

Caston Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	121111
Local Authority	Norfolk
Inspection number	313880
Inspection dates	9–10 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Penny Holden

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	67
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr James Paine
Headteacher	Mrs Leonie Smith
Date of previous school inspection	22 June 2004
School address	The Street Caston Attleborough Norfolk NR17 1DD
Telephone number	01953 483304
Fax number	01953 483149

Age group	4-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an additional inspector.

Description of the school

Caston Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary is a smaller than average-size school in a rural village in Norfolk. Most children enter school with skills and knowledge below those expected nationally. A below average proportion of pupils is eligible for free school meals. Pupils are predominantly of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is above average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Caston is a good school. This positive judgement is supported by the majority of parents. One parent wrote, 'My Year 6 child has been in the school since the beginning and has been always happy and enjoyed school. I am very happy with the progress made and the changes that have happened in the school to improve what it can offer the children.'

A major strength of the school is that all adults, including the site manager, play a full part in the life of the school and in supporting pupils' learning. Care and support are good. In class, teachers and teaching assistants work together very effectively, sharing ideas and strategies to support learning. The differing ways used to teach pupils are not shared with parents.

Pupils' achievement is good. There has been a consistent improvement with more pupils achieving the higher levels each year. Standards are now broadly in line with the national average although pupils do less well in science. Some parents of the oldest pupils are concerned that the stress of the work needed for the national tests has stopped pupils enjoying their last year at primary school. However, this is not the view expressed by most parents or pupils and the work in books shows interesting and imaginative activities, leading to positive responses and progress in achievement. The headteacher takes such concerns seriously and monitors pupils' personal development carefully.

Since the last inspection there has been considerable change in the school and many staff, including the headteacher, are different. Important improvements have been made to teaching and learning, and to the curriculum both in lessons and outside class. Teaching is good, and teachers plan very well to meet the needs of all pupils, using the expertise of teaching assistants fully. Interesting topics strengthen the curriculum, which is good. Many involve practical activities yet there is little practical work in science and the wildlife area is underused.

Personal development is good and pupils have excellent opportunities to take responsibility and contribute to the life of the school. Pupils are prefects, playground helpers and some run their own extra-curricular clubs. They take part in local fetes, providing dance displays and choirs and the netball team has been victorious this year to everyone's delight. However, there is little organised preparation in Year 6 for transfer to secondary school.

Leadership and management are good. Since the last inspection, the governing body has had to deal with extremely challenging staffing and leadership issues and have done so well. Targets and areas for improvement are appropriate and founded on good evidence. Work on the new extension to offer better Foundation Stage provision has begun, which is testimony to the governing body and headteacher's persistence through many obstacles, in driving this project forward.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Many children arrive at Caston with little pre-school experience, and they are just beginning to develop early learning skills. They make good progress although many do not reach the expected standards in mathematical development and communication, language and literacy by the end of Reception. The reading and writing ('synthetic phonics') programme, alongside the good teaching, are helping children make progress. They sing along with enthusiasm and join letters together on the interactive whiteboard to make letter blends. There are good, imaginative and interesting outdoor activities for children taking place each day. The building

work makes access to the outside difficult, but additional staff have been employed to accompany the children. A children's building site has been created, mirroring the real one and is giving them an excellent learning experience. Good planning and organisation ensure high quality intervention and appropriate Foundation Stage activities for the children whilst part of a mixed-aged class, covering three years.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make stronger links between knowledge and practical activities in science and, as part of this, exploit the wildlife area more consistently over the year.
- Share with parents the excellent strategies used to teach pupils, so that parents can better understand what is being done in class.
- Develop the programme for transition at the end of each key stage, especially between Key Stage 2 and secondary school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

This year there are 19 pupils in Year 6, last year there were 10 and next year there will be two. However, over the last three years, there has been a consistent improvement in standards, with more pupils every year gaining the higher levels in English and mathematics, although standards in science are still not high enough. Pupils start at the school with skills below those expected. By the time they leave, their standards are broadly average and in some aspects, such as reaching the higher than expected levels in writing at Key Stage 2, are better than the Norfolk average. Achievement is good, with many individuals making good progress. Pupils who find learning difficult make better progress than might be expected, with some reaching above average standards. The pupils who arrive at Caston mid-year or mid-key stage, sometimes after attending a variety of schools, take time to settle but go on to make good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development, including their social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is good. Children behave well and have very strong views when they feel others do not. Attendance is slightly better than average and punctuality is good; pupils rush into the playground at the start of the day eager to meet their friends and the staff. They take part enthusiastically in everything the school offers. Pupils can vividly recall every activity and the benefits they obtained from going on the annual residential visits. Pupils love taking responsibility. Some of the Year 6 pupils were very concerned that not all could be prefects, although they realised the impracticality of this, because nearly a third of all pupils in the school would have the role. Older pupils, very sensibly and productively, run clubs for other pupils. Pupils know well how to be safe and healthy. They delight in taking part in physical and sporting activities. 'Shake and wake' sessions are a part of every day. They enjoy their work, especially creative, practical and physical activities and the many clubs that they attend. They are extremely keen and willing to contribute to the community. The good skills they develop, alongside the opportunities they have for teamwork, to initiate ideas and take individual responsibility, prepare them well for their future lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teacher and teaching assistant teams work well, use very good teaching techniques to structure lessons, interest pupils and stimulate learning. They plan very well, with the only exception of practical science. Teachers share the objectives for what is to be learnt and how to recognise success very clearly with pupils. Paired work, and other strategies, help pupils to think and learn in a supportive and helpful fashion. The interactive whiteboards add a dimension to teaching and learning that broadens and enlivens teaching. The teaching and ongoing assessment of the oldest pupils, as shown in their exercise books, is excellent and takes pupils on to the next step in their learning. Staff know each pupil very well, which ensures that individual progress is maximised. Everyone works hard to ensure each child is included in and benefiting from the experience of being part of this school.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Interesting topics are chosen both for lessons and for the special one-day events, such as the design and technology project on marketing and packaging chocolate. All enliven and enrich the curriculum. Many topics combine subjects, which helps the pupils to understand what they are learning and makes them very enthusiastic about the content. However, there is little practical work in science for developing pupils' knowledge and the wildlife area is underused. Links with visits and outside speakers enhance the curriculum. Outside specialists, pupils, teachers and parents coordinate the unusually large choice of clubs on offer.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The headteacher and staff track pupils' progress systematically to make sure no individual falls behind. There are good procedures for promptly identifying any obstacles to progress and outlining appropriate ways of helping pupils. Year 6 pupils were particularly vocal about the support and effectiveness of the after-school Year 6 revision club, which almost all attended. They said the teacher tailored each of the sessions to their requests and helped them to fill gaps in their understanding, contributing well to their progress. Child protection and safeguarding procedures are robust and in line with current requirements. Pupils spend two or more years in a class with the same teacher and teaching assistant team. Year 6 pupils had not had many opportunities to visit their new schools and expressed concerns about the transfer. They felt unsure about what to expect in the schools they were going to and were relying too much on their siblings' accounts.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher, leadership team and governing body share their vision for a successful school. Since the arrival of the headteacher they have worked together well to make improvements where needed, especially in raising pupils' standards. There has been a steady rise in standards each year although they remain close to average rather than exceeding this. In this small school,

all members of staff take on multiple responsibilities. The headteacher has created an extremely effective leadership team, which is proactive and forward thinking. The headteacher has successfully prioritised developments in order to manage and consolidate progress and achieve lasting improvement. However, strategies used to teach pupils are not shared with parents. The school's self-evaluation is an accurate and helpful assessment of its performance. The issues raised in the last inspection have been addressed over a period during which there were serious difficulties in leadership and staffing. This provides good evidence that the school has capacity to improve further.

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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?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

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	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	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

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?	2

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 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

11 June 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Caston Church of England VA Primary School, Caston, NR17 1DD

Thank you so much for making me feel so welcome when I visited Caston. I spoke to many of you about your views of the school and hope you will see some of these reflected in my judgements.

You love coming to school and are always keen to join in and help others, by doing jobs, running clubs and taking part in activities. Those of you who are old enough to go on the school residential trips said you learnt a great deal from them, made new friends and developed new skills. You persuaded me that you are very healthy children, you know about eating sensibly, and you know how important it is to be active and take part in sport. Your successful netball team is good evidence of this. I liked the way you were all so enthusiastic about getting involved in work and in play.

Most of you have worked extremely hard and made good progress. Your teachers set interesting work to challenge and help you take the next steps in your learning. You have good writing skills and can write very interestingly for a wide range of reasons and in different styles.

You showed me how well you learn through practical activities, so I have asked the teachers to make sure that science lessons use experiments and activities to teach you scientific facts. Your parents generally know what you are taught but are not always sure how. I want them to have the opportunity to see the very clever ways your teachers use to organise lessons and help you learn.

As you spend several years in one class, I have asked the school to find ways of preparing you better for the change from one to the next, especially for those of you transferring to secondary school.

Thank you once again; I enjoyed my visit to your school.

Best wishes

Penny Holden

Lead inspector