed.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

Consistently good collaborative teaching and sharply focused leadership are key strengths underpinning the children's successful learning in both Reception classes. In response to good arrangements for children's welfare and very close links with parents and the adjacent pre-school, children settle swiftly and make good progress, especially in enjoying school, language development and relating well toward each other. Staff make good use of assessments to monitor the children's progress and to make sure that learning activities are well planned to meet their needs. These include, for example, focused music activities and good support of role play in the 'Spaceship'. As a result, the curriculum provides good opportunities for children to achieve equally well across all the required areas of learning. The children's good enjoyment and confidence in learning are further enriched by the

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careful balance between adult-led activities and those chosen by the children themselves, as observed on one typical occasion when one child remarked, unprompted, 'We're doing good teamwork!' At times, however, when children are learning outdoors adults' questioning is less effective at extending their speaking skills than questioning when children are working indoors.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

Although the proportion of respondents was lower than that typically found in similar schools, the vast majority of responses indicated that overall, parents and carers are happy with their children's experience at this school. Positive views related to most statements in the questionnaire. A few parents and carers spoke with an inspector and also expressed mainly supportive views. A range of additional written comments mostly reflected concerns about pupils' progress. Inspectors considered the parents' concerns and found that, while pupils' progress is improving, more should be done to help some pupils to do even better.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Castle Primary School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 88 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 318 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	59	67	26	30	2	2	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	52	59	34	39	1	1	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	40	45	42	48	4	5	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	44	50	37	42	5	6	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	46	52	40	45	1	1	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	36	41	50	57	1	1	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	42	48	43	49	2	2	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	36	41	45	51	1	1	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	43	49	41	47	3	3	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	40	45	44	50	3	3	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	30	34	53	60	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	41	47	40	45	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	47	53	39	44	1	1	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



11 February 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Castle Primary School, Tiverton EX16 6QR

Thank you for welcoming us to your school, and special thanks to those of you who took the time to talk to us. We were particularly impressed by the school's Reception and Communication and Interaction Resource Base areas and by your joyful singing. We think that your school is a satisfactory school and we agree with you that it is getting better.

These are the other main things we found.

- By the end of Year 6, most of you reach the levels that we expect in your subjects and these show that you have made satisfactory progress.
- You enjoy school, contribute well and are good at living healthily.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, but an increasing amount of better teaching is quickening progress.
- Your headteacher is working hard to help staff and governors improve the way they work together so that you can do even better.

To help you make better progress in your work, we have asked your headteacher, governors and teachers to do two main things.

- Improve your attainment, especially in mathematics, particularly by making sure that you learn your number facts and know how to use them to solve problems.
- Make sure that teaching in Years 3 to 6 is more consistent in helping you to learn better and making clear what you have to do to improve.

You can all help by learning your targets and asking your teacher for help if you are not sure how to improve your work.

Yours sincerely

Alex Baxter

Lead inspector

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