

The Castle Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113340
Local Authority	Devon
Inspection number	311220
Inspection dates	10–11 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Howard Dodd

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	303
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Tim James
Headteacher	David Barnes
Date of previous school inspection	16 May 2005
School address	Barrington Street Tiverton EX16 6QR
Telephone number	01884 253398
Fax number	01884 252610

Age group	4-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The Castle Primary School is a large primary school in the centre of Tiverton. Most pupils are from a White British background, with small numbers from other ethnic heritages. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average and the school provides special provision for autistic children in its communication and interaction resource base (CAIRB).

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. It has a number of outstanding features. At the heart of the school's success is the excellent leadership provided by the school's senior management team and its willingness to make bold decisions to bring about school improvement. The school provides outstanding care, guidance and support for all its pupils and especially the most vulnerable and those in the communication and interaction resource base. As a result, pupils greatly enjoy being in school. As one pupil said, 'I wish I could be in school all of the time.'

The school has made significant strides since its last inspection and its capacity to improve even further is good. Measures such as well-targeted support for pupils at risk of underachievement have done much to raise standards. As a result, pupils are achieving well, while standards are now broadly average by Year 6. Children settle quickly in the Reception class and make good progress because of well-managed and stimulating provision. Although progress is slower in Years 1 and 2, pupils develop self-confidence and learn skills essential to more rapid progress in Years 3 to 6. However, writing skills, particularly in Years 1 and 2, are a relatively weaker area and a barrier to more rapid progress in other subjects. Teachers make lessons interesting and are well supported by a team of teaching assistants who help pupils make good progress, especially those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Good teaching and a good curriculum mean that pupils want to learn. Pupils say how much they like their teachers. One said, 'they make us laugh and are always trying to help us.' Most tasks are planned to challenge pupils at their own level, although this is not always the case, particularly when teachers do not check how well individual pupils are doing and adapt the work accordingly. Outstanding care, guidance and support make a major contribution to pupils' good personal development and well-being. All staff know their pupils exceptionally well and provide the highest quality of support. Pupils respond well to the clear targets they are given to help them improve.

Pupils are very friendly, welcoming and polite. During the inspection, they readily engaged in conversation with inspectors, commenting, 'This is a really nice school and I really hope you enjoy your day.' Pupils' relationships with adults and each other are exceptionally good and they are well prepared for their future economic well-being. The school has forged excellent links with its parents, and external agencies greatly enhancing the well-being and range of experience for pupils. Their enjoyment of, and participation in, the wide range of sporting and other extra-curricular activities make a strong contribution to pupils' excellent understanding of how to keep healthy.

The overwhelming majority of parents are highly supportive of the school. Its success is summed up well by one parent who wrote, 'I transferred my son from another school and he is much happier here, I could not have asked for a better school.' The school offers a particularly warm and caring environment. All staff have the pupils' welfare at heart and always strive to offer them as wide a range of experiences and opportunities as possible. School managers monitor pupils' progress regularly so any underachievement is quickly identified. The school has good procedures for reviewing its work and self-evaluation is accurate and realistic. Governors provide good support and challenge.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

On entry to the Reception class, children's attainment varies but is usually below expectations for their age, particularly in their language and number skills. All children make good progress, due to the strong focus on speaking and listening. As a result, children move into Year 1 close to expected levels, though still with significant weaknesses in their language and number skills. Liaison with parents and pre-schools is very good. Children are happy and curious learners, eagerly discovering new experiences and enjoying well-planned activities. Good teaching builds children's skills well. Teaching assistants support effectively. Children's personal, social and behavioural development is good, and they make secure friendships with others. The quality of care is excellent and children feel happy and safe. Assessment is regular and effective. Leadership and management are good.

What the school should do to improve further

- Share existing good practice to ensure that work is always planned to challenge pupils at their personal level.
- Improve pupils' writing skills, particularly at Key Stage 1.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

By the time pupils leave school in Year 6, they reach broadly average standards in English, mathematics and science. Given their attainment on entry, this represents good achievement. Children get off to a good start in the Foundation Stage. This is consolidated in Years 1 and 2 where, although attainment remains below average, particularly in writing, pupils develop the self-confidence and basic learning skills that enable them to make rapid progress in Years 3 to 6. In national tests in 2007 at the end of Year 6, pupils achieved well, particularly in mathematics. However, attainment in writing remains a relative weakness. The school is taking action to tackle this and there are emerging signs of improvement but basic skills of presentation, spelling, punctuation and grammar are weak for many pupils. Pupils show good skill in using information and communication technology (ICT). Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress because of well-targeted and very effective support from teaching assistants.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' enjoyment of school and their good relationships with their teachers is a considerable strength. Their enthusiasm and energy in taking part in all that the school offers is infectious. Pupils have a clear understanding of right and wrong, and an outstanding awareness of the importance of a balanced diet and regular exercise, encouraged by the school's vigorous promotion of physical education and sports. As one pupil's poster promoting the school's encouragement to walk to school said, 'Be fit not fat'! Attendance is satisfactory and improving but a small minority of pupils are absent too frequently. Pupils respond sensibly and with maturity to opportunities to contribute as class monitors, house captains or school councillors. Members of the school council have been recently involved in the appointment of staff. They willingly adopt charities and fund raise for local causes. Pupils feel safe and know there is a responsive adult to whom they can go when necessary. Most pupils' behaviour is thoughtful and considerate. They are accepting of others' differences, including the pupils in the CAIRB.

They have a good understanding of how to deal with any bullying and confidence in the systems set up to deal with it. Pupils are well prepared for their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers establish a good climate for learning in lessons, which are characterised by very good relationships and a purposeful working environment. Tasks are well chosen to interest and excite. Pupils particularly enjoy activities that involve them in hands-on practical work. 'We learn best by looking and doing not just listening' is the mature and thoughtful way which one Year 6 pupil described his favourite lessons. Pupils are keen to please. They like their teachers and enjoy the work they set. Teachers use a variety of methods to engage and sustain pupils' interest. Effective questioning probes for understanding and challenges pupils to think more deeply and solve problems for themselves. In most cases, work is pitched at the right level to meet pupils' wide and diverse needs. As one pupil said, work is 'mostly neither too hard nor too easy'. However, this is not consistently the case and sometimes teachers fail to keep a check on how well pupils are doing and adapt the lesson plan accordingly. Teaching assistants provide good support throughout, enabling pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to make good progress. They work effectively alongside teachers. ICT is used effectively to support learning and interactive whiteboards in particular are making a positive difference to learning. Marking is both supportive and helpful, often suggesting ways in which pupils might improve their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is broad and well balanced. By and large, it meets the personal needs of pupils well and builds progressively on skills, knowledge and understanding. The use of special weeks to focus on specific topics, such as Food Week, Walk to School Week and Family Art Week, enables pupils to dig deeper into particular aspects. Pupils like this approach, feeling that it makes learning more meaningful. While there is an appropriate emphasis on developing basic skills, the school's commitment to developing a more exciting and meaningful curriculum is evident. Some imaginative and well thought out plans for developing generic skills across all subjects are in place. Alongside the extensive programme of visits, including residential visits which are viewed as an essential part of the school's provision, visitors and extra-curricular activities, the school's curriculum is rich in opportunity. The well-planned personal, social and health programme makes a strong contribution to pupils' personal development, and helps to ensure their emotional and social needs are well met.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school's commitment to pupils' academic and pastoral care is clearly evident. An ethos of care for the individual child is the touchstone for everything the school does. All staff have a good awareness of pupils' diverse needs and offer the right kind of support to aid both their emotional and social development as well as their academic learning. Procedures for ensuring pupils' safety and well-being are robust. All safeguarding and child protection procedures are fully in place. As a result, pupils feel safe and confident in the support of adults in the school.

The care for vulnerable pupils, those in the CAIRB unit and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is exemplary. Pupils say that one of the best things about the school is the teachers, and how they help them to achieve well. Teachers carefully check the progress of all pupils in termly assessments, and these are used well to support pupils at risk of underachievement as well as challenge others to do even better. Performance data are used with increasing confidence by all staff to provide challenging targets for improvement.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The vision and leadership of the headteacher and senior leaders are outstanding and have played a pivotal role in bringing about the significant improvement in standards and achievement since the last inspection. Parents are very appreciative of recent improvements made. Accurate and realistic self-evaluation, which involves all staff, is used well to identify where improvements are needed. Improvements have come about as a result of rigorous monitoring and effective systems for measuring pupils' progress by subject leaders, team leaders and the leadership team. Priorities for raising standards, especially in writing, are clearly outlined in the school improvement plan. Governors are well informed, reflective and very supportive. They have a clear understanding of the strengths of the school and make a valuable contribution to school development.

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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
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?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
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

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
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?	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?	2
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	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

13 June 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Castle Primary School, Tiverton, EX16 6QR

Thank you very much for the warm welcome you gave us when we visited your school recently. We were impressed with how friendly and polite you are and we enjoyed talking to you in lessons and around the school. I am pleased to tell you that you go to a good school.

Here are some of the things we found out.

?You really enjoy being in school because all the adults in the school look after you extremely well. ?All those who lead and manage your school want you to do your best and help you to do this. ?You make good progress in lessons and the work you do is at the standard expected for pupils of your age. ?You like all the different activities, trips and clubs you have at school and these widen your experience and make learning interesting. ?You have an excellent awareness of how important it is to eat a balanced diet and have plenty of exercise.

Here are some things we have asked the school to do to make things even better.

?To make sure that work in lessons is always planned to make you think hard and make even better progress. ?To help you to improve your writing skills.

It was lovely to meet you all and I know you will continue to work hard and enjoy school.

Yours sincerely

Howard Dodd Lead inspector

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- You make good progress in lessons and the work you do is at the standard expected for pupils of your age.
- You like all the different activities, trips and clubs you have at school and these widen your experience and make learning interesting.
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Lead inspector