

Castle Primary School

Mow Cop Road, Mow Cop, Stoke-on-Trent, ST7 4NE

Inspection dates

12–13 December 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Pupils achieve well in reading, writing and mathematics in this rapidly improving school because teaching is good.
- Children get off to a good start in the Nursery and Reception classes because they receive good-quality individual attention.
- Teachers and other adults are particularly good at helping pupils who are at risk of falling behind to get back on track. Some of these pupils make outstanding progress.
- Staff and pupils feel valued as individuals and pupils are immensely proud of their school.
- Behaviour is good. Pupils have positive attitudes towards learning and most develop into mature individuals.
- Attendance is high because pupils love school.
- The information the school uses to check on pupils' progress is of outstanding quality.
- Leadership and management, including governance, are good. Senior leaders work together very effectively as a team and have been instrumental in improving the quality of teaching and raising the attainment of pupils.
- The key to the success of this school lies in the inspirational leadership of the executive headteacher.
- The school works well with its parents, who feel fully involved in their children's learning.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not enough teaching is outstanding. Sometimes teachers do not ask enough of the most-able pupils or let pupils know how to improve when they mark their work.
- Not enough pupils reach higher levels in writing in Key Stage 2 because there is too much variation in the quality of writing and presentation and pupils make too many careless spelling mistakes.
- Too few pupils reach higher levels in mathematics in Key Stage 1 because they do not have enough opportunities to think for themselves or develop their problem-solving skills.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed eight lessons, four of which were observed jointly with senior leaders.
- Meetings were held with pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body, a representative from the local authority and staff, including senior and subject leaders.
- The inspector took account of the 11 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View). She also analysed the school's own parental questionnaires and spoke informally with parents and carers.
- The inspector looked at a wide range of documentation, including the school development plan, policies, information about pupils' progress and attainment and how the school sets targets for teachers to improve their work. She also looked at child protection and safeguarding procedures.

Inspection team

Kath Campbell, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Castle is smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- Nearly all pupils are White British and no pupils speak English as an additional language.
- A below-average proportion of pupils are supported by pupil premium, which provides additional funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, those looked after by the local authority and those with a parent in the armed forces.
- A below-average proportion of pupils are supported at school action, school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs.
- In September 2012, an executive headteacher was appointed. He is also the executive headteacher of another local school. During his absence at the other school, the assistant headteacher takes over responsibility for the leadership and management of Castle.
- In September 2013, the school gained authorisation to admit children of nursery age to its Early Years Foundation Stage class. The governing body also took over responsibility for overseeing the care it provides for pupils before and after school.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the proportion of pupils reaching higher levels in mathematics in Key Stage 1 and in writing in Key Stage 2 by:
 - providing more opportunities for younger pupils to think for themselves and apply their mathematical skills to real-life situations.
 - making sure that all teachers have the highest expectations of older pupils so that written work is of consistently good quality and well-presented, and that spelling mistakes are eliminated.
- Raise the proportion of good and outstanding teaching by making sure that teachers:
 - have the opportunity to share and learn from the good practice that exists within their own school and their partner school
 - move the most-able pupils on to harder work earlier in lessons
 - use marking more effectively to let pupils know how to improve their work.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Children start in the Nursery with the skills, knowledge and understanding expected for their age. They make good progress in the Nursery and Reception class and are well prepared for their move into Year 1.
- Pupils continue to make good progress throughout the rest of the school. In 2013, the attainment of pupils in Year 2 was well above average in English and above average in mathematics. In Key Stage 2, the small group of six Year 6 pupils reached above-average levels overall, with well above average levels in mathematics. Attainment has risen sharply in both key stages since 2011, chiefly because the systems that have been introduced to check pupils' progress are of outstanding quality. Early signs of potential underachievement are now targeted immediately to make sure that any pupils at risk of falling behind are given the support they need and get quickly back on track.
- Reading is taught well. The school provides a wide range of additional reading activities to support individual pupils and, more importantly, a large number of volunteers offer their time. Parents also support reading well at home. This means that pupils in most need read daily to an adult and reading is a very important part of school life. Younger pupils are confident to have a go at unfamiliar words and develop a love of reading. Group reading sessions are very effective because, not only do they develop pupils' reading skills but they also encourage an enthusiasm for a variety of reading materials. As a result, older pupils talk with maturity about a wide range of books and authors and many acquire a strong enjoyment of poetry.
- Writing is a whole-school area for development. Although attainment is rising, not enough older pupils reach higher levels. In the past, teachers did not always expect enough of pupils and checks on progress were not rigorous enough. As a result, there was some underachievement. To some extent, pupils at the end of Key Stage 2 are still catching up lost ground for their slow progress in Year 4. This is most noticeable in older pupils' written work. There is too much inconsistency. Some writing is of good quality and many pupils write at length with maturity. However, some pupils spell simple words incorrectly and the presentation of their work is untidy.
- Attainment in mathematics has risen because the school focused its attention effectively on developing pupils' calculation skills. However, although opportunities for pupils to apply their skills to problem-solving activities are becoming a more integral part of mathematics lessons, pupils in the current Key Stage 1 do not develop these skills in a systematic enough way. Some teachers encourage pupils to think for themselves but, occasionally, others rely too heavily on worksheet-based activities that are not demanding enough.
- The school is good at narrowing the gap between its least able pupils and the rest. Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs achieve well because they receive a package of support that is effectively designed to meet their individual needs. Some make outstanding progress because of the quality of help they receive.
- There is insufficient data for the past three years to show whether the school is successfully closing the gap between the attainment of pupils eligible for pupil premium funding and that of other pupils. In this academic year, the school is in receipt of funding for nine pupils and their attainment is above that seen nationally for this group in English and mathematics.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Better teaching is at the heart of this school's success. Nearly all the teaching seen during the inspection was of good quality and there has been rapid improvement since the previous inspection.
- In the Early Years Foundation Stage, learning is fun. Staff work together well as a team and make sure that children receive a wide range of exciting activities, both in the classroom and in outside areas, such as the Forest School. The recent addition of Nursery children into the Early Years class is proving successful because these children receive a great deal of individual support. As a result, they settle quickly into school life and Reception children enjoy working and learning with their younger friends.
- Teachers provide interesting and challenging activities for pupils of all abilities. Classrooms are lively places where there is much good humour and where pupils want to succeed because they appreciate the help they get from their teachers and other adults.
- Where teaching is at its most effective, teachers and other adults move pupils' learning along at a rapid pace, particularly during group activities. In a Key Stage 2 mathematics lesson on problem solving, the teacher gave a very clear explanation of the task so pupils were able to get straight down to their work. Pupils worked in pairs or small groups and this motivated them to succeed. The input of both adults to individual pupils was of high quality, and this made a strong contribution to the rapid progress made during the lesson.
- Highly skilled adults who support teachers in the classroom make sure that disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs receive the right level of support they need to succeed, while at the same time making sure that these pupils develop the skills they need to work on their own.
- Teachers are careful to make sure that they share the purpose of the lesson with pupils. They plan well across a range of subjects to cater for the needs of different ages and abilities. Occasionally, expectations are not high enough and the most-able pupils do not move on to harder work quickly enough because they spend too long on undemanding tasks.
- Most work is carefully marked and teachers make sure that pupils know their targets for improvement and the National Curriculum level they are working towards. However, there is some inconsistency in the quality of marking and not all teachers give pupils clear enough guidance on how to improve their work so that they can reach the next level.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Castle is a friendly, welcoming school where staff and pupils are valued as individuals.
- Most pupils have very positive attitudes towards learning and these make a strong contribution towards their good personal development. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education.
- Pupils are polite and keen to talk about their work. They enjoy school very much and appreciate what the school does to help them.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage quickly develop good social skills. On occasions, such as when they are working in the Forest School area, their behaviour is excellent. Staff successfully develop very positive attitudes towards learning right from the time children start in the school.

- In classrooms, pupils enjoy working with partners and in small groups. Good humour prevails because adults and pupils get along well together and like each other. Playtimes are good social occasions where pupils of all ages join together. The breakfast club is of good quality and provides pupils with interesting, purposeful activities at the start of the day.
- Adults manage behaviour consistently well. Pupils and adults say that most pupils typically behave well in class and around school.
- In discussion, pupils are adamant that incidents of bullying are very rare. They say that there are very clear, effective procedures to make sure that isolated incidents are dealt with so that there is no recurrence. Pupils are also confident that, if they have concerns, there are several adults within the school who will listen to them. Pupils show a good understanding of how to stay safe, including when using computers and the internet.
- Attendance is high because school is a fun place where pupils flourish, both socially and academically.
- Occasionally, a few older pupils are not as enthusiastic as they should be about their learning. As a result, they make slower progress because they do not take enough pride in the work they produce.

The leadership and management are good

- The executive headteacher is held in high regard by staff, parents and pupils all of whom express their appreciation of his role in moving the school forward at a rapid pace since the previous inspection.
- The relatively new senior leadership team, which includes the assistant headteacher and senior teacher, complement each other's skills well. They monitor the school's performance very effectively. Teachers are far more accountable for the standards pupils achieve than in the past.
- Senior leaders have a reflective, honest and accurate view of their school. They are forward thinking and, while recognising and celebrating success, tackle weaknesses with clarity of purpose and tenacity.
- Staff are strongly committed towards improvement. Subject leaders say they receive good support. They manage their subjects well because they have gained the expertise they need to know whether pupils are doing well enough in their subjects. The recent input of Nursery age children into the Early Years Foundation Stage has been led and managed particularly well.
- The ways in which the school checks on the quality of teaching and learning are thorough. They are used effectively to improve the performance of all adults working in the school. They have contributed to, for example, the rapid rise in attainment through more effective teaching. No teacher is rewarded with a pay increase unless their pupils achieve well.
- Pupils' workbooks celebrate a wealth of rich, memorable experiences that contribute greatly to their good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Opportunities for residential visits to places such as Hillcrest also make a strong positive contribution towards pupils' personal development. Outdoor areas, such as the Forest School, are used effectively by pupils of all ages to promote good learning. History, art, music and science feature strongly. There are many examples of literacy skills being used well in, for example, history work linked to myths and

legends. Sport also has an important place in school life. Sports funding has been allocated appropriately to provide additional specialist teaching during the school day and after school. Pupils say they enjoy this specialist input very much.

- Strong links with parents are an important part of the school's work. Parents say they are well informed about their children's progress and have many opportunities to attend events, such as the Christmas concert, held during the inspection.
- Collaboration with partner schools is good because it allows the school to access and share expertise not otherwise available to a school of this size. Opportunities for teachers to share and learn from the good practice of others are developing but are not yet a regular enough part of teachers' professional development.
- The school keeps a careful eye on how well disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are doing to make sure none of them falls behind. It successfully removes barriers to learning so that everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed. For example, it uses its pupil premium to provide extra one-to-one support and to make sure that all pupils have the same opportunity to go on residential visits.
- Safeguarding procedures meet current government guidelines.
- The local authority knows the school well and provides a good level of support. The district manager for improvement reviews the school's performance regularly and commissions training when appropriate.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The relatively new team of governors is knowledgeable and highly supportive of the school. Governors are well informed about pupils' achievement and make sure they keep up to date with training requirements on important matters such as safeguarding. They have played a very important role in negotiating the introduction of Nursery-age children into the school and have recently taken over responsibility for before- and after-school care. The governing body keeps an eye on how effectively the school uses its pupil premium funding by checking on, for example, the impact of daily personalised support for individual pupils. Governors are strongly committed to further improvement and have secure procedures in place to make sure that any underperformance in teaching is tackled robustly.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	124091
Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	426990

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	104
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Gail Cumberlidge
Headteacher	David Bell (Executive Headteacher)
Date of previous school inspection	21 September 2011
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