

# Castlethorpe First School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	110213
<b>Local Authority</b>	Milton Keynes
<b>Inspection number</b>	325110
<b>Inspection date</b>	28 January 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Mike Thompson

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

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	First
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–7
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	42
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mrs Catharine Turner
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Julie Baldwin
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	27 April 2006
<b>Date of previous funded early education inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Date of previous childcare inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>School address</b>	Castlethorpe Milton Keynes MK19 7EW
<b>Telephone number</b>	01908 510342
<b>Fax number</b>	01908 510342

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## Introduction

Two Additional Inspectors carried out this inspection. The inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues.

- How effective is teaching and the academic guidance provided for pupils in ensuring the good progress claimed by the school?
- To what extent is the school able to demonstrate the continued positive impact of leadership?

The inspectors gathered evidence from performance data, observations of teaching, the work produced by pupils, and observations of the pupils at play and at lunch. Parents' questionnaires, and discussions with pupils, with representatives of the governing body and with members of staff also contributed to the judgements. The inspectors did not investigate other aspects of the school's work in detail. Where the inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, these have been included where appropriate in this report.

## Description of the school

Castlethorpe is a small village school to the north of Milton Keynes. Its pupils are taught in two classes. In the morning sessions, children in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and pupils in Year 1 work together, while the Year 2 pupils are taught separately. In the afternoons, the EYFS children are taught separately, while the Year 1 and 2 pupils are combined. A very large majority of the pupils are of White British heritage. There are no pupils with English as an additional language and, typically, very few pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Where learning difficulties and/or disabilities are identified, they are usually categorised as the need for extra help to remedy specific weaknesses in either literacy or numeracy. There are no pupils eligible for free school meals.

Following the departure of the previous headteacher, and until a substantive appointment can be made, the school is led and managed by an experienced member of staff who was appointed as interim headteacher in April 2008.

The school has achieved National Healthy School Status.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

Castlethorpe is a good school. Its pupils achieve well because they benefit from well-planned activities that excite and interest them, and receive good quality teaching and academic guidance.

The change in leadership has not affected the performance of the school, and its pupils continue to make good progress. The interim headteacher knows the pupils and their parents exceptionally well. She is building on the well-established systems for managing the school, and is effective in ensuring that the quality of provision and the pupils' academic and personal development continue to be closely monitored.

When children start school in the Reception Year group, their attainment varies considerably but is, overall, above what is normally expected at this age. When they leave at the end of Year 2, standards in reading, writing and mathematics are most often well above average. The most important factor in pupils' good achievement is the academic guidance provided. This stems from the large proportion of staff employed in relation to the number of pupils on roll. Pupils enjoy a great deal of good-quality individual attention. As one of the inspectors noted, 'There is no hiding place from learning in this lesson!' The needs of each individual are extremely well known, and so teachers tailor learning precisely to ensure that everyone receives achievable challenges. Year 2 pupils confirmed this and said that the work they are given really makes them think. Currently, attainment in Year 2 is already well above what is normally expected for this age group in reading, writing, mathematics and science. Particularly noteworthy is the excellent progress that pupils make in developing their skills in reading and writing. In reading, most pupils typically leave school as seven-year-olds with reading ages well in excess of nine years. These skills are used to very good effect in other subjects. In comparison, pupils' skills in using computers are less well developed, and are broadly in line with expectations. Pupils do not use the computers often enough as a day-to-day tool for learning. In other aspects of information and communication technology, such as the equipment available and the staff skills in using it, the school has improved since the last inspection.

A further important factor in the school's success is the excellent climate for learning evident in all classes. This results from the high quality of relationships within the school community and pupils' enjoyment of learning. 'I really like my lessons because they are fun', was one of the many appreciative comments made by the pupils. Their parents have similarly positive views. One summarised these well when writing, 'The children have a wonderful introduction to school life in a warm and friendly environment. The experience they have is really special.' Another added, 'My child has blossomed while at the school.'

Pupils' eagerness to learn is a key factor in the good learning that takes place, and this reflects the support for, and value placed on, education by their parents. Pupils enjoy challenge, and the good teaching that they receive ensures that they are not disappointed. There are many strong technical aspects of teaching, such as the clear explanations provided for pupils and the consistent focus on what is to be learned. The teachers are working to develop pupils' skills in evaluating their own progress so that, by doing so, pupils gain a clearer understanding of what they need to do to improve further. This initiative was evident in a Year 2 English lesson in which pupils used a checklist to assess their success in meeting the criteria for their writing set out by the teacher. The school acknowledges that it has some way to go before the pupils develop the levels of awareness and skill required for really effective self-evaluation. In this

case, the pupils' views of their success in meeting the criteria were sometimes far more positive than the teacher's analysis when checking their work. Nonetheless, pupils' work in this lesson showed generally good standards of presentation and handwriting. There was also excellent vocabulary from the more-able pupils, as they used words such as 'horrified' or 'exhausted' to describe the feelings of one of the characters in their story. Key partners in the teaching are the skilled teaching assistants. They provide effective help for individuals or small groups of pupils, including those who have specific learning needs. All pupils have targets to achieve in literacy and numeracy, and most know what they are. However, not all pupils have a clear enough understanding of precisely how they are to improve their work.

This is a school which practises what it preaches and where every child really does matter. For the pupils, membership of the school brings with it a strong sense of family because of the outstanding pastoral care provided. Standards of pupils' personal development and well-being are excellent. Their enthusiasm for school is evident in the consistently high attendance rates. They have an excellent understanding of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle, and this is recognised by the school's National status in its Healthy School Award. Pupils display a very good awareness of how to keep safe. They have a keen sense of right and wrong and an empathy with others. Consequently, their behaviour is usually exemplary. Pupils develop good skills in citizenship through their contribution to the day-to-day life of the school as school councillors or by carrying out various jobs. They also contribute well to the wider community through, for example, charitable fundraising or taking part in village events. They are well prepared for the next phase of their education and a future as lifelong learners. Their excellent social skills and love of learning are offset to some extent by their average attainment in the use of computers.

The school provides a good range of exciting and challenging experiences for its pupils, enhanced by enrichment activities such as 'themed days' and after-school clubs. During the inspection, the after-school cookery session was well attended and a source of great enjoyment for the pupils. The school successfully ensures that requirements for physical education (PE) are properly met, despite the lack of a hall. The good arrangements for using the village hall for PE lessons and the sharing of PE resources with the local pre-school demonstrate the school's good involvement in the life of the local community.

The governing body is well led and has a clear view of the future direction that the school needs to take. The governors' appointment of the interim headteacher has ensured excellent continuity while longer-term arrangements are made. The school's evaluation of its performance is thorough. Its clear commitment to continuous improvement, demonstrated through the challenging targets routinely set for pupils' performance, leaves it well placed to make future improvements.

## **Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage**

### **Grade: 2**

The children get a good start to their education in the Reception year group. By the time they move into Year 1, almost all achieve the goals expected at this age and, in most years, at least a quarter of the children exceed these goals. Teaching is good and reflects a secure understanding of how very young children learn. A particular feature is the teachers' high expectations of children's behaviour and work rate. Planning ensures a good balance between activities chosen by the children, designed to develop skills in independent learning, and those directed by adults. Careful observations of children at work are used well to develop the next steps in learning. As in Key Stage 1, the children gain immense benefit from the frequent good-quality individual attention. A further similarity is that children do not make enough use

of computers in their day-to-day learning. Despite this weakness, they make good progress overall, and outstanding progress in developing their skills in communication, language and literacy.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Develop the use of computers as a daily tool for learning.
- Improve pupils' skills in assessing their own learning and their understanding of how they can improve their work.

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## Annex A

**Inspection judgements**

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

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

**Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage**

<b>How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?</b>	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

**Achievement and standards**

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

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<sup>1</sup>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.

## Personal development and well-being

<b>How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

## The quality of provision

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

## Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

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

11 February 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Castlethorpe First School, Milton Keynes, MK19 7EW

On behalf of your inspectors I would like to thank you for being so helpful when we came to your school to find out how well you are getting on. We particularly enjoyed looking at your work and talking to some of you.

I agree with your parents that you go to a good school.

There is so much I like about your school that I cannot mention everything, so here is a list of the most important things.

- You make good progress. By the time you leave at the end of Year 2, you are much better at reading, writing and mathematics than pupils in most other schools. You should be very proud of all of this. You make excellent progress in your reading and writing.
- Being at your school is just like being in a large family. Everyone is friendly and welcoming, and your behaviour is usually excellent. Well done!
- You know a lot about how to be healthy and safe.
- You learn well in lessons because your teachers plan interesting things for you to do, they are good at teaching you, and you get lots of individual attention.
- All of the adults in your school make sure that you are really well looked after.
- Your headteacher and all of the other people who help run your school do a good job in making sure that you get a good education.

Even in a good school like yours there is always something that could be better. Your headteacher agrees, and wants your school to be really excellent. To do this, she knows that you need to use the computers more often to help you with your work. This will also help you to become more skilled in using them. I have also asked your teachers to make sure that you become even better at checking your own work and working out what you have to do to improve your work.

I am sure that you will continue to have great success in the future.

Yours faithfully

Mike Thompson

Lead Inspector