



# Castle Primary School

## Inspection Report

**Unique Reference Number** 124091  
**Local Authority** Staffordshire  
**Inspection number** 292889  
**Inspection dates** 12–13 December 2006  
**Reporting inspector** Ceri Morgan HMI

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Primary	<b>School address</b>	Mow Cop Road
<b>School category</b>	Community		Mow Cop
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–11		Stoke-on-Trent ST7 4NE
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed	<b>Telephone number</b>	01782 297890
<b>Number on roll (school)</b>	87	<b>Fax number</b>	01782 297891
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair</b>	Walten
		<b>Headteacher</b>	Claire LOWE
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	26 February 2001		

<b>Age group</b>	<b>Inspection dates</b>	<b>Inspection number</b>
4–11	12–13 December 2006	292889

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

## Description of the school

Castle Primary School is much smaller than average. It serves a rural area of mixed housing. There is an independent nursery on site. No children are in the early stages of learning English and a below-average proportion is entitled to free school meals. There is an average but increasing proportion of pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

## 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 some considerable strengths. There is a thoughtful and sensitive approach to the welfare of the pupils. As a result, the personal well-being and care offered to the pupils are approaching outstanding. Similarly, the standards reached by the majority of pupils are good and their progress, although much more variable, is often impressive, especially for pupils with additional learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This inclusive approach is evident throughout and parents are overwhelmingly positive about their school and its role in the community.

There is a high level of care that all adults show towards the pupils. This has created a supportive ethos which is almost tangible and is appreciated by parents and pupils alike. The pupils enjoy school and thrive during their time here. In particular, the individual needs of pupils are taken into account in detail in teachers' planning. One good example of this is how staff write individual learning plans for many pupils.

One of the main reasons why the progress pupils make is secure is the good quality of teaching linked to frequent assessment of how well pupils are doing. In particular, the school involves pupils well in their own assessments, which are accurate and perceptive. One pupil writes, 'I have improved in swimming and ordering decimal numbers to 3 places but still think I can be better at both'. A thoughtful curriculum, enriched by frequent visits and extra activities, is much appreciated by the pupils and they respond with genuine enthusiasm to this variety and challenge. There is scope for some improvements to the curriculum for the youngest children.

In 2005, both the standards attained and the progress made by pupils aged eleven were good. This followed a period of year-on-year improvements. Results in the 2006 tests were more disappointing. Only 60% of the older pupils reached the required levels and too few pupils reached the higher levels by age seven. The school has, however, responded to that dip by planning to improve mathematics through increased problem-solving activities and improving aspects of writing. It is expecting an improved performance in 2007. Although some of the dip can be explained by the very small number of children in the year and the specific needs of some pupils, it is acknowledged that the monitoring of pupils' progress could be tighter.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Although the regular assessment of pupils is completed throughout the school with accuracy, the results of this are used more effectively at individual classroom level than for the school as a whole. For example, the new school improvement plan summary currently contains too few pupil performance targets, and some of those that are there are safe rather than ambitious. The school has appropriate plans to include targets at the next stage of writing. At the moment, the good standards and progress are largely due to good individual teaching but this could be improved yet further by a sharper, more rigorous and consistent monitoring process that involves senior and subject leaders and governors in checking that the school's targets for improvement are ambitious and always met.

## **What the school should do to improve further**

- Enhance the Foundation Stage curriculum.
- Sharpen the judgements made during monitoring, especially in relation to pupil progress.
- Improve standards in mathematics and some aspects of writing.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

Standards improved consistently between 2002 and 2005 and are now above average, despite the dip in 2006. The progress made by pupils is also good and in 2005 the overall progress made by pupils age eleven was significantly above the national average. In particular, standards of reading and science are good. Standards in mathematics are generally slightly lower than those in English, and some aspects of writing, especially presentation, could be improved.

The school is aware that the standards reached by pupils aged eleven in 2006 showed a decline on the success of the previous year. The results anticipated for 2007 show a recovery and the progress evident in pupils' work books support this view.

Standards of spoken English are very good and pupils contribute very well to discussions. There is more variation in written English, including the use of spelling strategies and handwriting, although standards of composition using a rich vocabulary have improved considerably. Pupils have a sound grasp of basic number skills which they are using increasingly effectively to solve word problems and investigations. This is an area the school identified as a priority following an analysis of test results, and progress in this area is good.

One aspect of high performance is in creative and expressive subjects such as art and music. The quality of the pupils' work in these subjects is evident throughout the school in displays and performances and there are plans to use expertise in these subjects to enhance writing and mathematics, although the plans to do so lack detail.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 2**

The pupils' personal development and well-being are good, with some elements that are outstanding. Pupils behave exceptionally well in and around the school and are keen to learn. They clearly thoroughly enjoy coming to school. One pupil expressed this, after much thought, with the words, 'the worst bit about school is going home at the end'. Attendance and punctuality are good. There is good provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral and social development. The cultural element of the school is satisfactory. Pupils are encouraged to make charitable donations, for example to a new school in The Gambia. Relationships within school are outstanding and pupils routinely show respect and consideration for each other. They like to see each other doing well. There is an enthusiastic school council, whose members are ready to take

even more responsibility. Pupils feel safe and secure and know whom to turn to if they need help.

The importance of leading a healthy lifestyle is clearly understood. Physical activity and healthy eating is promoted well and pupils say that far fewer of them eat snack foods now. Fundraising activities successfully promote pupils' social awareness.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

Teaching is good overall. This is one of the main reasons why standards in recent years have improved. Lessons observed were well judged, imaginative and used resources, including the new interactive whiteboards, well to stimulate pupils' imagination and interest. The very detailed planning teachers complete is a real strength. Similarly, because teachers know their pupils very well, they complete accurate assessments and set appropriate levels of challenge.

In the best lessons, enthusiastic teachers set high expectations and challenge and match the work very well to pupils' needs. Pupils respond especially well to sessions that have real sparkle and they make better progress then. Lessons are generally well structured and pace is carefully maintained.

Where teaching is less effective there is a tendency to accept short answers from pupils, thus limiting language development. The sharing of clear lesson objectives is done but often without clarity and, as a result, some pupils are unsure of why they were doing things. Teachers do not always check frequently enough for potential misunderstandings during lessons, especially in mathematics.

A particular strength is the detailed way the school ensures the pupils themselves know how well they are doing and uses this at classroom level to set targets which are then reviewed. For example, pupils are encouraged to complete a review diary setting out their own views of progress.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 2**

The curriculum is good overall and improving. It is well planned and thoughtfully evaluated. In the Foundation Stage, the curriculum is generally matched well to the children's age and experience but with some aspects that could be enhanced, such as the provision for outdoor play. A wide range of additional activities, including music and sports, enhances the quality of the curriculum. Opportunities for improving the pupils' literacy and numeracy skills are carefully planned for. Pupils' information and communication technology (ICT) skills are increasingly well developed across the curriculum, although there are appropriate plans to further develop them in the Foundation Stage. A particular strength is the way opportunities are provided for

pupils to develop their independent learning skills. This has helped foster an independence of thinking and a maturity that is a credit to the pupils.

There is good provision for pupils' personal development. Pupils' learning is also enriched by a good range of educational visits and activities, as well as interesting visitors to the school, such as a rocket scientist.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 2**

Pupils are very well cared for and they are taught about the importance of adopting healthy lifestyles and staying safe. Staff have an exceptional knowledge of individual pupils' social and emotional needs. The support of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is especially good. The school now has effective procedures to check on pupils' progress but does not always use this to plan for whole-school development.

There are good links with parents, carers and support agencies to ensure pupils' needs are met. One example of effective partnership work with local residents is how the school has improved the safety of pupils with the 'park and stride' scheme by building a footpath away from busy roads. There are rigorous child protection procedures in place and staff are up to date with training in this regard. Children settle quickly in the Foundation Stage because of the effective induction programme. Parents are kept well informed of their children's progress through newsletters and meetings.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 3**

The leadership and management are judged by the school as satisfactory and the inspection confirms this. However, this does not do justice to the clarity of vision and sensitive management shown by the headteacher. Recent changes to the membership of the senior management team, and some inconsistencies in the role of both subject leaders and governance, mean that leadership is satisfactory overall but, as a result of effective evaluation, has a good capacity to continue to improve. Subject leaders have a clear awareness of the respective strengths and weaknesses but do not yet consistently set sharp or ambitious enough targets for improvement. Past variations in pupil progress have not always been identified quickly enough because monitoring procedures lacked sufficient rigour. Thus, although some pupils, such as those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make impressive progress, others do not match this achievement, especially in writing.

The work of the headteacher is good and she has instilled an ethos where every child matters. She takes a lead in checking pupils' standards and is constantly evaluating what the school does. This has led to significant improvements since the last inspection in 2001. Although there were no significant weaknesses identified then, it was suggested the school consider increasing pupil independence and improving pupils' spiritual development. Progress on both issues has been impressive as a consequence of the headteacher's effective leadership. She is a hard working, thoughtful and

sensitive manager who leads by example. As a consequence of staff secondments, much of the recent improvement rests on her contribution.

Governors are fully supportive of the school and all subcommittees now function well. There is scope for them to offer a greater challenge to the school and engage more in detailed analysis of standards and pupil progress. However, given the thoughtful approach to change and the good capacity to improve, the school is well poised for future development.





## Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	<b>School Overall</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	3
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

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> 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	2

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
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

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

<sup>1</sup> 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.

## Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
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	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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

### **Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

As you may remember, I visited your school recently to see how well you were all doing. I met with many of you and talked to all of your teachers and some parents.

I am writing to let you know the findings from my visit.

I would first like to thank you for the welcome and help you gave me on my visit. It was a pleasure to meet you and your behaviour and attitude to school do you great credit. Clearly you enjoy school and know how much your teachers look after you. You are lucky to have such good teachers.

I think you attend a good school with lots of exciting activities, including extra visits and visitors. You make good progress while you are at school and Mrs Lowe and her staff help you with this.

- I have made some suggestions to improve things even more. These are:
- Providing more equipment and resources for the youngest pupils.
- I have asked those who run the school to set even higher targets for you all and use these in a school plan.
- Improve some aspects of mathematics and handwriting.

I wish you all well in the future.