

The Castle Children's Centre (and Nursery School)

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	132014
Local authority	Wakefield
Inspection number	381435
Inspection dates	15–16 May 2012
Lead inspector	Kathryn Dodd

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

Type of school	Nursery
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	3–5
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	87
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rachel Holmes
Head Of Centre	Kathy Stevens
Date of previous school inspection	25 March 2009
School address	255 Barnsley Road Sandal Wakefield WF1 5NU
Telephone number	01924 303 211
Fax number	Not applicable
Email address	headteacher@castlecc.wakefield.sch.uk



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Introduction

Inspection team

Kathryn Dodd

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspector observed eight different sessions led by two teachers and support staff. The inspector held discussions with staff, parents and carers, and two members of the governing body. The inspector observed the school's work and reviewed documentation, including improvement plans, the systems for tracking children's progress, the arrangements for safeguarding children and a sample of children's Records of Achievement. The inspector took into account questionnaires completed by school staff and analysed 42 questionnaires returned by parents and carers.

Information about the school

The majority of the children attending this average-sized nursery school are White British. The remaining children come from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds and most speak English as an additional language. A very small but increasing minority of children are at an early stage of learning to speak English. These are mainly children from Eastern European backgrounds. The proportion of disabled children and those who have special educational needs is below average. Along with the nursery, the headteacher (known as the Head of Centre) also manages the on-site children's centre. Almost all aspects of the leadership, management and organisation of the nursery are delegated to the Deputy Head of Centre. Since the previous inspection there have been a number of changes to the structure, funding and organisation of the nursery and several changes in staff. Day-care provision is also located within the nursery building but is managed by the local authority. The children's centre and day-care were not part of this inspection and separate reports are available on the Ofsted website. The school has been accredited with the Investors in People award and is designated as an Early Excellence Centre.

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	2
Achievement of children	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of children	1
Leadership and management	2

Key Findings

- This is a good school. Parents and carers are overwhelmingly supportive. They acknowledge that their children, ‘thrive here’ and say they, ‘cannot praise it enough’. The school is not outstanding because some opportunities to promote children’s communication, language and literacy skills are overlooked.
- Children’s achievement is good. By the time children leave, most have skill levels in line with those expected for their age. This represents good progress from their starting points, which are usually below those expected for their age. However, fewer children reach the expected level in aspects of their communication, language and literacy skills.
- Teaching is good. Staff work closely together to provide children with exciting learning experiences. They continually encourage children to learn through whatever captivates their imaginations and, as a result, children are absorbed in very busy play. However, although activities are generally well planned, staff do not always ensure that their questions challenge children’s thinking or enable children to extend their speaking skills.
- Children’s personal, social and emotional development is good and their behaviour is excellent. This is because activities continually promote their independence, curiosity and enjoyment. Children are extremely polite and respectful towards adults and one another. They are acutely aware of how to keep themselves safe.
- Leaders and staff regularly and accurately assess children’s skills, using this information astutely to determine improvement priorities. The systems used to track performance, however, do not easily pinpoint differences in the progress between groups of children. The Deputy Head of Centre regularly monitors the quality of teaching and, as a result, despite the numerous changes in staffing and reorganisation of the nursery, the quality of teaching is never less than good. These changes have, however, hampered efforts to delegate

responsibilities to staff, such as analysing performance data and monitoring the quality of provision.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of children that reach the skills expected in communication, language and literacy by:
 - developing the questioning skills of staff so that children are always encouraged to develop their speaking skills
 - providing more opportunities for children to write and for adults to model writing
 - making sure that staff always plan activities that challenge the more-able children
 - ensuring that children who are new to English receive effective bilingual support so that they make consistently good progress.
- Develop the systems to track children’s performance in order to pinpoint differences in the performance of different groups more effectively and extend the roles of staff in reviewing performance data and monitoring the quality of provision.

Main Report

Achievement of children

Achievement is good. This view is endorsed by the large majority of parents and carers who returned questionnaires and those that talked with the inspector. They say that their children, ‘arrive without tears and leave in high spirits’. Children, including disabled children and those who have special educational needs, make good progress. By the time they leave, their skills are similar to those expected for their age.

When children arrive, they are keen to greet their friends and staff, happily leaving their parents and carers. They confidently, quickly and independently choose an activity and become submerged in very purposeful and imaginative play. They demonstrate their wonderful imaginations, for example, by dressing up as kings and queens while hosting a tea-party beside the castle they have constructed. Children move freely and independently throughout the nursery both indoors and outside. They enjoy opportunities to investigate the outdoors environment, such as by preparing an area and replanting their rapidly growing sunflowers. Exciting and engaging activities such as these effectively sustain their concentration. Children’s progress in communication, language and literacy is occasionally held back because staff do not always ask children questions that challenge their thinking, especially the more-able children. Opportunities to engage children in conversation with staff or with one another, for example during snack-time, are sometimes overlooked.

Overall, children who speak English as an additional language make good progress, although for the very small minority of children that are new to English, progress is

inconsistent. This is because children do not have continual support from bilingual staff, and other staff are still developing their ability to support them effectively. Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs receive effective guidance from staff and are well-supported with activities that are tailored closely to their needs.

Quality of teaching

The quality of teaching is good. All parents and carers agree. They say staff are, 'kind, friendly and very approachable'. Relationships between staff and children are very warm and caring. Staff regularly adapt the activities offered to follow the children's interests and topical issues. For example, they have provided a wonderful array of activities with the forthcoming Queen's Jubilee celebrations in mind which enables children to develop their skills across several areas of learning. Staff ensure resources are high-quality, accessible and organised so that children's independence is promoted. This contributes effectively to their good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Staff provide a good balance between leading small group activities and supporting individuals during independent play. Children make good progress in learning letters and the sounds they make (known as phonics) because they are taught in small groups of similar ability and because adults ensure the activities are fun and active. This was seen, for example, as children danced enthusiastically to a musical letter identification game. Children thoroughly enjoy such sessions, so much so that one boy said, 'I love my phonics.' Opportunities for children to develop their writing skills, including by observing adults writing, are sometimes missed.

Regular assessment of children's achievement is an integral part of sessions and involves everyone. 'Newsflash' slips, for example, are completed and staff are using them increasingly effectively to pinpoint children's precise next steps. Regular review meetings ensure that future planning builds well upon children's interests and takes their learning needs into good account. However, occasionally, planned activities do not always challenge the more-able children. In the best sessions, very skilful questioning of children ensures that children continually think about what they are learning and are encouraged to talk about it with adults and with one another. These best practices are not yet consistently evident, however, amongst all staff.

Disabled children and those who have special educational needs make good progress because they receive effective support from dedicated staff and from external support agencies. Although a specialist bilingual support worker effectively supports some children that are new to English, at present this support does not extend to children attending afternoon sessions.

Behaviour and safety of children

Children's outstanding behaviour and awareness of safety enable them to experiment and enjoy their time at the nursery to the full. Children's mature self-discipline and awareness of others' rights and needs, such as their respect for children of different backgrounds, create a very happy environment in which children grow in confidence and self-esteem. All parents and carers agree that there is a good standard of

behaviour. They particularly appreciate the impact the school has on improving their children's personal skills and attitudes. As one parent commented, their child, 'is now confident and independent but was previously shy and clingy'. Children say that they really love coming to school. This shows in their eagerness to take part in everything on offer. Their attendance, except for a very small minority of children, is good and has recently improved. Children's ability to cooperate with one another when playing independently, to initiate games and decide for themselves what role they will play in them is excellent. This was seen, for example, as children made a bus and the driver took passengers on a journey to Disneyland and beyond, and in the supermarket as the check-out operator served customers.

Any hint of bullying or other unkindness is tackled swiftly and very effectively. 'Dinosaur School' sessions enable children to develop a keen understanding of the importance of listening, sharing, taking turns and how to keep themselves safe. Although some children have only attended nursery for a short time, their ability to do so is impressive. Children know that there is a special place they can go to if they need to calm down. Children are very clear about the high expectations of their behaviour and are keen to rise to this. They willingly and sensibly follow instructions from staff, such as tidying up or lining up to attend a small group session. Children's understanding of how to keep safe is outstanding. They are extremely clear about how to use and carry equipment sensibly. Ongoing opportunities for taking calculated risks, always under close guidance by staff, ensure the children develop a keen understanding of potential dangers and of their own limitations.

Leadership and management

This caring, safe and supportive school is very well presented, organised and resourced. Over time, the Head and Deputy Head of Centre have provided a positive steer. They have maintained a clear vision of where and how to improve achievement throughout a period of continual and significant change. They have ensured that since the previous inspection, children's numeracy skills and attendance have improved and the capacity to improve further is good. They are committed to, and successful in, promoting equality of opportunities, reducing discrimination and closing any gaps in attainment. This is why efforts to improve communication, language and literacy skills are already well underway. Parents and carers, for example, particularly appreciate the recent sessions held to help improve their understanding of how children are taught to read and to help them support their children's learning at home.

The Deputy Head of Centre plays a pivotal role in collating and analysing children's achievements and acknowledges that the present system does not easily identify variances in progress between different groups of children. Minimising any potential disruption to learning due to the many recent changes has been a priority. A continual programme of staff development, such as one aimed at improving staff confidence in teaching numeracy, has been successfully undertaken. Staff say they are able to rise to the challenges of change because everyone is so committed and dedicated. Nevertheless, ongoing changes have hampered the intentions of the Deputy Head of Centre to delegate some responsibilities to staff. As a result she shoulders much of the responsibility for evaluating children's performance and the school's effectiveness. The governing body has provided unwavering support and

guidance through the many changes, carefully planning ahead and effectively managing significant budgetary constraints. Members are now focused on extending their skills in monitoring the quality of provision. The school's safeguarding procedures meet requirements and ensure children feel exceptionally safe. Ongoing communication amongst staff and with parents and carers ensures safeguarding matters are continually kept high on the agenda.

The curriculum is good. It provides a wonderful range of activities that help to fire children's imaginations and is adapted skilfully to follow their interests and to promote enjoyment. Success is evident, for example, in children's exemplary behaviour, their thirst for learning and good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

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 children's needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its children well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its children.
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 children. 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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

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

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the child's work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor settings	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well children acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which children are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the children's attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



17 May 2012

Dear Children

**Inspection of The Castle Children's Centre (and Nursery School),
Wakefield, WF1 5NU**

Thank you for the really lovely, warm and friendly welcome you gave me when I inspected your nursery school. I really enjoyed being part of your school community and watching you have so much fun. Your school is good and you learn a lot. There are many good things happening. These are just a few of the things that I really liked:

- seeing just how well you behave and get on so well together
- finding out just how well you are cared for by all the adults and that you know so much about how to keep yourselves safe
- finding out how much you enjoy your time in nursery and how pleased all your parents and carers are with your school
- seeing you making lots of choices about what, where and how you play
- watching you having a tea party next to the castle you made and pretending you were kings, queens and soldiers
- seeing you have so much fun when you learn about letters and the sounds they make.

So that your school gets even better I have asked that:

- by the time you leave the nursery more of you develop better skills in speaking and in writing
- more staff help your Deputy Head of Centre to check how well you are learning and that the way they do this makes it easier for them to see if you are all doing equally well.

I hope that you all continue to have a wonderful time, particularly with all the planned Queen's Jubilee celebrations, and wish you well for your future.

Yours sincerely

Kathryn Dodd
Lead inspector

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