

The Castle Children's Centre (and Nursery School)

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	132014
Local Authority	Wakefield
Inspection number	328662
Inspection dates	25–26 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Jane Hughes

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

Type of school	Nursery
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	3–5
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	76
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ms Dawn Sketchley
Headteacher	Ms Kathy Stevens
Date of previous school inspection	16 January 2006
School address	255 Barnsley Road Wakefield West Yorkshire WF1 5NU
Telephone number	01924 303 213
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Age group	3–5
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Castle Nursery School is part of the Castle Children's Centre. It caters for children of three and four years of age and is open term-time only. There are up to 80 part-time maintained Nursery places and children come from a mixed economic and social area. The proportion of children who speak languages other than English at home is broadly average but continues to grow as the number of eastern European and African immigrants moving into the relatively settled Asian community increases. The school has been an Investor in People since 2002.

The Children's Centre was redesignated in 2005, having been an Early Excellence Centre, and previously a combined Centre, since 1991. As well as the Nursery, there is day-care provision which is open from 08.00 to 18.00, 50 weeks per year, excluding all statutory Bank Holidays. There is also a separate crèche facility with up to 16 places to support adults attending the centre. Drop in, family, targeted and individual support groups for parents, carers and families, as well as a range of health and family support services, work from the centre. The extended services did not form part of this inspection.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This outstanding Nursery provides children with memorable first experiences that set them firmly on the path to lifelong learning. Parents are glowing in their praise, with comments such as, 'absolutely delighted', 'provides a superb starting point', and, 'can't fault it'. The head of centre and other senior leaders promote all aspects of children's learning, development and welfare equally impressively. Irrespective of its already outstanding status, the driven leadership continues to improve every aspect of the school. This determined lack of complacency, coupled with the clear strides the Nursery has made since its last inspection, reflects its outstanding capacity to improve further.

From starting points well below those typical for their age, children make impressive progress. By the time they leave for Reception classes elsewhere, children reach the levels expected for their age and some children attain beyond these. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities do equally well as staff assess their needs before they join the school, either at home or with the help of information from day-care staff and other professionals who work closely with the Children's Centre. These early interventions are vital in the careful match of support programmes to children's individual needs. Bilingual staff support children and families who speak languages other than English at home and these children make rapid progress in their communication skills. More able children benefit from equally effective, bespoke support programmes so that activities offer enough challenge to move their learning on quickly.

Consistently, first-class provision ensures that children do as well as possible in terms of their learning and development. Highly skilled early years' practitioners prepare activities that stimulate young children's interest and curiosity and help them to engage fully in their learning. Continual questioning by adults throughout the Nursery is central to the successful strategies children employ with regard to problem solving, although adults sometimes miss opportunities to introduce mathematical problems when the occasion arises. All adults pay excellent attention to children's safety, health and well-being and children thrive as a result. Meticulous tracking of children's progress enables staff to tailor learning to the individual needs of each child which helps them to do as well as possible. Parents sum up the feeling of many with comments such as, 'The staff are to be highly praised for all their hard work, time and patience'.

Children's behaviour, attitudes and response to adults' consistently high expectations are exemplary. They agree that they like coming to Nursery and their feedback was extremely positive in a recent survey. Children reinforce their knowledge of how to eat healthily and enjoy growing, picking and cooking some of the food served at lunchtime. They are keen to take responsibility for small tasks and listen carefully to instructions. They reinforce their basic skills and so build a firm foundation for their future education and success. Above all, they enjoy school. One girl illustrated the happy atmosphere in school as she danced and sang in the cloakroom, 'If you're happy and you know it, clap your hands!'

Conscientious and energetic governors provide the school with extensive support and the stimulus to keep improving. As a result, the head of centre and deputy headteacher are able to focus clearly on the services provided and children's learning. They leave no stone unturned in an ongoing effort to engage as many people from the local community as possible. Leaders demonstrate unwavering attention to community cohesion, to equality of opportunity and to eliminating discrimination. They show an excellent understanding of local diversity of need and culture and ensure that the school provides a haven for parents and community members who

seek support. Since the last inspection, the school has maintained and increased its community links and partnerships. For example, fathers now come in for special 'dads' days' and marvel at the opportunity these offer for productive play and learning with their children.

What the school should do to improve further

- Provide children with even more opportunities to count and calculate during their everyday activities.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Children join Nursery with skills well below those typical for their age. Increasingly, children are not toilet trained when they arrive, have minimal mathematical, reading or creative skills and very little knowledge and understanding of the world.

They make particularly good progress in their social and communication skills due to the success of specific programmes put in place by the school. Girls and boys achieve equally well as the staff are careful to provide a wide range of appealing and practical activities. Children's attainment is rising as the assessment tools the school use now provide a far more detailed picture of children's strengths and weaknesses. Appropriate support programmes mean that all children, whatever their particular individual needs or backgrounds, do exceptionally well during their short time at the Nursery. Most reach the levels expected for their ages and some attain beyond these, particularly in aspects of their personal, language, mathematical and physical development.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Children settle quickly and behave beautifully as they respond to the praise or gentle admonishment of adults who expect nothing less than the best from them. Parents comment, 'The school has changed my child's behaviour so much'. Staff encourage children to make decisions and solve problems such as how two children could make hot cross buns at the same time when there was only one ball of dough. The children thought about this very carefully then one suggested that they push the dough to the centre of the table. After further prompting, they decided it would be better to cut the dough in half. Children's excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development ensures that the Nursery is harmonious and orderly. Children treat one another with respect and are sensitive to the needs of others. One boy selflessly allowed a girl to take a turn with his bucket in the sand tray. She was delighted and started shovelling in the sand, but then realised that he had nothing to play with. She stopped, handed him back the half full bucket and said, 'We can take turns'. Children have a strong awareness of how to eat healthily and to look after their teeth. They serve themselves snacks, choose where to play and which resources to use. They have an increasing awareness of different cultures and record on a world map where all the children in the Nursery were born. They thoroughly enjoy celebrating festivals such as Eid and learning about different countries and their foods.

Quality of provision

Effectiveness in promoting children's learning and development

Grade: 1

Each session is a voyage of excited discovery for the children. They gravitate towards a wide range of activities that capture their imagination. One boy delighted in squishing his hands in the pink-streaked shaving foam and just enjoyed the feeling. He lifted his hands and squealed, 'Look! My hands look like a marsh, a marshy, a marshmallow!' Adults promote children's learning through a constant dialogue that develops their speaking and listening skills and raises their self-esteem. Very occasionally, adults miss opportunities to extend children's numeracy skills still further through complementary counting or calculating activities. Staff and children laugh and marvel together at all the revelations children experience during each session, such as watching the activities of the growing chicks. The learning environment is bright and welcoming. Whether indoors or outside, children find worthwhile activities that add to their learning. At any one time, children may be outside stirring 'twig soup' in the wigwam den, beating out a tune on different percussion instruments, reading about kitchen equipment or flying colourful streamers. Indoors, they may be kneading dough, learning to make different patterns on the interactive whiteboard or role-playing at the vets or in the home corner. Wherever they are, they are within earshot of affirmative adult support, light-hearted laughter and continuous challenge. These three qualities help the Nursery to be so successful in engaging children and turning them into eager learners.

Effectiveness in promoting children's welfare

Grade: 1

First-class communication with parents and day-care staff ensure that children settle quickly. Similarly, well developed academic and pastoral links with local primary schools enable the older children to move on to full-time education with minimal anxiety. All adults are highly caring of the children. Welfare requirements are fully met. Safeguarding procedures are in place and meet current government requirements. Health and safety systems are secure and known to staff and children. Ancillary staff ensure that all areas of the Nursery are clean and bright. Key workers are diligent in the care they offer to children and provide detailed written and verbal feedback to parents. Parents typically say, 'Staff treat the children as if they are their own'. Adults meet daily to discuss children's achievements, activities and responses and to share the many observations they make, both formally and informally. As a result, there are accurate records of what children know, understand and can do. Adults plan carefully from these observations in order for each child to do as well as they can. Staff promote with great success children's attendance, good behaviour, health, hygiene and safety throughout their time at the setting.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Teamwork of the highest quality is at the heart of the Nursery's success. The head of centre and the deputy headteacher, as head of early learning, promote a strong vision and ensure that Early Years provision develops continuously. A stable staff team means that practitioners build on good practice and make sure that they develop their already high quality skills. Parental

involvement is highly valued. Leaders take close account of parents' views and change practice to meet parents' requests whenever practicable. For example, there are improved 'new starter' meetings now and weekly lunch menus are on display. After a recent consultation meeting, a new 'By Parents 4 Parents' group has formed. Parents present overwhelming positive views of the school. They clearly hold the setting and its staff in the highest regard. They confirm that, 'Staff go out of their way to make parents involved and part of the learning process with your child'. When governors asked for parental feedback on what they would like to improve, a common reaction was, 'I can't think of anything negative to say – and I've tried really hard!' Governors are highly effective in their role and provide support and challenge in equal measure. They are key motivators for change and improvement. Governors evaluate how they could do better and have a crystal clear understanding of the impact of their work as well as the school's priorities. There are excellent links, through the Children's Centre, with other early years providers, local primary schools and with an extensive range of outside agencies. They all offer high quality support to children and families.

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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 is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children?	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
The extent to which 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 effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	1
How effectively is the welfare of the children in the EYFS promoted?	1

Leadership and management

How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	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 eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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

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

Thank you for talking to me when I came to your Nursery. I saw how much you all love listening to stories at your 'bus stops' every day, so I have written a very short story about what I found out about your Nursery. I have highlighted some of the sounds the older children are learning – see if you can hear some of them when your teachers read this out.

'Along the b-b-busy road, near the railway bridge, there is a Nursery. You can find it easily – just follow the sound of children s-s-singing! The children who go there are very lucky. They go there every day and it is a very, very, very good Nursery. The children are so happy when they arrive, they smile at the teachers and rush in to p-p-play. There is so much to choose from. They 'cook soup' in the den outside or make sparkly Easter eggs indoors. They know that eating fruity snacks or s-s-spaghetti for lunch helps to keep them healthy and they run around and climb, slide and jump to keep fit. They practise all the sounds they need to speak properly and the older children can recognise 'b-b for bat' and 'r-r for rabbit'. And guess what? They make 'silly soup' with all the sounds in it! All the children do really well at the Nursery and behave beautifully. They are very kind, help each other, and share toys.

So much happens at this Nursery that it is difficult for the children to stop playing when it's time for them to go h-h-home. Their parents are h-h-happy too because the teachers tell them what their children are doing. In future, the teachers are going to make sure that they ask the children more questions about numbers so the children get even better at counting and doing sums'.

I hope that you aren't missing the chicks too much now that they have left and that the sick animals at the vet are feeling better after all the injections you gave them!

Carry on having great fun and learning lots at Nursery.