

INSPECTION REPORT

CASTLETHORPE FIRST SCHOOL

Castlethorpe, Milton Keynes

LEA area: Milton Keynes

Unique reference number: 110213

Headteacher: Mrs. G.E. Morris

Reporting inspector: Mrs. B. Iles
12000

Dates of inspection: 22nd January to 24th January, 2001

Inspection number: 197639
Full inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	First School
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	4 to 8 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	North Street Castlethorpe Milton Keynes Bucks.
Postcode:	MK19 7EW
Telephone number:	01908 510342
Fax number:	01908 510342
Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	David Shepherd
Date of previous inspection:	23/09/1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
12000	Brenda Iles	Registered inspector	English Science Art and design Design and technology Music Religious education Equal opportunities	What should the school do to improve further The schools' results and achievements How well are the pupils taught How well is the school led and managed
9003	Bryan Findley	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development How well does the school care for its pupils How well the school work in partnership with parents
20350	Vivien Davies	Team inspector	Mathematics Information and communication technology Geography History Physical education Foundation stage Areas of learning for the under fives Special educational needs	How good are curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils

The inspection contractor was:

SES

6 Star Corner
Barby
Rugby
CV23 8UD

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Alexandra House
33 Kingsway

London WC2B 6SE

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Castlethorpe Primary School is situated in the village of Castlethorpe close to Milton Keynes. The majority of pupils live in the surrounding area although a proportion attend the school from outside the reserved area as the school grows in popularity. Most families live in owner occupied housing and a higher proportion of parents than usual have higher education qualifications. Pupils are usually admitted to the reception class at the start of the term in which they become five. Attainment on entry is above the local average in language and mathematics.

Forty-seven girls and boys aged from four to eight attend the school, which is much smaller than usual. Eleven children were in the reception year at the time of the inspection. No pupils take free school meals and there are no pupils attending the school who come from backgrounds beyond Europe. Seven pupils are on the register of special educational needs, which is below average, and there are no pupils with statements of special educational need.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

The school provides a good quality of education and its strengths outweigh the few weaknesses. Good teaching enables pupils to make steady progress and achieve standards that are well above average in English and above average in mathematics and science by the ages of seven and eight. The very good understanding of the needs of the local community enables pupils to benefit from strong relationships that support partnership in learning very effectively. The school is well led and managed and provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- Standards in literacy are well above average and in numeracy they are above average.
- Teaching of the youngest pupils in the reception and Year 1 class is very good.
- There is a clear direction for school improvement and strong partnership between the headteacher, staff and governors.
- The caring ethos promotes high attendance levels and very positive attitudes to learning.
- The curriculum supports teaching and learning well.

What could be improved

- Provision for information and communication technology does not support teaching and learning well enough to enable standards to be raised further.
- The presentation of work is careless and untidy in Years 2 and 3.

The areas for improvement will form the basis of the governors' action plan.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in September 1997. Since then, standards in English have improved, the quality of teaching is better and the curriculum, which was not well developed, now supports teaching and learning well for all age groups. Good progress has been made in addressing the weaknesses highlighted in the last inspection; the school improvement plan identifies clearly the priorities for improvement and monitoring arrangements are effective, improvements to the accommodation have enhanced provision and the school is now bright and attractive. The best use is made of staff expertise and supporting adults to enhance learning and subjects such as design and technology are now strengths.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by seven-year-olds based on average point scores in National Curriculum tests.

Performance in:	Compared with				Key
	All schools			Similar schools	
	1998	1999	2000	2000	
Reading	A	A*	A	B	Well above average A Above average B
Writing	A*	A	A	B	Average C Below average D
Mathematics	A	B	B	D	Well below average E

Results over the last four years show that pupils usually achieve standards that are well above those of most schools. When compared to similar schools pupils' performance is above average in reading and writing and below average in mathematics. Variations in achievements between subjects have been analysed and show that a significant proportion of pupils expected to reach the higher levels narrowly missed achieving the grade. In small year groups (twelve last year) one pupil's performance can alter the letter grade and hence they are not reliable indicators of changes in the school's performance from year to year or of variations between subjects.

Inspection evidence shows that the standards attained by seven and eight-year-olds are well above average in reading, writing and science and above average in mathematics. Standards in art and design, history, geography, design and technology and music are above average and in information and communication technology, physical education and religious education they are in line with age-related expectations. Most children finish the foundation stage of their learning with above average attainment and, up to the end of Year 3, make good progress measured against their prior attainment. Pupils with special educational needs also make good progress.

Weaknesses in the presentation of work detract from the high levels of knowledge and understanding evident in discussion, displays and final drafts. While standards in information and communication technology are about average they could be higher and current provision does not support faster rates of learning well enough.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils like school and have very positive attitudes to learning.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Pupils are well behaved.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships are strong and personal development is good.
Attendance	Attendance is very good

The care shown to pupils is of a high standard. The good relationships and the commitment to make learning enjoyable and to encourage pupils to attain their best foster enthusiastic and effective learners with an ambition to succeed. Pupils love school and attendance is very good.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Aged up to 5 years	Aged 5-7 years	Aged 7-8 years
Lessons seen overall	Very good	Good	Good

Inspectors make judgements about teaching in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. 'Satisfactory' means that the teaching is adequate and strengths outweigh weaknesses.

The teaching of five and six-year-olds is consistently very good. Lively enthusiasm and interesting activities motivate children and learning is exciting. Examples of very good teaching were also observed in the teaching of music. Just over a third of all lessons are very good, a further third are good and the remainder are satisfactory. Literacy and numeracy are taught well. Good subject expertise and knowledge of pupils support learning well in mixed age classes. Pupils with special educational needs receive good support.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum is of good quality and offers a balanced programme of learning opportunities in all subjects.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Provision is good.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Provision for moral development is very good; for spiritual, social and cultural development it is good.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Care is very good and a significant strength of the school.

The very good partnership with parents supports pupils' learning well. There have been good improvements in the development of the curriculum since the last inspection and the national strategies for literacy and numeracy have been implemented effectively. Progress in developing information and communication technology has been slower than expected because of resource issues beyond the school's control. The curriculum for reception aged children is effectively planned and provides challenging learning opportunities. The care

taken to support the needs of individual pupils is a strength of the school. Targets are set to challenge pupils and all staff provide very good role models to promote positive values, self-esteem and care and consideration for others.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher provides good leadership. Staff work as a committed team to improve standards.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors provide very good support and are fully involved in the life of the school. There is a clear direction for the school's work.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school monitors and evaluates standards and uses the information to identify strengths and priorities for development.
The strategic use of resources	Funds are applied appropriately to support priorities and the principles of best value are understood and applied well.

Good use is made of the strengths and expertise of staff to support the delivery of the curriculum. The programme of improvements to the building make the best use of available resources and every effort has been made to make local arrangements to address the lack of a school hall and field. The school library is very small and does not enable older groups of pupils to undertake independent research. There is no appropriate access to the playground to support the physical development of reception-aged children. The principles of best value are understood and applied well.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their children like school and achieve high standards. • The good quality of teaching • The information they receive about their children's progress • They feel comfortable to talk to staff and value the close partnership that is encouraged. • The effectiveness of the leadership and management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some parents would like more after school clubs.

Parents are very happy with almost all aspects of the school's work. Parents feel the school does not provide a broad enough range of extra-curricular activities. In a very small school such as this, the range of activities which enhance the curriculum are carefully planned to include visits, visitors to the school and two lunchtime clubs. Pupils take part in local festivals and celebrations to represent their school and, in addition, there is an after school club which is well attended and supports the needs of the community well. This range exceeds that of most first schools of a similar size.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

THE SCHOOL'S RESULTS AND PUPILS' ACHIEVEMENTS

1. National Curriculum test results for pupils aged seven in 2000 show achievements were well above average in reading and writing and above average in mathematics. According to statutory teacher assessments standards in science were also very high. Trends over time show the school performs consistently higher than schools nationally. When results are compared to schools with similar entitlement to free school meals, achievements are above average in reading and writing but below average in mathematics.
2. The proportions of pupils attaining the higher levels were also well above average in writing and above average in reading. Fewer pupils achieved the higher levels in mathematics. This is mainly due to minor variations in individual pupil's performance in tests between subjects. In small cohorts such as these each pupil represents over eight per cent of the school's marks. Hence, one more or less pupils who is highly able or who has special educational needs, or even a substantial variation in the proportion of girls and boys can readily change the letter grade. Consequently, comparisons of contiguous years or between subjects should be treated with great caution. However, the school has analysed its results carefully and has taken further steps to promote high achievement. For example, with its encouragement the local authority has monitored mathematics lessons and the implementation of the numeracy strategy has been reviewed. Minor aspects for improvement have been addressed. Teaching is good and the analysis of pupils' work currently in Year 2 and Year 3 shows standards are similar to those of the test results and all pupils achieve at least the expected levels. A difference in the level of parental support was identified between English and mathematics. While support for reading and writing was well established parents were less sure how to help their children in mathematics. As a result the school organised mathematics evenings for parents and the successful and well-established strategies used to support reading and writing have been applied to mathematics. Parents are involved in helping their children to achieve precise learning targets and say they have valued the information they have received to develop this approach to homework. The partnership between home and school enhances learning and supports pupils to achieve their best.
3. The school is eager to raise standards. The practice of monitoring the progress of groups of pupils in relation to local baseline assessment is in the early stages of development. This data has not been available for a long enough period to support the school to extend their existing good practice. This is a minor issue for development.
4. Progress is supported by teaching which is at least of good quality. Pupils are appropriately challenged and the issue of underachievement of more able pupils raised in the last report has been addressed successfully. Standards of pupils currently in Year 2 are well above average in speaking, listening, reading and writing and above average in mathematics and science. These standards show good improvement in English and the maintenance of standards in mathematics and science since the previous report.

5. Inspection evidence shows that standards are well above average in almost all aspects of English by the ages of seven and eight because teachers have good subject knowledge and expertise and the literacy strategy has been implemented effectively. Pupils are articulate and use well-formed sentences and a rich range of descriptive vocabulary from the earliest stages of their education. Teachers introduce pupils to precise subject vocabulary that they are then expected to use. Consequently pupils use terms such as 'flexibility' and 'phoneme' in their discussions. Pupils benefit from many interesting and varied opportunities to read books and write for different purposes. Their knowledge of authors and styles of writing is a strength. Seven-year-olds describe how adjectives increase the complexity and interest of sentences. By the age of eight pupils refer to features of text, they enjoy giving reasons for their preferences and describe with enthusiasm their enjoyment of 'Harry Potter' books by J.K.Rowling and how her writing differs from that of Michael Morpurgo. They write for a wide range of purposes including poems, letters stories and reports. Pupils understand that labelled diagrams are helpful in science investigations and that clear directions are important in design and technology. They are proud of their school poetry book and keen to read their work in assemblies. Spelling shows a high level of accuracy with good use made of phonics to attempt difficult or new words independently. The use of punctuation is also well above that of most seven and eight-year-olds. Handwriting is mainly joined. In final drafts it is neat and legible but exercise books are frequently untidy and this detracts from pupils creative ideas, use of language and knowledge and understanding. Those who have learning difficulties achieve well because they are well supported by classroom assistants and every effort is made to include pupils in lessons.
6. Pupils love reading for pleasure and for information. They explain the purpose of their writing and understand how punctuation can be used to command the reader's attention, for example the use of exclamation marks and inverted commas. They understand that films about books they have read do not always accurately reflect the author's writing. The ability to reason and present views and opinions is well developed. Pupils' understanding of the links between speaking, listening reading and writing are reflected in the way they articulate their knowledge skills and understanding. This is a strength that underpins learning across the curriculum and exceeds that of most eight-year-olds. There are, however, some occasions when their exuberance leads to calling out and interruptions in their desire to contribute their own views. These achievements are the outcome of good teaching, good partnership with parents and the successful implementation of the literacy strategy. This high standard of literacy supports pupils' learning in other subjects well.
7. By the age of seven pupils express great interest in science. They describe and classify materials, and know how forces affect objects, for example by pushing and pulling on different surfaces. Eight-year-olds describe the difference between man made and natural materials indicating the best purposes for use and degrees of flexibility and hardness. Pupils also know that substances can be changed by heating and cooling and describe the changes they have observed when melting ice and adding milk to cereals. They make comparisons of outcomes of their investigations, and understand how to carry out a fair test. They describe the process of predicting, testing and comparing conclusions. Pupils of all ages use scientific vocabulary well. By the end of Year 1 pupils name the parts of flowering plants and understand that the roots take water to the plant. They also know that too much or too little water can adversely affect plant growth.
8. In mathematics, the numeracy strategy has been implemented successfully and pupils are particularly adept in applying the four rules of number. This aspect of mathematics is taught very well to younger pupils and results in pupils confidently working with numbers to 20 by the age of six. The use of games to encourage swift mental recall is an effective strategy that supports learning well for five and six-year-olds.

9. Pupils in Year 2 cope well with counting numbers in tens and hundreds and higher and have a secure understanding of addition and subtraction, multiplication and division. By the age of eight, pupils double and add and know about the connections between the four rules of number. The targets set by teachers to focus on precise areas to develop supports pupils learning well. Pupils' ability to use and apply their skills show good improvement, and pupils understand how they can use graphs and tables to record the results of their investigations.
10. Pupils with special educational needs are well supported through individual education plans that specify precise targets for learning. Work is planned to provide reinforcement, secure success and enable pupils to recognise the progress they are making. The very good adult support they receive encourages confidence to achieve and pupils make good progress in relation to their prior attainment. Good progress has been made in addressing the needs of more able pupils. They are set challenging targets which enable them to achieve higher standards.
11. Standards achieved by pupils in information and communication technology (ICT) are broadly in line with those expected nationally at the ages of seven and eight. However, the school is aiming for higher standards. Circumstances beyond the school's control in implementing the national grid for learning (NGfL) has hindered progress but new equipment is now ready and training for staff planned. However, pupils could achieve more than they do at the present time and this is a key issue for the school to address. Pupils use a limited range of software to support their learning. For example, in a history lesson pupils used a program to research facts about trains in Victorian Britain but had some difficulty in accessing information. They know how to control the mouse, word process and design and print labels for their displays. By the age of eight pupils have a good understanding of the benefits of ICT in daily life but their skills are less well developed due to the limited access they have had to computers until recently.
12. Standards in religious education continue to meet the expectations of the locally agreed syllabus. Younger pupils understand the main Christian festivals and are aware of other world faiths. They are aware that Jesus was a "special person" and that the Bible tells stories of life before and after his birth. Pupils develop awareness and respect for different points of view. This was evident when pupils compared the practices and beliefs of world faiths with Christianity through the Ghanaian project. Pupils understand the importance of symbols, for example, the use of water as a symbol of life at baptism and light at Christmas and Divali.
13. Standards in art and design, design and technology, history, geography and music are above average and in physical education they match age-related expectations. This shows good improvement since the school was last inspected when standards were sound. Overall, measured against their prior attainment, pupils make good progress by the age of eight in all these subjects. The school has limited facilities to support physical education but makes good use of the local village hall and field. Standards in swimming exceed those of most seven and eight-year-olds and the school has made significant efforts to provide opportunities to extend skills in aspects of the subjects that would not usually be taught at this stage.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES, VALUES AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

14. Pupils' attitudes to their schooling are very good. They busily organise themselves on arrival and are soon settled in the classroom ready for the start of the day. Pupils then participate in activities with eager involvement and take a pride in their achievement as was seen in music and science lessons. Almost all parents feel their children like being at school.

15. Behaviour is now good and has improved since the last inspection. There is a clear understanding of codes of conduct and pupils have been involved in agreeing class rules. The positive role models presented by staff set a good example for pupils to follow. Pupils are motivated by the awards they get for being good and there is little need for sanctions beyond a gentle reminder about how to behave. The weakest area of behaviour is seen in a few of the older pupils who interrupt others during discussions in their eagerness to give their own opinions, for example in literacy and numeracy sessions. There are also occasional emotional tantrums when a very small number of younger pupils find it hard to wait their turn. This behaviour is managed with firm insistence and reinforcement of the agreed school rules. Exclusions are rare and only used as a last resort to ensure the health, safety and welfare of others.
16. Relationships are good and pupils are happily involved together in both work and play, evident in the good-natured co-operation seen in many lessons. There are no concerns over bullying or other forms of oppressive behaviour. The relationship that pupils have with teachers and other staff is good and creates an environment in which pupils learn well. Pupils willingly support the work of the school by taking responsibility for helpful tasks, such as tidying up their tables between activities in Year 1 and the reception group. Pupils in Year 3 take responsibility for break time play equipment.
17. Attendance is very good and has been consistently above national averages in recent times. Many pupils have an excellent record of attendance. Unauthorised absence is virtually unknown and pupils are generally punctual in arriving at school.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT

18. Teaching is a strength of the school and supports pupils' learning well. Four out of ten lessons are very good and in a further four out of ten lessons teaching is good. The remainder is satisfactory. The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection when it was described as either good or satisfactory. Both literacy and numeracy are well taught.
19. Teaching is very good in two-thirds of lessons in the reception and Year 1 class; consequently, the youngest pupils make very good gains in their early learning. The teaching for these pupils is lively, enthusiastic and inspires enjoyment in learning. Precise learning objectives give lessons a clear focus and there is a very good balance between listening and practical activities to meet the needs of pupils of different ages and abilities. The effective use of questioning ensures that pupils listen carefully and are ready to answer questions. On the isolated occasions when a very small proportion become distracted, the teacher draws them back into discussions skilfully by requiring their involvement. This was evident in the teaching of mathematics when pupils took turns to put frogs into the pool as they sang their song 'Five little speckled frogs'.
20. The job share arrangement for pupils in Years 2 and 3 works well. Teachers maintain good communication to secure continuity in the strategies they use and the sharing of information about pupils' progress. Good use is made of the subject expertise of staff, for example, in the teaching of art, music and physical education. Teaching for pupils in Years 2 and 3 is good overall with one in six lessons being very good, for example in the teaching of music. Local advice was sought to review the teaching of mathematics and the provision is now good.
21. Weekly planning is thorough, indicating the range of subjects to be covered. Lesson plans identify what pupils are expected to learn and the activities they which they will be involved in. This is particularly effective in the teaching of literacy and numeracy.

Teachers maintain detailed records of their assessments leading towards pupils meeting their agreed targets. They identify how the needs of higher attaining pupils and those with special educational needs are to be met and resources are used well to support learning. Time keeping is good. In the literacy hour teachers make good use of text to stimulate discussion and strategies to support group reading for mixed age groups works well. All pupils have opportunities to read and good role modelling enables pupils to improve their use of pace and expression. This was evident in the reading of 'The Mousehole Cat' in Years 2 and 3. Particular features of the very good teaching observed are the confident use of subject knowledge and expertise to support the learning of all pupils and ensure the elements of the literacy hour link well the skills and knowledge that pupils use in their follow up tasks. Pupils' lively enthusiasm is usually managed effectively with firm and insistent guidance, very good use of specific subject vocabulary and high expectations of pupils to achieve their best. A difference between the good and satisfactory teaching is evident in the effectiveness of the teacher's response on the few occasions when a small proportion of pupils rudely interrupt in their eagerness to make personal contributions to discussions.

22. Teachers are confident in their subject knowledge, engage pupils in discussions and encourage pupils to wait their turn and give reasons for their opinions. They evaluate work with pupils, through marking and discussions. This happened in a literacy lesson in Years 2 and 3 when the teacher encouraged pupils to share their views of the vocabulary used in 'The Mousehole Cat' and to suggest alternative words. A weakness lies in the inconsistent attention given to presentation in Years 2 and 3 and this results in the untidy and often careless presentation of work in exercise books. This detracts from the imaginative ideas and use of a broad range of vocabulary that are features of pupils' writing.
23. Across all age groups there is a good balance between listening, practical activity and recording. Teachers provide pupils with good encouragement to explore a range of options to investigate and record their work. This was evident in the Year 2/3 class when the teacher insisted pupils explained their understanding of the pentatonic scale in music and worked with them, demonstrating how to sustain pulse and improve the quality of two-part singing. In the class of younger pupils the teacher ensured all pupils had the opportunity to discuss strategies to investigate objects that move by pushing and pulling. She encouraged pupils to decide independently who to work with, to be detectives and to investigate how best to move objects. The use of discussion, the introduction of simple methods to record findings and the encouragement to use the new scientific language that had been introduced were very successful. Teachers make their expectations of what is to be achieved during lessons very clear and the skills learned in literacy and numeracy are applied well to other subjects. A good example was seen in the work of pupils in Years 2 and 3 who recorded surveys using graphs and tables.
24. Teachers regularly assess pupils' learning in English, mathematics and science and adapt individual targets to set goals for pupils to achieve. In this respect there has been considerable improvement since the previous report and the needs of more able pupils and those with special educational needs are well met, enabling them to make good progress. Assessment information is used to plan tasks for individuals and group and this ensures that pupils are challenged appropriately. The quality of marking is good. There is an appropriate balance of praise, encouragement and aspects for improvement. However, there are times when the teaching of older pupils does not reinforce strongly enough expectations of pupils to independently evaluate their work and check for errors at the drafting stage. In discussion pupils quickly highlight how they will improve work for final presentation and they are capable of taking greater responsibility for making refinements at an earlier stage.

25. Teachers manage pupils' exuberant behaviour well, for example when they interrupt others in discussions in their desire to be heard. They reinforce the importance for pupils to wait their turn to receive attention and to respect the right of each person to be heard. This underlines the strong moral and social values of the school and pupils know that rudeness and selfishness will not be tolerated. Pupils with challenging behaviour are managed effectively through calm, firm strategies that ensure that school rules are maintained and the health and safety of others is prioritised.
26. Classroom assistants provide very good support and provide appropriate levels of guidance and intervention to enable pupils to succeed and achieve task objectives. This is a particular feature of the support evident for the youngest pupils and those with identified difficulties in Years 2 and 3. Relationships between teachers and support staff are good and the close working partnership enhances teaching and makes a positive contribution to pupils' learning.
27. Minor weaknesses in the teaching relate to the provision of too few opportunities for pupils to use information and communication technology (ICT) to support their learning across subjects. There is no timetabled direct teaching of ICT at the present time to develop pupils' skills and provide more frequent and regular opportunities for pupils to apply their knowledge. Accommodation and resource issues also inhibit elements of teaching, particularly in winter months when less use can be made of external resources to support physical education.
28. Homework is used effectively for all age groups, which encourages partnership in learning between home and school and encourages independence and responsibility well. This includes regular reading, spelling, tables and opportunities to research work linked to their lessons. Parents offer very good support and homework makes a positive contribution to learning. A good example of this strong partnership was evident in reading diaries and in the opportunities taken to involve pupils in local research. In a history lesson the teacher used a framed section of a Victorian newspaper, brought to school by a pupil as a focus for learning. This created a sense of excitement as pupils heard how the family discovered the paper in a wall cavity during building renovations.

HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO PUPILS OR STUDENTS

29. The school provides all of its pupils with a broad and balanced curriculum that meets the requirements of the National Curriculum and the locally agreed syllabus for religious education as well as offering a good range of other interesting and worthwhile experiences. This is a significant improvement since the last inspection. The school now has up-to-date schemes of work based on national models for all areas of the curriculum. This includes a scheme of work for information and communication technology (ICT) that is of good quality but which has not yet been fully implemented as training is still outstanding. There is also a programme for updating and reviewing policies in the light of recent national changes. The curriculum for personal, social and health education is relevant, well designed and aspects are present in many lessons.
30. Over the past two years the school has successfully introduced the national strategies for teaching literacy and numeracy. The teachers plan these lessons well and set out clearly what they expect the pupils to learn. As a result the pupils' confidence and competence in these fundamental skills is increasing steadily throughout the school.
31. The curriculum for the youngest pupils under the age of five is good. The youngest pupils are taught in a class of Year 1 and reception children and are very well supported by a part-time learning assistant. The teacher plans the curriculum very effectively for

both groups to ensure appropriate challenge. However, the provision for the physical development of the reception pupils is limited by the lack of appropriate access to an outdoor play space.

32. There has been significant improvement in the provision for pupils with special educational needs. The school now identifies these pupils early in their school lives. All aspects of special needs provision are managed very efficiently by the special needs co-ordinator. As a result the school succeeds in ensuring that all the pupils on the special needs register are fully involved in the life of the school and make good progress towards the targets on their individual education plans. The school is using all the resources at its disposal to provide access to learning for the very small minority of pupils who have behavioural difficulties. The school's arrangements for preparing pupils for the next stage of education are good. The vast majority of pupils transfer to the local middle school.
33. The provision for the pupils' spiritual development is good. All assemblies comply with the requirements for collective worship and provide good opportunities for pupils to reflect on their beliefs and their place in the world. The themes, prayers and songs provide a good focus for the pupils' spiritual development. Opportunities for pupils to experience and reflect on the world around them are built into teachers' planning. For example, in Class 1 there was a focus on individual feelings and responses before pupils talked and wrote movingly about relationships.
34. The provision for the pupils' moral development is very good and for social development it is good. Both moral and social development are nurtured through the positive example and high expectations of the school staff. The school's aims are set out clearly within the prospectus. Adults provide very good role models for the pupils. The pupils are frequently encouraged to consider the impact of their actions on the lives of others and to take increasing responsibility as they grow older. Pupils are kind to each other. At lunch times older and younger pupils play well together and enjoy playing co-operative games. They work well together and collaborate in joint projects, for example in putting together a box of English artefacts for Ghanaian pupils to use. The pupils are developing very good skills which enable them to work well together in groups. However, some aspects of social awareness are less well developed. During class discussions a very small number of pupils show a lack of courtesy towards others and rudely interrupt.
35. The pupils' cultural development is planned effectively. The curriculum is of sufficient depth to enable pupils to gain a great deal from this aspect of their education. The school's very strong links with the local village enhance much of the curriculum and often provide a rich context for the day-to-day work of the school, particularly in history and geography. In addition, pupils take part in local festivals, including the flower festival, and use the local church. The pupils have a secure grasp of their own Christian culture, the key festivals and other secular events. In contrast, the school has benefited greatly from the extensive project undertaken on Ghana, which included music and art, so that pupils have a very good knowledge of a contrasting culture. There is a good range of educational visits. For example, pupils visit the Great Linford Art Centre. The school offers a lunchtime chess and owari club. The latter game was inspired by the Ghanaian project. There is also an after school club.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS

36. The school continues to offer good levels of support and safety and child protection arrangements are very good. The quality of support for pupils' academic and personal development is good because teachers and support staff are committed to children achieving their best; they treat them with a respect that promotes both confidence and

industriousness. Targets are set for each pupil in English and mathematics and are shared with parents. This provides a clear focus for improvement and encourages a strong learning partnership. Teachers are well informed about the progress of individual pupils through the close relationships that ensure good communication in this small school. Good use is made of test results to analyse strengths and weaknesses and the school intends to make better use of the baseline assessment information to judge better the progress made by groups of pupils. This information has only recently become available.

37. The promotion of good behaviour is effective. Pupils are motivated by the positive measures staff use and the opportunities they are given to be helpful, for example, when organising their books at the start of the day. Members of staff meet regularly to review their strategies, which successfully create a calm and disciplined environment around the school. Procedures are implemented consistently and the use of sanctions is minimal. The school deals effectively with any behaviour giving cause for concern. Attendance is very well managed and monitored centrally in the school office. Arrangements are supported by parents and the school is always aware of the special circumstances of individual pupils.
38. There are effective arrangements for child protection with a properly trained and designated teacher to oversee practice in the school. Health and safety procedures are managed very well, with good reporting and recording procedures and an independent audit to review what the school does. Welfare arrangements are very good and support the well being of all pupils very effectively.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS

39. The school continues to enjoy the same very high quality relationships with parents that were described at the time of the last inspection. There is a genuine sense of partnership, which supports the quality of learning and pupils' development. The school enjoys the overwhelming confidence of the parent body and parents complimented the school in almost all areas of its work during pre-inspection consultations. The inspection findings generally support the positive sentiments of parents. The only significant concern expressed was about the provision of activities outside lessons. In this respect, the school does what it can within the scope of a small school with limited facilities.
40. The quality of information about the life of the school is very good and parents feel well informed. Information about pupils' progress is generally good with detailed reports about attainment, especially in English and mathematics. A weakness in reports is the tendency to only describe the positive aspects, with little reference to areas for improvement. However, there are effective arrangements to discuss progress with parents, including the setting of targets for future work in the curriculum. Parents see this aspect of consultation as a strength.
41. The partnership with parents and the community grows with each new venture. The introduction of a bi-annual questionnaire has proved a very effective instrument to enable the school to gain views and respond to the wider parent group. As a result, the school has introduced regular information for parents about their children's' work across the curriculum. Details are sent home and also displayed in the school. This, together with dialogue over targets and the informal contact at the beginning and end of each day, contributes significantly to the help parents give to their children. A parents' group, 'Friends of Castlethorpe School', continues to provide valuable support and actively involves a large proportion of the parent community.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED

42. The quality of leadership provided by the headteacher and staff is good and the governors provide very good support. There is a shared understanding of the strengths of the school and the areas that could be improved. Staff and governors work conscientiously as a committed team to move the school forward. Good use is made of the strengths and expertise of adults and professional development discussions enable staff to receive the appropriate training to fulfil their roles and responsibilities. As a result the quality of management has been maintained since the previous inspection. The criticisms made of the school development plan have been acted upon and the plan is now of good quality and is a working document which guides the pace of change appropriately for a small school. It forms the focus of the school's work and identifies priorities, costings, responsibilities and monitoring arrangements. It is the result of consultation with staff and governors who identify and agree areas for improvement. This combined effort demonstrates the successful teamwork that characterises the school.
43. The issues raised in the last inspection have been addressed successfully. This is demonstrated by the action taken to meet the particular needs of cohorts of pupils. Standards in English, art and design and technology have risen through improving the quality of the curriculum and the teaching of subjects that lacked specific expertise. The school ensures all pupils have equal opportunities to succeed. The headteacher has a significant teaching commitment and she is very well supported by the school secretary who ensures the day-to-day organisation of the school runs smoothly. Appropriate use is made of information and communication technology to support day-to-day management, including monitoring finances.
44. The governing body is well organised and take effective measures to ensure they know the school well. They receive useful reports from the headteacher and staff and are fully involved as governors in the day-to-day life of the school. Governors monitor performance in partnership with the headteacher and guide the long-term development of the school, critically analysing standards. They are involved in setting targets and regularly review the progress made towards their achievement. The governors' annual report to parents and the school prospectus provide clear and useful information for parents and the governors fulfil their statutory duties well.
45. Monitoring and evaluation of the school's work takes place in an organised and systematic way and is linked to the priorities in the school development plan. The headteacher, staff, governors and external professionals observe teaching and learning, feeding back to teachers to support improvement. Governors monitor the literacy and numeracy sessions and report back to other governors at meetings. The programme of monitoring is impressive for a school of this size. Good links have also been made with other village schools to support this development and to share knowledge and expertise. Pupils' performance in national tests is analysed and action taken to address possible areas of weakness. A good example is evident in the steps taken to review the provision for mathematics when the proportion of pupils achieving the higher test levels was missed very narrowly. Given the small size of the year groups and the varying proportions of more able pupils from year to year this action demonstrates the school's commitment to high standards.
46. The school makes effective use of resources and has made very good improvement to the building since the last inspection. Space is now used effectively and changes to the classroom area of older pupils have provided additional space. The playground has been resurfaced and provides an attractive area for pupils to share games together. Good use is also made of local resources to compensate for the lack of a school hall

and playing field. The village hall is used for gymnastics and in the summer months the village field is to be used for sports day. The introduction of swimming to enhance the provision for physical education has also positively enhanced pupils' learning. The internal redecoration provides a bright welcome and attractive displays support the positive ethos of the school. The buildings are in good condition and are well maintained. Priorities for improving the premises accurately identify the aim to provide appropriate external access to the playground to support the physical development of children within the foundation stage of learning. The library is also very small and this inhibits opportunities for older groups of pupils to undertake independent research.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER

- (1) * Raise standards in information and communication technology by:
 - o providing appropriate training to extend staff competence and expertise;
 - o Timetabling the teaching of ICT to secure frequent and regular teaching of the subject;
 - o improving the range of software to support teaching and learning across subjects
- (2) Improve the quality of presentation of pupils' work in Years 2 and 3.

The following areas are of a minor nature and should be considered by the governors for inclusion the school's action plan:

- *Seek ways to provide appropriate access to the outside play area for children in the foundation stage of learning;
- Continue to seek ways of improving the library facilities.
- Make further use of baseline assessment data to predict learning outcomes and to judge the rates of progress of pupils against their prior attainment.

*** Denotes areas that the school has already identified and included in its development plan**

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	17
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	9

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
0	41	47	12	0	0	0

The table gives the percentage of teaching observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Nursery	YR-YR5
Number of pupils on the school's roll (FTE for part-time pupils)		47
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals		0

(FTE means full-time equivalent)

Special educational needs

	Nursery	YR-YR5
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs		0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register		7

English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	0

Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	1
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	0

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	3.2
National comparative data	5.2

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.0
National comparative data	0.5

Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 1					
		Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 1 for the latest reporting year		2000	5	7	12
National Curriculum Test/Task Results		Reading	Writing	Mathematics	
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above					
	Total	11	12	12	
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	92 (95)	100 (95)	100 (84)	
	National	84 (82)	85 (83)	90 (87)	

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above				
	Total	12	12	12
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	100 (95)	100 (84)	100 (95)
	National	84 (82)	88 (86)	88 (87)

Percentages in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

Ethnic background of pupils**Exclusions in the last school year**

	No of pupils			Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0		Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0		Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0		Black – other	0	0
Indian	0		Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0		Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0		Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0		Chinese	0	0
White	37		White	0	0
Any other minority ethnic group	0		Other minority ethnic groups	0	0
<i>This table refers to pupils of compulsory school age only.</i>			<i>This table gives the number of exclusions of pupils of compulsory school age, which may be different from the number of pupils excluded.</i>		

Teachers and classes**Financial information****Qualified teachers and classes :**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	2.18
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	18.5
Average class size	18.5

Financial year	April 1999- Mar 2000
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Education support staff: YR-Y7

Total number of education support staff	3
Total aggregate hours worked per week	45

	£
Total income	126,685
Total expenditure	127,018
Expenditure per pupil	2,762
Balance brought forward from previous year	4,264
Balance carried forward to next year	3,931

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	47
Number of questionnaires returned	39

Percentage of responses in each category					
	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	70	18	5	5	3
My child is making good progress in school.	48	38	3	5	8
Behaviour in the school is good.	48	43	0	8	3
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	30	55	5	0	10
The teaching is good.	60	28	5	0	8
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	58	28	5	5	5
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	83	10	5	3	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	68	23	5	0	5
The school works closely with parents.	75	18	0	5	3
The school is well led and managed.	63	28	3	3	5
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	60	28	3	3	8
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	10	45	18	5	23

PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES

AREAS OF LEARNING FOR CHILDREN IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE

47. The children enter the reception class at two points during the year in which they are five. They join older children in a class covering the reception and Year 1 age range. On entry the majority of children demonstrate standards of attainment higher than usual for their age. Most have attended a nursery located on an adjacent site or a local playgroup. The setting has a very warm, caring, and positive ethos. The teaching observed during the inspection was always at least good and mostly very good. The children love their teacher. The curriculum is rich and well balanced and the activities are well matched to the children's needs. The teacher makes detailed assessments and with the very effective support of the learning support assistant she ensures that all children are very well challenged in their learning. As a result, they receive a very positive introduction to school, and by the time they reach the end of their reception year, all have made good progress. Most of them achieve above the levels of attainment appropriate to this age group in all the areas of learning except physical development. This is an improvement since the last inspection. At this early stage there are no reception pupils entered on the special educational needs register. At the time of the inspection there were eleven children in the foundation stage.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

48. Very good teaching ensures that the children's attainment in personal, social and emotional development improves well during their time in the reception class. The children are well behaved, enthusiastic and concentrate hard. They learn to take turns and to listen to each other. They have opportunities for role-play both in the "Home Corner" and in many lessons including mathematics. The teacher creates a stimulating environment and atmosphere where each child is made to feel special. Expectations of work and behaviour are high, and the children are cheerful and eager to please.

COMMUNICATION, LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

49. The children's attainment in this aspect of their work is a strength. They are confident, articulate and respond well to their teacher's questions. In all sessions, the children are encouraged to develop their vocabulary, to listen carefully and to show respect for each other's views. They recognise many simple words and letter sounds, and many read simple text fluently and accurately. The children enjoy books and like to talk about them; they know what an author and a title page are. All can write their names and copy the teacher's writing with few mistakes. The potentially higher attaining children begin to write on their own and make good attempts at spelling 'new' words. The quality of the teaching is very good. The teacher and her assistant are enthusiastic and because of this the children have very positive attitudes to their learning. A lively and rich range of activities is provided to encourage listening, reading and writing. The teacher's planning is clearly focused; it takes into account what the children already know and extends learning effectively.

MATHEMATICAL DEVELOPMENT

50. The children's attainment is above that of most reception aged children. They learn to count confidently, and count in twos up to twenty. They also count forwards and backwards and recognise simple number patterns and geometric shapes. In one lesson, the children showed enjoyment and skill in addition and subtraction using cards

and coins for shopping. Some use arbitrary measures, estimate and find missing numbers. They are also acquiring and using mathematical vocabulary in an appropriate way. This is all the result of good quality teaching and a wide range of relevant learning experiences. The tasks provided for the children match their needs and enhance their interest in learning.

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORLD

51. The children's attainment in this aspect will exceed that normally expected at the end of the foundation stage. Their knowledge and understanding increase rapidly. Children name parts of the body and the parts of plants. They are keen investigators and enjoy working in pairs as 'detectives' in science lessons. Their teacher explained the work very clearly and taught them to use initials instead of lengthy name writing to identify their work, so nothing impeded their enthusiasm. They could not wait to start the task. They investigated toys and other objects around the room to see which required pushing and which required pulling and labelled the objects appropriately. They use computers with confidence. The teacher has high expectations, and through her very good use of discussion she encourages the children to reflect and explain their experiences.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

52. The children's attainment in this aspect is satisfactory though provision is limited by the constraints of the building, which include the lack of a hall within the school building and access from the classroom to the outside area. Their manipulative skills are developed well. This is evident in the way that they use scissors carefully and hold pencils and brushes appropriately. In the playground children move confidently, utilise space well, and show a good awareness of others as they play. There were no opportunities to see the teaching of this aspect during the inspection.

CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT

53. Attainment in this aspect is again higher than usual. The children have opportunities for engaging in a good range of art activities such as drawing, painting, modelling and printing. They paint confidently, often making bold use of colour. They encounter the work of artists such as Picasso and Van Gogh and are successfully learning to incorporate some themes into their own work. They respond imaginatively to opportunities for using drama, in the form of role-play, in many aspects of their work. The planning for this area takes careful account of both the creative and language development. The children enjoy acting, singing nursery rhymes and there is provision for using musical instruments. Good teaching encourages the children's creativity and careful planning skilfully relieves the intensity of some of the language and number activities by offering more creative follow-on tasks. This ensures that the concentration skills of these young children are not over-taxed.

ENGLISH

54. Test results for pupils aged seven in 2000 showed standards were well above average in reading and writing. The proportions of pupils who achieve the higher levels in reading were above average and in writing they were well above average. Standards have been consistently high over time and consistently good teaching enables pupils to achieve their best. Comparisons with similar schools show standards to be above average. Any conclusions drawn from the comparative use of this data should be treated cautiously, as explained in Part A of the report. The standards of pupils currently in Year 2 and Year 3 continue to well exceed those of most seven and eight-year-olds. Standards in reading have been maintained since the previous report and there is

evidence of improvement in the quality of writing, which has been built upon through the literacy strategy. Speaking and listening skills are also well developed and a strength.

55. Pupils confidently respond to questions using well-structured sentences and put forward their ideas and opinions in discussions. They listen well and show interest in different points of view. In a history lesson pupils in Years 2 and 3 eagerly discussed the occupations and names of villagers in the past, comparing them to the present day. They refer to evidence and give reasons for their ideas. There are occasions when exuberance leads to a small proportion of pupils forgetting to wait their turn. They call out and interrupt others in their desire to make personal contributions. Reading is fluent and expressive and pupils know that non-fiction books support research and enquiry. They make good use of contents and index pages to locate information and dictionary skills are also well developed.
56. Pupils look up words they are unsure of independently. They have favourite authors and refer to the books they shared in the literacy hour, for example 'The Mousehole Cat'. They expressed delight when their teacher introduced 'Butterfly Lion' by Michael Morpurgo. They had requested the books and were thrilled when their teacher introduced them during group reading. Pupils eagerly anticipated the challenge of sharing the text.
57. They have a well-developed understanding of a range of writing, for example, poetry, stories, reports and instructions. They refer to these differences in examples of their work such as the directions to make yoghurt in design and technology and their school anthology of poems. Phonic skills are taught systematically from the earliest days in the reception class and spelling is mainly accurate and phonetically plausible. The structured and systematic teaching of phonics draws wells on pupils' personal language and extends understanding to new and more difficult words. Punctuation is taught by drawing attention to key features in shared reading books. This strategy is very successful. For example, pupils use capital letters, full stops, question and exclamation marks appropriately and by the age of eight pupils are aware of the purpose and use of inverted commas.
58. The teaching of literacy is consistently good and in the class of younger pupils it is very good. This supports pupils' learning well and by the time they are eight pupils are competent readers and writers. Those with special educational needs make good progress in relation to their prior attainment and receive good support from classroom assistants. Pupils' performance is carefully monitored and regularly reviewed with parents. The use of teacher assessments, spelling and reading homework enhance learning and achievement. Staff, governors and external professionals monitor teaching and learning regularly. However, the quality of pupils' work in exercise books is not monitored carefully enough and work at the drafting stages is frequently untidy with careless mistakes. Pupils are quick to self-correct and capable of identifying their carelessness. Expectations of presentation of work are not always high enough.
59. Pupils enjoy reading and writing because teachers provide challenge and have high expectations of the range of language to be used. This ensures that pupils draw on a rich vocabulary and the content of their completed work is lively and imaginative. In a lesson for reception and Year 1 pupils the teacher brought excitement and enthusiasm to learning through discussion of 'The Owl Babies'. This engendered a keen interest in language to express the feelings of the owl mother looking after her offspring while developing understanding of a range of words to describe emotions and feelings.
60. A further good strategy was observed in Years 2 and 3 when the teacher provided a very good role model for reading with expression, and pupils' use of expression improved as a result. The skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing are well

developed and linked. For example, teachers' very good use of specific subject vocabulary in all lessons supports pupils to articulate and use this language in discussions and in their writing. Expectations in this respect are high and pupils' writing is lively and interesting. When reading their work aloud, for example in assemblies, there is a sense of pride and achievement.

61. Pupils are well prepared for their next stage of education. A minor weakness lies in the limited space available in the library to support independent and group research and to take full advantage of information and communication technology resources.
62. The high levels of achievement in English are the outcome of consistently good teaching, good partnership with parents, the successful implementation of the literacy strategy and the steady application of skills and knowledge to other subjects.

MATHEMATICS

63. By the age of seven results show that all pupils are achieving the nationally expected standard. In last year's National Curriculum tests the school's performance in mathematics was above the average of all schools but below average in comparison to similar schools. The analysis of results shows the percentage of pupils achieving the national average rose by 15 per cent last year although the number of pupils who achieved the higher levels was below the national average. Fewer pupils than expected achieved the higher levels in mathematics. This is mainly due to minor variations in individual pupil's performance in tests between subjects. In small cohorts such as these a single pupil represents a significant proportion of the pupils in a year. Hence, variations in the proportion of pupils who are highly able or who have special educational needs, or variations in the numbers of girls and boys can readily change the letter grade. Work seen during the inspection confirms there was no evidence of underachievement within this group. As a result of the test results, the school sought local advice to review the provision for mathematics. As a result minor improvements have been made. The quality of teaching is good and parents are now fully involved in supporting their children to achieve their targets.
64. Standards of work seen in the current Year 2 during the inspection showed that the majority of pupils are achieving average standards with a small number achieving higher levels. Able pupils are performing at an appropriately high level. Pupils with special educational needs are supported very well and make good progress, though some are achieving below average levels. In mathematics, boys and girls reach similar levels and make similar progress.
65. By the age of seven pupils are developing accurate, reliable mental methods for adding and subtracting two digit numbers. Pupils are able to recall basic number facts and the speed of recall is improving daily. Most pupils have appropriate knowledge of addition and subtraction facts and can count on in two's and tens from different starting points. Pupils carry out routine tasks adequately; many have appropriate spatial and statistical knowledge. The skills they need to use and apply their mathematical knowledge are developing well. Younger pupils can count to 10 and read and write the numbers involved, some can add and subtract numbers to ten and count on mentally. Most pupils have a good grasp of mathematical language and understanding of number operations; many are beginning to understand place value. Most pupils use standard units for measuring length and can tell the time. They construct simple graphs and show a good knowledge of the names and properties of two-dimensional shapes.
66. Pupils in Year 3 can multiply and divide by 10, 5 and 2 and their knowledge of fractions extends to fifths and sixths. Good progress continues to be maintained. Pupils with special educational needs are supported well and make good progress in their learning.

67. Pupils' attitudes to learning mathematics are good. Pupils enjoy whole class sessions and are confident enough to contribute answers, join in whole class activities and explain how they reached an answer during mental mathematics sessions. The majority work enthusiastically and demonstrate good levels of commitment to the challenges set. Most work well in small groups and show good co-operation in completing set tasks. The range of interesting and challenging tasks holds their interest and many concentrate for substantial periods of time. Pupils talk sensibly about their work. They can use correct mathematical terms, discuss in groups and plan work productively. However there are occasions during whole class sessions when a very small number of pupils do not listen well enough to others. In their eagerness to contribute their own ideas they call out answers without being asked and this has a detrimental effect on learning, interrupting the contributions made by their fellow pupils who behave well. However, teachers usually manage this behaviour through reinforcing the school rules and insisting that everyone waits their turn. Work in books shows that more able pupils are challenged through more difficult work. However, some recording was untidy. Work was regularly marked but there was little evidence of written evaluative comments to indicate the next steps for improvement. Pupils do, however, have a good knowledge of the targets they are striving to achieve.
68. The teaching of mathematics is good with some very good teaching in Year 1. In all lessons teachers use very good visual aids to support teaching. Lessons are often imaginative. In Year 2 good use was made of a wall display to create a practical situation for pupils to problem solve using money. In Year 1 pupils were riveted by Kipper's counting and worked hard to help him as he made errors on the number line! All teachers made good use of the hundred squares and the counting stick was well used. They also used simple aids very effectively when questioning, enabling those pupils who grasped the answer to confirm their thinking. Those pupils who were still uncertain were able to test their answer against a simple visual aid such as a number square. Teachers are using the numeracy strategy well. The three-part lesson is established well.
69. The ability of pupils to use information and communication technology to develop their mathematical skills, knowledge and understanding is underdeveloped. This is a weakness. Links with the other subjects of the curriculum are well developed.
70. Homework is well supported. The school has established clear targets for mathematics for each term that are shared with parents and pupils. Teachers use informal observations and soon will use regular tests to assess attainment. The school analyses end of key stage test material well to determine areas of weakness and is planning to establish procedures for tracking and monitoring the progress of individual pupils and cohorts as they move through the school from baseline information; this information is not available yet. The school has made satisfactory progress since the last inspection. Subject management is good.

SCIENCE

71. The 2000 National Curriculum teacher assessments for seven-year-olds showed standards of attainment were very high and the proportion of pupils who attained the higher levels was well above average. The school also performed very well in comparison to similar schools, showing good improvement since the previous report.
72. By the age of seven pupils describe and classify materials, and know how forces affect the movement of objects. They can make comparisons, simple measurements and by the age of eight understand the principles of carrying out a fair test. Pupils of all ages use scientific vocabulary well. Year 1 pupils explain how objects can be moved by

pushing and pulling and Year 3 pupils use the term 'flexible' when describing the best use of materials for specific purposes. By the time they leave the school pupils' knowledge and understanding is well above the national expectation. They are able to describe the main parts of flowering plants and understand the function of different parts of the plant, for example that the root carries water and nourishment to the plant and the flower attracts insects through colour and smell. They can classify materials into those that are man-made and those that are natural and explain why some fabrics are better suited for cold weather and rainy conditions. Pupils describe how to carry out a fair test independently and suggest ways of recording their findings using graphs and tables. This was evident in an experiment to discover the effects of water and light on plant growth.

73. Pupils are confident to explain how substances can be changed by heating and cooling, for example when melting ice and mixing cereals with milk. They are gaining a good knowledge of the differences between reversible and irreversible change for their ages and more able pupils are well challenged. Pupils with special educational needs are very well supported by staff who ensure their inclusion in activities and enable them to make good progress in relation to their prior attainment.
74. Only one science lesson was observed during the period of the inspection so overall judgements about the quality of teaching cannot be made. However, in the class of Year 1 pupils the teaching was of very good quality. The focus of learning was precise and pupils learned the scientific application of the terms 'push' and 'pull' before investigating and recording how to move familiar toys and objects in their classroom. They worked conscientiously and with great interest, supported well by the teacher who enabled them to discover the effect of pulling the cords of the window blind. The lesson had a very good balance of discussion, activity, simple recording and the sharing of experience. Consequently, all pupils made very good progress. Older pupils in Years 2 and 3 are also enthusiastic. Their eagerness to describe science lessons indicates learning is exciting, fun and challenging. They explain knowledgeably how their work in design and technology is sometimes linked to science, for example, when making flavoured yoghurts. They recognised similarities in the organisational strategies necessary to carry out investigations and the importance of recording using specific instructions and carefully labelled diagrams. Literacy and numeracy skills are well applied. Pupils explain how they look up information in books and are competent to use dictionaries and glossaries to enable them to use technical terms and spell them accurately. Pupils describe the opportunities they have to work together, monitoring the weather and changes in plant life through the seasons. Very good use is made of the local environment to support learning. The relevance of science to everyday life is a strong feature.
75. The subject is managed effectively. Curriculum planning is secure and pupils' progress is monitored regularly. The assessment and monitoring information is used well to inform lesson planning. Resources are used effectively to support learning.

ART AND DESIGN, DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY AND MUSIC

76. Standards achieved in art and design, design and technology and music exceed the expectations for seven and eight-year-olds.
77. In the lessons observed in these subjects teaching was at least good and in music it was very good. The very good level of subject expertise of the coordinator enables pupils to make rapid progress. For example, by the age of eight pupils understand the term pentatonic scale and know that 'pent' means five. This element of the lesson forged good links with mathematics and literacy. Pupils extended the breadth of their vocabulary and improved their ability to maintain a regular pulse by counting and

tapping following the teacher's lead. Skilled teaching enabled pupils to maintain two-part singing by the end of the lesson. Very good use was made of the classroom assistant to support the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs, ensuring their full participation and concentration. Very good pace, high expectations and the teacher's enthusiasm to build upon prior learning enabled pupils to evaluate and improve their performance and recognise the progress they had made.

78. In a good quality art lesson the teacher evaluated pupils' work and referred to the work of David Hockney to improve drawings of people and to develop control of the use of pastels and paints. The lesson made a good contribution to pupils' personal, social, moral, spiritual and cultural development. They reflected on the people in portraits, considering the positive aspects of relationships that can be communicated through art. This work built well upon the portrait work covered in the Year 1 class. Younger pupils successfully painted self-portraits showing good attention to detail and skin tones. A work by Picasso, 'The Weeping Woman', stimulated an effective display that explored the effect of cutting portraits and assembling the parts differently. Displays are bright and attractive. They reflect good links with art across subjects and significantly enhance the learning environment. The Ghana Project supported the development of understanding of art from non-European cultures and the local community supported every pupil to contribute to an attractive fabric and thread wall hanging to celebrate the Millennium illustrating the history of Castlethorpe. Good use is made of a local arts centre. Pupils made shields linked to their study of the Vikings and in their Millennium project benefited from the skills of a visiting artist who supported the making of clay tiles to depict important features of Castlethorpe. Although no design and technology lessons were observed, photographs and discussions with pupils indicate a high level of enthusiasm and regular opportunities to design and make articles for specific purposes. Pupils talk about the strong links between design and technology and science. They describe the importance of reading and writing instructions clearly and the need to test out the suitability of materials for a particular task. Links between food technology and science were evident in an activity where pupils made different flavoured yoghurts and described the methods and ideas they had for enhancing the flavour and colour of natural yoghurt. These subjects were criticised in the last inspection and good progress has been made in implementing the curriculum and raising standards.

GEOGRAPHY, HISTORY AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

79. One lesson in each subject was observed during the inspection. However, this evidence was supplemented by talking to the pupils and scrutinising the teachers' planning, the pupils' previous work and current displays. The quality of the work is above the standards expected in geography and history and pupils make good progress. Standards are about average in religious education at the end of Year 2 and Year 3. The pupils study a range of themes that are well supported by educational visits and strong local links with the local village including the church. The subjects are planned using a two-year cycle of topics that provides appropriate coverage of the National Curriculum and the locally agreed syllabus.
80. In geography, Year 1 pupils are able to map their journey to school and follow directions using appropriate geographical language. Some are beginning to use symbols. Older pupils have gained much from a project on Ghana and can analyse data on rainfall and temperature in Ghana and London. This topic has made a strong impact on pupils and it also influences their social and cultural development. Judging by pupils' levels of knowledge and understanding and the one lesson seen teaching is good. The pupils are keen to carry out research and are motivated by well-planned and imaginative topics.

81. In history lessons, pupils gain good understanding of Britain in the past through their research into the Great Fire and the Victorians. Recently the pupils produced a Millennium wall hanging illustrating the history of Castlethorpe. The teaching is good, with well planned and prepared tasks and resources. The pupils respond well to good questioning and challenging activities and work purposefully in pairs and groups, with enjoyment. Local visits, donated artefacts and visits from older local people provide valuable first hand experiences to enrich pupils' knowledge of local history. Their experiences and knowledge are suitably recorded and standards are above those expected for the age group.
82. In religious education lessons pupils learn about special places. They are beginning to understand that churches and other places of worship, including mosques, are important to the people whose religions they represent. The pupils share their feelings about places and events that are special to them. They also learn about Christian festivals and are able to compare them with festivals in other religions. The teaching is good overall. The teachers' knowledge of the subject is good. The lessons are well planned, identifying clearly what the pupils are to learn. They use questioning effectively to guide the discussions. In the lesson seen, the teacher motivated the pupils well and they worked hard on their tasks connected to special occasions.
83. The pupils' attitudes to learning are good. The pupils listen concentrate well and focus on the topic under consideration. They are happy to share in the discussions, for example about special occasions and preparations that are needed in religious education lessons. They are enthusiastic about all these subjects and respond well to the interesting topics planned.
84. The curriculum for history, geography and religious education is well established and competently led by a knowledgeable and enthusiastic co-ordinator. There is a well-planned scheme of work organised on a two-yearly topic cycle that ensures good coverage of the National Curriculum programmes of study and the agreed syllabus. A very good programme of visits linked to the village and including visitors into the school makes a valuable contribution to pupils' learning across these subjects. These factors all contribute to the above average standards achieved by the pupils in both key stages in history and geography.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

85. Standards in ICT are average by the age of seven and at the end of Year 3. At present, pupils' skills are not being sufficiently extended so they are not achieving the higher levels of competence they achieve in most other subjects. Arrangements for staff training are in hand to address this issue.
86. By the age of seven, the pupils can enter and modify both text and images. The youngest pupils, for example, successfully control the mouse to create images within a painting program. In Years 2 and 3 pupils' make appropriate use of word processing to layout their poems and the older pupils can merge text and images. Pupils can use the computer for research in history. They also know that the Internet will provide access to further information. Their knowledge of the possibilities offered by ICT exceeds their skill to exploit them; in many schools the reverse is true. Until recently the school's hardware limited the range of opportunities to make challenging and effective use of ICT across the curriculum.
87. No teaching of ICT was seen during the inspection and ICT is not specifically timetabled. The co-ordinator is managing the subject well. There is a good scheme of work linked to national guidelines. The school has an action plan that is guiding developments. The co-ordinator has enthusiastically overseen the setting up of the ICT

mini suite and is eager to make rapid progress in establishing broad and exciting uses of ICT across the curriculum. She is very aware of the need for the further training planned in the very near future. Following this the school must provide the pupils with more challenging opportunities to develop their skills. Pupils have a good understanding of the opportunities that ICT offers but there is an insufficient range of software and timetabled opportunities to support developments across subjects. This is a key issue for the school to address.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION.

88. Pupils' skills in swimming are better than those of most seven and eight-year-olds. In gymnastics pupils' performance is appropriate for their ages. Other aspects of physical education were not observed and it is not possible to comment on achievements in games and dance.

89. The school makes the best use of its available resources to support provision for physical education. Despite the limitations of the accommodation having no hall or playing field, the school makes good use of the village facilities to support the teaching of gymnastics and sports. Pupils delight in dancing at the local festivals and are taught maypole dancing. The introduction of swimming lessons using a local pool significantly compensates for the school's lack of space. In the lessons observed for pupils aged seven and eight teaching was of good quality and the support of a trained swimming instructor was very good. Pupils' development of skills to swim a range of strokes is very well supported by a number of parents who regularly give their time to assist teachers so pupils can be helped in small groups. Consequently by the age of eight the majority can swim at least a width with more competent swimmers practising the strokes for front and back crawl, breaststroke and life saving techniques. Performance in gymnastics is appropriate for the age range and pupils demonstrate the ability to work together in pairs and small groups to create sequence of movements. Teachers have a high regard for health and safety and skilfully manage challenging behaviour when necessary ensuring pupils are not at risk. Support staff are used very effectively and every effort is made to include all pupils except when others could be at risk.