

Castle Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109435
Local Authority	BEDFORDSHIRE LA
Inspection number	309982
Inspection dates	13–14 March 2008
Reporting inspector	David Speakman

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	3–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	377
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs M Kubicek
Headteacher	Mr M J Marsh
Date of previous school inspection	10 February 2003
School address	Goldington Road Bedford MK40 3EP
Telephone number	01234 300800
Fax number	01234 300805

Age group	3–9
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a larger than average-sized lower school. It serves a community with relatively advantaged social circumstances and the proportion of pupils who take free school meals is below average. An above average proportion of pupils come from a wide range of ethnic minority backgrounds. An above average proportion do not have English as their first language and eighteen languages other than English are represented in the school. The number of pupils identified with learning difficulties or disabilities is below that found in other schools, but the proportion with a statement of special educational needs is average. Attainment on entry to school is similar to that expected for children of this age. There have been some significant recent changes in leadership, with a new senior leadership team, including headteacher and deputy in the last two years. The school gained accreditation as a Healthy School and has achieved the Active Mark for its provision in physical activity.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

The effectiveness of this school is outstanding. A new senior leadership team, including a new headteacher and deputy have joined the school in the last two years and there are a number of new governors. New leadership is excellent and has been particularly effective in ensuring rapid improvement in pupils' achievement. As a result, standards have risen dramatically. Parents comment very favourably on the impact that new leadership has had on the school and they express a lot of confidence, particularly in the headteacher. He works extremely well with the deputy and together they provide strong and purposeful leadership. Improved achievement for all pupils is mainly a result of rigorous monitoring of the quality of teaching and of its impact on pupils' learning. This has helped lift teaching to its current outstanding level. Moreover, teachers set challenging targets for pupils' attainment. The monitoring of their progress towards achieving these is extremely thorough. This ensures pupils at all levels of attainment achieve their full potential.

Following a period when standards fell and pupils' progress was barely adequate, there has been a considerable improvement in pupils' achievement and standards. Both are now exceptionally high. This represents achievement that is outstanding, and which is well above that which can be reasonably expected. Pupils' personal development is also exceptionally good. Their excellent behaviour and attitudes to learning make a significant contribution to the rapid progress that they make. All aspects of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are outstanding. Pupils speak very highly of the school and value what staff are doing for them. They feel they are becoming better people with the chance of a good life and they learn 'how to live, how to respect and how to love.'

The quality of education provided is excellent. Teaching and learning are of an exceptionally high quality and enable pupils to excel in both their academic and personal development. The curriculum is good and the school is planning to make stronger links between subjects to help maintain pupils' exceptional progress. The quality of curriculum enrichment is excellent and makes a significant contribution to the high level of enjoyment and interest pupils find in learning. Links with other organisations provide excellent opportunities for pupils' well-being and add much to the quality of learning opportunities. The school shows very high levels of pastoral care for all pupils and the excellent academic guidance they receive helps them progress extremely well.

High quality leadership and management; accurate school self-evaluation; actions to identify weaknesses and quickly address them so they become strengths; the record of rapid improvement over the last two years and the high quality of education provided all demonstrate that the school has an excellent capacity to improve even more.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children make good progress in the Foundation Stage and achieve well. By the time they transfer into Year 1, they have acquired good skills in literacy, mathematics and in their personal, social and emotional development. Most achieve the expected levels for their age and several exceed them. This is due to the good teaching they receive which means they learn quickly. There are good systems for assessing progress and basing work on what the children can do already. Support for children who find learning more difficult is very good. There is a reasonable

balance between those tasks which the children choose for themselves, and those directed by adults. However, some activities do not develop children's independence well enough. There are plans to improve this, especially with the development of the outdoor area. There is a very high level of care, good induction procedures for when children first start at school and parents are actively encouraged to be involved in their children's learning.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the opportunities for children in the Foundation Stage to learn through play and improve facilities for them to learn outdoors.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

There was a dip in standards in 2005 and 2006 but since then they have improved substantially. In 2007, attainment at the end of Year 2 rose to above average in reading, writing and mathematics. There was a similar improvement at the end of Year 4 and standards were above age-related expectations. This year the momentum of improvement is being sustained. Currently standards are well above average in reading, writing and mathematics in Year 2 and exceptionally high in Year 4. Pupils are very confident and clear speakers. Standards in art, music and information and communication technology (ICT) are high and the school is proud of its impressive sporting achievements. With very close and regular monitoring of their progress, all pupils achieve extremely well. Support for pupils who find learning difficult is very good and their achievement excellent. Those with English as a second language soon acquire enough English to access the curriculum and make similar progress to others.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The pupils are very polite and friendly to visitors and display very good attitudes to learning, showing that they enjoy lessons by working hard. As a result, behaviour is of a high standard and the vast majority of pupils are eager to learn. Good levels of attendance reflect their great enjoyment of school. Relationships in the school community demonstrate that pupils find this a happy and stimulating environment in which to work. They make an excellent contribution to school life through the school council and other opportunities to take on responsibility. Pupils have a very good understanding about how to lead a healthy lifestyle by their enjoyment and participation in a wide variety of physical activities and choosing a healthy diet. They show very good understanding of how to keep safe. The school places a strong emphasis on this through personal, social and health education (PSHE) and through the Social & Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) initiative. Well-developed transition arrangements and very good basic skills enable pupils to prepare extremely well for the next stage of their education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

The quality of teaching and learning in the school is of an extremely high standard, enabling pupils to make exceptional progress. Teachers meet the different needs of all learners exceptionally well. They use their knowledge of each pupil's progress to match work closely to all ability levels. Teaching assistants and other adults make an excellent contribution to support

learning. They are very knowledgeable and are involved fully in planning lessons and assessing how well the pupils are doing. All teachers are well organised and have established positive relationships with pupils. A high level of expectation and brisk pace are characteristic of lessons and teachers' subject knowledge is a very strong feature. Lessons are lively and engaging and activities are very interesting. This encourages pupils to concentrate well, remaining motivated and enthusiastic about their learning. Teachers have created a very stimulating learning environment for pupils to work in.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school has begun revising the curriculum by linking subjects together more closely. The aim is to provide good support for the further development of reading and writing skills and to ensure their effective use in other subjects. This does not yet fully extend to linking other subjects into a themed approach to learning. Curriculum planning meets the pupils' learning needs well and the provision for those learning English as an additional language is good. Modern foreign languages have an important place in the curriculum. There is an Italian club and French is taught in Year 3, with the intention of offering this to Year 4 pupils in future. Musical and artistic pursuits and activities, such as learning to play a variety of instruments, working with artists and being involved in drama and theatre visits, are significant aspects of the curriculum. There is a strong emphasis on sport, enhanced extremely well by very good links with the local community. These combine to provide a curriculum enriched extremely well through a broad range of interesting experiences.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

There are rigorous procedures in place for ensuring pupils' health and safety. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils are fully in place and risk assessments diligently carried out. A very strong support structure is in place for pupils who find learning difficult. They are competently supported by dedicated teachers and committed teaching assistants, enabling these pupils to make excellent progress. The school has developed exceptionally strong links with parents and a variety of agencies to ensure first class care and support. Parents greatly appreciate the excellent quality of support their children receive from all staff, including the headteacher and the highly efficient administration team. Academic support is of an extremely high standard. Systems to track academic progress and set challenging targets are developed exceptionally well and help pupils make excellent progress. Marking of pupils' work mostly informs them how to improve, but is less helpful for older pupils.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

School leaders provide excellent leadership and management at all levels. The senior leadership team and governors work very effectively together. They got to grips very quickly with improving all aspects of school life. Once they had identified what needed to be improved, they developed highly effective strategies to raise standards whilst still ensuring high levels of support and guidance. Central to this vision are high expectations of all staff and pupils and challenging targets for performance. There is a very strong sense of teamwork and all are valued for their contribution. Staff have been provided with opportunities to gain the skills to enable them to

do their jobs exceptionally well. Rigorous monitoring of staff performance and pupils' achievement means the rate of improvement has been rapid. School self-evaluation is accurate and clearly identifies what the school's strengths are and how to use these to improve other areas. Governors are highly effective. They are organised very well and work in close collaboration with the school, giving them an excellent knowledge of how well it is doing. They provide high levels 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?	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	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	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
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?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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

17 March 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Castle Primary School, Bedford MK40 3EP

We very much enjoyed the two days we spent in your school recently and would like to thank you all for making us so welcome. We were really impressed by what we saw. We enjoyed meeting you and your teachers, visiting you in lessons, watching you work, speaking to you about your school and finding out about how you help to make the school so successful.

You go to an excellent school and all the adults working with you, under the excellent leadership of your headteacher and deputy, form a very strong team. The teaching you receive in lessons is excellent, as is the quality of care that adults show for you. You make a very important contribution by behaving excellently, taking responsibility very seriously and trying hard to do your very best, so well done. We were very impressed by the sensible way in which you go about learning, being friends together and most importantly of all, caring about each other. You all make excellent progress in your lessons and reach very high standards in your work.

There is very little that needs improving. We are asking staff and governors to make sure that the outdoor areas are improved for children in the Nursery and Reception classes. This is so that these children can be more involved in choosing what they want to play and learn about.

We wish you all the best in the future.

David Speakman

Lead Inspector