

Castlefort Junior Mixed and Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104204
Local Authority	Walsall
Inspection number	323988
Inspection dates	25–26 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Bogusia Matusiak-Varley

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	225
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Steve Malen
Headteacher	Joanne Wilson
Date of previous school inspection	21 February 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Castlefort Road Walsall Wood Walsall WS9 9JP
Telephone number	01543 452158
Fax number	01543 452158

Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Nearly all of the pupils are from White British backgrounds. A very small minority of pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and this includes those with related speech and language, hearing impairment and behavioural difficulties. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are taught in a separate Nursery and a Reception class. The headteacher has only been in post for five months. The school is in receipt of Activemark and the Healthy Schools award. There is a Castlefort JMI before and after school club which operates on the site and was inspected separately.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school offers a satisfactory quality of education for its pupils. The newly appointed headteacher has taken significant action to ensure that the correct focus has been placed on raising standards and improving teaching and learning. The school's internal data show that standards are rising but there is still a lot to be done to develop consistency of approaches in order to bring about even faster rates of improvement. Teaching and learning are satisfactory with good and outstanding practice seen in Years 2 and 6 where the best learning takes place. There are, nevertheless, inconsistencies in teaching, especially in Years 4 and 5. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the headteacher. 'She is making marked changes to the school,' and, 'We are seen as important in our children's learning,' are typical comments from very pleased parents.

Whilst standards are broadly average and pupils' achievements are satisfactory, they are inconsistent. Sound skills in literacy, numeracy, and information and communication technology (ICT) ensure that pupils are adequately prepared for the next stages in their education. The best rates of progress are in Years 2 and 6 where highly focused teaching results in good learning. Across the school, progress is good in speaking and listening and reading, and is improving in mathematics, but pupils' achievement in writing and experimental and investigative science, whilst satisfactory, needs improving, especially for more capable pupils. Generally, all groups of pupils make satisfactory progress, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. However, more capable pupils sometimes mark time because teachers do not always use data from assessment to plan tasks to meet pupils' needs. Provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage is satisfactory. Children enter school with skills that are below those expected nationally, especially in speaking and listening, writing, problem solving, reasoning and numeracy. Their achievement is satisfactory but they do not reach the expected standards on entry to Year 1, other than in personal, social and emotional development, where achievement is good.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. This is because of good care, guidance and support. Pastoral care is especially strong and there are plenty of opportunities within the satisfactory curriculum to develop their knowledge of citizenship and community links. Pupils have good knowledge about healthy lifestyles and how to keep safe. They know right from wrong, develop secure team-building skills and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Steps taken to promote community cohesion are satisfactory, but pupils' knowledge of the many faiths and cultures found in multicultural Britain is less secure. Their knowledge of international awareness is satisfactory. Attendance is improving and is broadly satisfactory due to the targeted support parents receive from the headteacher and home-school link worker.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher has won the hearts and minds of staff, parents and pupils but her clear vision for the school cannot yet be fully implemented because of weaknesses in the monitoring and evaluation skills among senior leaders. As a consequence, there is an inequitable distribution of responsibilities among the most senior leaders which limits the implementation of change and subsequently pupils' progress. Some middle leaders are new to their posts and have not yet been trained in monitoring the impact of provision on outcomes. Governance is satisfactory. Governors fulfil their statutory duties and have good knowledge of the school's strengths and areas for development. Self-evaluation is realistic and accurate, and the correct strategies have been identified to implement change.

The recent good progress in speaking and listening and reading demonstrates the school's satisfactory capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Children settle quickly because of good induction procedures, a warm, welcoming atmosphere and good resources for learning. Throughout their time in the Early Years Foundation Stage, children make satisfactory progress due to sound teaching and learning, and start Year 1 with standards just below those expected of most children of this age nationally. Children make good progress in personal, social and emotional development. These good gains secure foundations for good behaviour and attitudes as children move up the school. Whilst staff track children's achievement, assessment information is not used sufficiently well to ensure that all children, especially more capable children, make as much progress as they can, especially in early writing skills. Parents are made welcome and they are fully involved in their children's learning. Children are well looked after by a caring staff who make learning fun. Welfare requirements are fully met and children work in a safe environment which contributes to their good progress. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Relationships are good and the uniqueness of each child is valued.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards throughout the school, in writing and experimental and investigative science, by ensuring that information from assessment is more effectively used to match tasks to pupils' needs, especially for more capable pupils.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning, especially in Years 4 and 5, so that all pupils make good progress.
- Provide more opportunities for pupils to learn about the different faiths and cultures of multicultural Britain.
- Develop the role of senior leaders, so that they can help the headteacher implement her vision more quickly, by developing their skills of monitoring and evaluation, and by ensuring that they have an equitable distribution of responsibilities.

A small proportion of schools whose overall effectiveness is judged as satisfactory, but which have areas of underperformance, will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before the next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards are average by the end of Year 2 and Year 6, and pupils' achievement is satisfactory. The recent good progress in speaking and listening, reading and mathematics is attributable to the headteacher's good monitoring of teaching and learning and overall strong focus on raising standards. Progress is satisfactory but is patchy throughout the school and ranges from being unsatisfactory to outstanding. The best rates of progress are in Years 2 and 6 where teaching is at least good. In 2008 national tests, whilst standards were broadly average, too few pupils attained the higher levels. This is still the case in some classes. Standards in writing and experimental and investigative science, whilst improving, are still not high enough, especially for more capable pupils. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make similar progress to their peers but sometimes, in lessons, they lag behind because tasks set for them do not reflect their targets. They pick up speed when working individually with teaching assistants on

their specific targets. In Year 1, girls' underachievement, as identified by national tests, has been tackled through better reading resources, more focused questioning and secure teaching of guided reading.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The school ensures that pupils thrive in a secure environment. It has rigorous procedures to ensure pupils' safety. In the playground and around the school, pupils behave well. They are courteous, polite, hold doors open for adults and eagerly talk about the changes the headteacher has made. 'We went "wow" when we saw our newly painted classroom, it's nicer for learning,' said one very happy pupil. Pupils carry out their duties well. The older ones look after the younger ones and pupils' contribution to both the school and local community is good. The music of the orchestra enhances many social occasions. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory, but their knowledge of the wider community, especially multicultural Britain, is not that strong. Pupils run mini enterprises and through such activities they develop important skills for life. However, their skills of independent learning are not sufficiently well developed. Some good examples of independent research skills were seen, however, in Year 6 where pupils developed their own lines of enquiry around the Tudors in history and the rivers in geography. Pupils know their targets and this is helping them improve their work.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Pupils' learning is satisfactory. Teachers mark work regularly but some do not give sufficient guidance as to how pupils can improve their work and do not expect enough of them. In the best lessons in this school, tasks are matched to pupils' needs and expectations are very clear, resulting in pupils feeling very secure in their learning. In an outstanding mathematics lesson on probability in Year 6, the teacher checked pupils' understanding by encouraging them to apply their knowledge to many different situations. This enabled the pupils to have a strong grasp of the mathematical concepts. Where teaching is less successful, teachers do not plan tasks to build on prior learning and do not expect enough of their pupils. As a result, pupils, especially the more capable, do not always make the progress that they are capable of.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Enjoyment of learning is most evident in the good range of extra-curricular activities, visits and visitors to school. The curriculum is broad and many opportunities are provided for pupils to learn from first-hand experiences. Pupils enjoy French and Spanish and talk very enthusiastically about their visits and residential experiences. The school encourages pupils to live healthy and active lifestyles and pupils participate in a good range of sports activities. Inconsistencies in planning prevent pupils from consistently developing their literacy, numeracy and ICT skills in other subjects. Too often, opportunities are missed to develop pupils' skills of extended writing and this limits pupils' progress. Good provision for pupils' personal, social and health education contributes to pupils' good personal development and well-being.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils thrive because of the good care, guidance and support that they receive from all adults. 'You can always go to someone for help when you need it,' said one member of the school council. Staff are vigilant and know immediately if something is wrong. The school is a very caring community, and pupils' needs and well-being are at the core of the school's work. Pastoral care is of a high quality. All aspects of safeguarding meet requirements and appropriate policies are adhered to. Academic guidance is variable, but is satisfactory overall. Assessments of pupils are not always well used to help them make better progress. Recent initiatives to improve the use of targets for pupils are helping pupils improve their work. The school is a safe environment and all health and safety checks are regularly undertaken. 'This is a very caring school. You just know that your children will be well looked after,' said one delighted parent.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher has made all the right decisions in moving the school forward, drawing well on the support of the local authority. Good links with external agencies have been established. School self-evaluation is accurate and the school has a realistic view of the quality of education it provides. As a result, the priorities for development are the right ones to move the school forward. Governors are both knowledgeable and supportive and have information from the headteacher on which to evaluate provision. They are clear about what needs to be done to drive up standards and hold the school to account for pupils' learning. The recently introduced tracking system for pupils' progress has enabled the headteacher to highlight any pockets of underperformance, and satisfactorily supports the promotion of equal opportunities for all. Nevertheless, progress on school improvement is not as fast as it could be because of weaknesses in the senior leadership team, and particularly their skills of monitoring and evaluation for implementation of the headteacher's vision.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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?	3
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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	3
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	3
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	3
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	3

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which 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	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
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

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

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Castlefort Junior Mixed and Infant School, Walsall, WS9 9JP

Thank you for making us feel so welcome when we visited your school. Your school provides you with a satisfactory quality of education. Your new headteacher is making many changes to ensure that you make even better progress in learning.

Here are some positive aspects of your school.

- You attain average levels in English, mathematics and science and your achievement is satisfactory overall.
- You make good progress in speaking and listening and reading.
- Those of you in the Early Years Foundation Stage make good gains in personal, social and emotional development and this contributes to good behaviour seen around the school.
- You have good relationships with one another and with your teachers.
- You know your targets for improvement and this helps you with your learning.
- You participate well in a good range of extra-curricular activities, especially sports, and you know about how to stay healthy and keep safe.
- Your attendance is improving - well done!

We have asked your headteacher and staff to do four things to make your school even better.

- Help you make better progress in writing and experimental and investigative science. You can help by ensuring your targets are reflected in your writing and by asking for more opportunities to set up your own experiments in science.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning in Years 4 and 5. You can help by asking your teachers for harder work when you need it.
- Provide more opportunities for you to learn about different cultures. You can help by asking questions and finding out about different faiths and cultures in Britain.
- Ask those teachers with leadership responsibilities to make the school even better by helping your headteacher to make the necessary changes. You can help by telling the headteacher and the senior leaders your opinions on what is, and what is not, working.

Please thank your parents for all of the questionnaires that they returned. Best wishes to you all for the future.

Yours sincerely Bogusia Matusiak-Varley

Lead inspector