

Castleton Community Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	121376
Local Authority	North Yorkshire
Inspection number	292095
Inspection date	10 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Roger Gill

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	33
School	
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Delia Liddle
Headteacher	Mrs CM Wilson
Date of previous school inspection	17 September 2001
School address	High Street Castleton Whitby North Yorkshire YO21 2DA
Telephone number	01287 660496
Fax number	01287 660496

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is a very small primary school situated in a relatively remote village in the North Yorkshire Moors National Park. All pupils are of White British heritage. A below average proportion of pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities; very few have statements of special educational need. Since the school was last inspected, there have been some significant changes to the school grounds which have transformed opportunities for play and keeping fit. The teaching force has expanded: it now comprises three teachers and five assistants in a full-time or part-time capacity. The school was awarded the Primary Quality Mark in 2004 and the Healthy School award in June 2006. It has won the borough's Yellow Woods Challenge four years running for its efforts in recycling.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

A recent visitor to Castleton School wrote to the pupils in heartfelt terms: 'Your wonderful garden, your new terraces, your bread-making and the whole ethos of your school will remain with me.' Equally, the inspection recognises these outstanding features of this good school. The excellent care provided for pupils, encapsulated in the visitor's comments, has a considerable influence on their personal development, which is first-class.

The school's efforts to widen pupils' horizons as well as enabling them to collaborate with others within the area underscore its success. For example, the school mounts a residential visit to West Yorkshire every other year. As part of the expedition, pupils visit the Interfaith Education Centre in Bradford, which broadens their cultural understanding enormously. At a more local level, pupils have joined with another local school to hunt for fossils, making the best use possible of a Royal Society Grant entitled Ammonite Adventure.

The school has improved tremendously since it was last inspected: pupils make better academic progress and possess even greater personal skills. The headteacher, who was newly appointed in 2000, manages to combine very skilfully a substantial teaching load with leading from the front. Moreover, governors play an exemplary role in supporting and guiding development. Their overseeing of a vastly improved provision for information and communication technology (ICT) is a fine example of the school's achievements.

All adults who work with the pupils, including the many volunteers, add to the life of the school in ways that benefit pupils enormously. For example, making corn dollies and planting juniper trees on the moors, with members of the community, deepen pupils' understanding of local culture and ecological matters. The new and exciting stepped garden terraces provide endless opportunities for imaginative and healthy play. Moreover, the garden area gives pupils a valuable insight into the way in which fruit and vegetables keep them fit and healthy. Parents are wholeheartedly in favour of what the school offers because they can see what the developments since 2000 have done for their children.

Attainment is above average at the end of Year 2 and Year 6, which is good achievement. Standards can vary seemingly from year to year because results are influenced excessively by individual high or low scores. The good progress, however, can be patchy in writing. There is not an absolutely consistent approach to broadening pupils' vocabulary or encouraging variety in sentence construction and the use of the most apt punctuation.

Children prosper well from the Foundation Stage (Reception) onwards. In the two classes, pupils of different ages mix easily. It is the effortless way in which pupils learn together that makes provision so relevant for the majority. The family atmosphere advantages pupils both academically and socially.

Typical of the school's good teaching is the development of pupils' enjoyment in learning. They tackle, with enthusiasm, important basic skills in English and mathematics or ponder on powerful questions in science such as how seeds develop in the different wild plants found in and around the school. Older pupils have produced some exquisite drawings of seed heads to communicate their findings. Even so, there is not always enough challenge for higher attainers across the curriculum. Some provision is made for them to tackle different work or learn with pupils older than themselves, but even more could be done along these lines. This additional challenge needed for higher-attaining pupils is a relative weakness which in part prevents the school from being outstanding overall.

Behind all the valuable initiatives lies the vision of the headteacher, supported vigorously by governors, who are tireless in seeking ways in which pupils can prosper at Castleton. Everyone at the school possesses an accurate appreciation of its merits. Plans for improvement are well considered; their effect so far is good. There has not been time for the determination to improve writing and the aspirations for high attainers to reach fulfilment.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve methods of teaching writing to make pupils' progress consistently good throughout the school.
- Increase the challenge for higher attainers so that they attain even better results and improved skills such as in problem-solving and extended research.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Children start school with skills and knowledge typical for their age. This can vary greatly from year to year: for instance, this year the minimum number of pupils in a year group is two and the maximum is seven. Consequently, national test results cannot be relied on as a useful measure of success. Children in Reception achieve well partly due to the engaging opportunities for outside play and imaginative learning inside. There are micro-patterns within the school's results in Year 2 and Year 6 which confirm what the school has deduced correctly about pupils' progress. Standards in writing could be better and higher attainers could, in some cases, reach a higher level in English and/or mathematics. These relative shortcomings do not detract from the good achievements made generally. Achievement is also good in ICT, music and physical education as a result of the improved resources, particularly in ICT, and an enriched curriculum.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Personal development is better than the school contends. Pupils prosper in the very positive family atmosphere, which is demonstrated admirably in assemblies. In one particular gathering, devoted to reflecting on the virtues of helping others, a contribution from one of the youngest children set everyone thinking. It was announced in complete confidence from the front row that 'loving is part of your responsibility.' Behaviour is first-rate and pupils possess very positive attitudes; no wonder attendance is above average in the majority of cases. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. This is partly because pupils reflect in depth after meeting people from other faiths and cultures during their residential trip. A sense of community grows remarkably through helping out. For example, older pupils run the school shop and ensure that play times are safe and healthy occasions. Class conferences are very influential because pupils' suggestions are treated seriously.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy saying that 'teachers are their favourite thing' in school. Although the quality of teaching and learning is good, occasionally able pupils are not shown how to do even better. For example, advice for older pupils about writing fictional letters concerning poor children in Victorian times lacks additional challenge for higher attainers. There are good systems

throughout the school to assess work and involve pupils in thinking about how well they have done. For example, a relatively new system of combining a termly target from the teacher with one from the pupil is beginning to work well. Parents feel involved and able to discuss progress more easily. Targets to help improve writing are helpful, but not consistently specific enough to help pupils attain an even higher level of achievement. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are included seamlessly by skilful assistants and as a consequence progress well.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum inspires pupils' academic learning well and is great for their personal development. The Primary Quality Mark is proof that tasks for basic skills are well designed. This is a commendable achievement since the two classes cater for such a wide range of age and ability. Developments needed in writing and the programmes for higher attainers are relative shortcomings in an effective curriculum. Pupils learn French and also benefit from growing things such as asparagus in the garden. Many pupils get involved in a wide range of activities such as the astronomy club, recycling telephone directories and the annual musical productions in a way that boosts their confidence and stimulates valuable skills. Physical education is a strong feature of the provision, as is ICT. The way in which pupils learn valuable lessons about health and safety, and participate in running the school, equips them wonderfully for secondary education and later life.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Pupils are given high quality care and support because, as they say, 'the small size of our school helps us to receive individual treatment.' Those who transfer from larger schools state how special they are made to feel. This quality of support helps to make pupils' personal development so remarkable. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils including risk assessments, are in place and working well. Support for healthy living is very well-established and recognised by the Healthy School award. Parents are involved very closely in their children's learning. They appreciate particularly the opportunities at the beginning of each term to find out what is going to be learned. Additional help is exploited well for any pupil with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Throughout the school, pupils receive good guidance. The need to improve academic guidance in writing does not diminish the outstanding nature of this aspect of the school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Pupils' first-rate personal development derives from the concentrated attention it receives from all concerned. It is the vision and tenacity of the headteacher combined with the excellent steer given by the governors that have moved the school on from its satisfactory status in 2001. The monitoring of teaching is undertaken regularly and performance management is up-to-date. Nevertheless, some minor inconsistencies in the teaching of writing have occurred and these prevent progress being quite as strong as in other areas. Plans for improving the school contain the right things to do, but criteria to judge their success are sometimes not measurable enough. Nevertheless, these relative shortcomings do not inhibit the good effects from leadership and management. This is a school which has a clear appreciation about where its strengths and

development points lie. It continues to have a good capacity to succeed, as judged by its recent successes and how it has improved since its last inspection.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	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 effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Inspection of Castleton Primary School, Castleton, Whitby, YO21 2DA

Thank you for your help when I inspected your school. I thoroughly enjoyed my day with you all.

You go to a good school with some first-rate features. I know that you enjoy every minute because everyone that I spoke to told me so and I saw it with my own eyes. As you know, I had lunch with the representatives of the various clubs and interests in the school. So, among other things, I learnt about Botany Club, your interest in recycling, your passion for football and gymnastics and the school garden. All this while eating great food at a table decked with a tablecloth and proper napkins. I did feel privileged. You can see why I speak highly, in my report, of your confidence and the fascinating things you have to do at school. I also spoke to other children about their writing and how they know what to do to make it better. You all told me that teaching is good and helps you to learn well and I agree. I really like the way that the play areas outside have been transformed in recent years. Your headteacher has played a leading role in engineering these changes. As a result, the Castleton Cottage and the stepped gardens are super places in which to play: you certainly do enjoy them immensely.

I know everyone wants to do even better and I have suggested two things that will help. First your teachers need to extend the very helpful guidance for your learning to make sure that writing throughout the school is as good as it can be for all children. Second there needs to be a concerted effort to make sure that those capable of harder work receive the right level of challenge at all times in all subjects.

You can all help the school do better by trying to use championship words in your writing and adding variety to the kind of sentences you use. What is more, you should tackle, with enthusiasm, any ambitious challenges that come your way.