

Castlefields Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	107531
Local Authority	Calderdale
Inspection number	287842
Inspection dates	14–15 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Ronald Cohen

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	5–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	179
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Allan Bolland
Headteacher	Mrs Susan Wood
Date of previous school inspection	2 December 2002
School address	Field Top Road Rastrick Brighouse West Yorkshire HD6 3XB
Telephone number	01484 716894
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Castlefields is a larger than average infants school situated on the boundaries of the Kirklees and Calderdale authorities. It takes pupils from both authorities. The independent private nursery facility situated within the school provides 75% of the infant school's intake. At entry to Reception, children's skills are below those expected for their age. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is higher than average, as is the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The numbers of pupils from minority ethnic groups constitute a higher proportion of the school than is generally found nationally.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school with several outstanding features. Pupils blossom in a happy, caring and creative environment, and they make good progress.

Right from the start, the children in the Foundation Stage become enthusiastic learners and enjoy the excellent provision and outstanding teaching they receive. Consequently, from a below average starting point, pupils reach standards which are average in Reception and generally above average in the end of Year 2 national tests. Mathematics standards have returned to above average over the past year. Although standards in writing are above average, there are relative weaknesses in pupils' spelling and use of extended vocabulary. Pupils read well and their skills in spoken language, particularly the confidence to speak in a group, are burgeoning. Parents' general satisfaction is summed up by the comment: 'Overall, we couldn't have asked for a better start to schooling for our children.'

There are many reasons why pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, achieve so well. First, the quality of the curriculum is excellent. It is rich, covers all subjects very well and is enhanced by an exceptional range of additional activities. This stimulating curriculum is delivered well by the teachers and teaching assistants. Teaching is typically good and sometimes better. Marking is always helpful, and the increasing use of self-assessment by pupils means that they know what they need to do to improve their work. The progress made by different groups of pupils, such as those learning English as an additional language or those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is excellent due to the outstanding support by specialist support teachers and teaching assistants. The school is aware that it must extend this support even further to higher-achieving pupils, especially in mathematics.

A further key factor in the pupils' good progress is that the work of the school is focused on fusing together pupils' well-being and their academic achievement. Provision such as family learning is key to this. Outstanding care, guidance and support provide a safe environment, and warm relationships are a strong feature of the school. All pupils, including the most vulnerable, feel safe and secure. Consequently, pupils' personal and academic development and their well-being are good, their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong and they behave well. Parents prize the excellent quality of care above all other aspects of the school's work, and they recognise it as a vital underpinning feature for their children's future academic success.

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher provides excellent leadership and strong direction for the work of the school. She is very ably supported by staff. The governors are very supportive of the school and have a good knowledge of its strengths and areas for development. They recognise the need for even more rigour in holding it to account. The teamwork and shared vision for the school is strong. The school is going from strength to strength and has good capacity to continue to do so. It gives good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the quality of pupils' spelling and use of extended writing skills.
- Ensure that higher-attaining pupils are suitably challenged in order to maximise their potential.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Children's attainment on entry to the Foundation Stage is below average. They make good progress in the Foundation Stage to achieve average skills by the time they join Year 1. They make particularly good progress in their personal, social and emotional development.

Pupils continue to make good progress in Key Stage 1. The 2006 results at the end of Year 2 were above average. They showed a good improvement from the previous years' decline in standards and were stronger in reading and writing than in mathematics. The school has successfully tackled the issue in mathematics and pupils are currently working at above average levels in all three subjects, although now their writing is less strong than reading or mathematics. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including autism, and those who speak English as an additional language achieve outstandingly well. This is because their needs are identified early, extra support is given where needed and their progress is carefully monitored. Higher-attaining pupils mostly achieve well, but some do not make the progress they could, particularly in mathematics.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being is good overall, with some outstanding features. Pupils enjoy their lessons, although despite the best efforts of the school, attendance remains broadly in line with the national average. Pupils' behaviour is good, particularly in lessons that set a brisk pace and have a high level of challenge, and where staff have developed excellent relationships with pupils. Pupils make comments such as, 'I like this school because everyone's kind.' They are able to work cooperatively and show high levels of independence. They are well aware of what they must do to keep safe, and say they feel safe in school as a result of the effective systems in place to ensure high levels of pupil care. They have a very clear understanding of healthy lifestyles, making good use of a range of sporting activities and choosing healthy meal options. The school council takes an active role within the school. For example, its members are responsible for organising and running fund-raising events, including their own stalls at summer and autumn fairs.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. The school takes full advantage of the ethnic diversity of its intake, and this gives pupils an unusually good understanding of the multicultural world in which they live. Pupils are given time to reflect in assemblies and circle time. A strong focus on the social and emotional aspects of learning ensures that pupils have a clear sense of right and wrong.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Pupils make good progress in lessons and this is because the teaching that takes place is good. In most lessons there is a high level of challenge for all pupils, the pace is brisk and pupils have opportunities to work in small groups or pairs. In the best lessons pupils also show a high level of independence and are able to assess their own work or that of their partner. The 'carpet buddy' system enhances pupils' learning and encourages them to think about what they need to do to improve their work further. Pupils find most lessons exciting, and say that they

particularly enjoy being actively involved in 'lessons where we do things'. Learning takes place in a positive environment where pupils are regularly praised and encouraged, and as a result they develop in confidence and self-esteem. In the few lessons where teaching is less successful teachers do not use time and tasks as well as they might. Consequently, pupils' attention wanders and their behaviour becomes a little challenging. This slows their progress and that of their classmates. The highly skilled team of teaching assistants ensures that all pupils have full access to the curriculum, and support is outstanding for those pupils who find learning difficult.

Marking is positive and sometimes guides pupils to what they need to do next. The tracking and assessment of pupils' work is good and leads to lessons which are carefully planned and learning objectives and success criteria which are shared with pupils.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is rich and varied. It contributes significantly to pupils' personal development by enabling them to stay healthy and safe, and develops their understanding of the world around them. It is carefully planned to link subjects together where possible, and opportunities are regularly sought to encourage writing across all aspects of learning. This makes learning more enjoyable and develops pupils' literacy skills, while providing a variety of purposes for writing. The provision of theme weeks including Literacy Week and Healthy Schools Week further enriches pupils' learning. The school also uses information and communication technology (ICT) to support the curriculum, and recently received the ICT Mark for its effective use in the classroom. A number of similar nationally recognised awards held by the school, including Investors in Pupils, Artsmark Gold and Activemark, are a testament to the high quality and breadth of the curriculum. A wide range of visitors to the school, including African drummers and artists as part of International Week, ensures that pupils experience a rich variety of learning opportunities. The school provides opportunities for children in the Foundation Stage and pupils in Year 2 to take part in residential visits, and a wide range of local visits to places of interest also take place. All pupils have an opportunity to take part in a variety of sporting and arts-based extra-curricular activities. The school has strong links with other local primary and secondary schools which provide opportunities for inter-school events.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The level of care and support is outstanding. Effective procedures are in place to secure and safeguard the health, safety and protection of all pupils. Excellent links with outside agencies ensure that the welfare of vulnerable pupils is always paramount. Pupils feel safe and know who to turn to if they have a problem. They say that bullying is rare, and they are confident that any incidents are promptly addressed by staff. The school has robust systems in place to promote good behaviour, and this is rewarded by special end-of-week activities and assemblies. Early identification of and support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities enables them to access the curriculum fully and make excellent progress. Additional intervention activities are also provided for pupils identified as gifted or talented. Parents overwhelmingly acknowledge the excellent levels of care and support given by the school to their children, and many feel that the school also offers valuable additional support to parents through the family learning programme and extended care facilities. Pupils are given regular guidance on how to

improve their work through a highly developed system of targets. Regular homework tasks encourage parents to become actively involved with their children's learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The schools' self-evaluation is mostly accurate, but is a little over-generous in some areas. This reflects the school's determined drive towards excellence, rather than the current position, which is that leadership at all levels has a clear, consistent and shared understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The outstanding leadership of the headteacher and deputy headteacher provides a model of excellent teamwork for the whole staff. Good professional development opportunities and carefully planned performance management ensure that all staff are well trained and held to account for the effectiveness of their work. Monitoring and evaluation are systematic and involve subject leaders in lesson observations. However, the evaluation of lessons lacks a sharp focus on pupils' achievements. Systems to track the progress that individual pupils make are used effectively to deploy resources. Governors are well informed and fulfil their statutory role effectively. They support the school particularly well by working with it to ensure equality of opportunity for all pupils. However, governors would be more strategically effective through a stronger balance of support and challenge.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Thank you for making Mr Wilson and me feel so welcome when we came to your school recently. We enjoyed talking with you. Particular thanks go to those of you who gave up your time to talk to us during your lunch break.

You are fortunate to go to such a good school which you leave able to read, write and do your mathematics well. That is not all. We were very impressed by how well you present your work, by your behaviour and how helpful you are to one another. You try hard in your lessons and this is not surprising as your teachers work very hard and teach you such interesting things in exciting ways. You told us that the school looks after you very well, and we agree with you. In fact, you are cared for so well that many of your parents wrote me notes to comment on it.

The school is run very well. The staff and governors plan carefully to improve it. We have asked them now to think about how to help you become more confident in expressing your views in writing, using the new words you are taught. We have also asked them to make sure that those of you who sometimes find work a little bit easy are encouraged to do even more difficult things. It may be hard at first, but it will be worthwhile in the long run.

Please thank your parents for kindly sending in the questionnaires and letters. These helped me to understand how well they think of the school.