

Castle Hill Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124663
Local Authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	328187
Inspection date	18 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Judith Dawson

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

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	141
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Judy Palmer
Headteacher	Mrs Sheri Wilks
Date of previous school inspection	17 January 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Dreyden Road Ipswich Suffolk IP1 6QD
Telephone number	01473741929
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Age group	4–7
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

- children's achievement, especially that of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage
- what it is that makes the provision so effective in promoting children's learning
- how well the school promotes community cohesion.

Inspectors gathered evidence from the school's environment, documents and records of progress, lesson observations, discussions with children and curriculum planning. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Castle Hill is an infant school situated in the north of Ipswich. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage enter the Reception class with the expected knowledge and skills for their age, many having attended the local Nursery school, which shares the same headteacher. The school has a larger than average percentage of children who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities and more children than average have statements of special needs for moderate learning or social and emotional challenges, nine of whom attend the school's special support class. Most children are from White British backgrounds and very few speak English as an additional language. The school and individual teachers hold many achievement awards and, since the last inspection, have re-gained the Primary Quality Mark, Eco Green Flag and Healthy Schools status. There is a wide range of extended provision for children and their families, including a before and after school club. Staff are involved in a number of research projects as well as providing training for other practitioners.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

At the time of its last inspection, Castle Hill Infant School was judged to provide an outstanding education. The school has maintained its high quality provision, enabling children to attain high standards and an impressive range of personal and social skills to prepare them for the future. It is so successful because the headteacher, governors and staff are united in placing children's learning and welfare at the heart of all their work. This is a school that gives children the skills they need to learn for themselves, and for their future lives, within an exciting and vibrant environment. As a result, children have a sense of curiosity, a strong desire to question and investigate and to try new things for themselves.

The headteacher has taken over the leadership of the Nursery school and children's centre since the last inspection. As a result of the changes, children's knowledge and skills on entry to the Reception classes have improved and are now in line with those of children nationally in most areas of learning. By the end of Year 2, standards in reading, writing and mathematics are high. In the Key Stage 1 national assessments in 2007, standards were very high compared with those nationally. They remained high in 2008, although the impact of several children with statements of special educational needs caused a slight dip from the 2007 outcomes. Many of the present cohort have already met national averages for the end of Year 2 and children are on track to meet or exceed the school's challenging targets, maintaining high standards. This represents high achievement from their starting points.

Children's personal development and well-being are exemplary because adults expect them to take responsibility for their actions, to respect others and to care for their school and the environment. Several children have emotional or behavioural difficulties, but because each child knows his or her responsibilities, overall behaviour is exemplary. Attendance has improved since the last inspection and is now above average. Children and staff enjoy discussion and learning together and there is often a buzz of excitement in lessons. Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is extremely good and they have a mature attitude. In a philosophy lesson, for example, children in Year 2 used the words 'if' and 'then' to look at aspects of war. They matched statements such as 'If weapons were free' with a selection of 'then' outcomes, justifying their response with a 'because' statement. Their responses were well-reasoned and thought-provoking. Children influence school planning. For example, they requested teddies to read to in the library area and the school provided these.

The school is rigorous in ensuring children know how to keep themselves healthy and safe. Children in Year 1 explored the properties of fruit and vegetables. They used a computer program to select, with total accuracy, statements about keeping healthy. Others used magnifying glasses to aid their life drawing of sections of fruit. Some used their senses to identify attributes of a range of fruit and vegetables, extending their vocabulary. Children use tools very safely because adults teach them how and then trust them. In the playground is a padded post with a notice 'You climb this pole at your own risk'. This is an example of the school's philosophy to encourage children to make the right choices.

All staff share the same philosophy so that all aspects of the school's provision are exemplary. Teaching and learning are outstanding. Highly skilled teachers and teaching assistants encourage the children to apply their skills to solve problems and find out new things, often leading to lively discussion enabling them to learn from each other. This leads to rapid and highly motivated learning. The rich and diverse curriculum, for which the school is justifiably renowned, ensures

learning is relevant and challenging. The learning opportunities go beyond the requirements of the National Curriculum, with additional subjects such as philosophy and French. Extremely skilful planning around themes links learning across the curriculum. Children develop the skills they need through the rigorous teaching of basic skills in relevant ways. For example, children in Year 2 consolidated multiplication and division skills by making sets of 'pills' for Florence Nightingale to dispense to soldiers in the Crimea. In Year 1, children explored the sounds within the words they used to describe the taste, feel, smell and look of the fruit, an activity deliberately planned by the teacher. The school walls and surfaces 'drip' with high quality work across the curriculum and colourful displays to support learning. The outside area is attractive, with good quality playground equipment, a wild area and raised beds for children to grow vegetables. A large range of additional clubs and activities, which most children attend, extends learning extremely well. Visitors, including guests from other faiths and cultures, bring the curriculum to life.

Children receive high quality pastoral and academic guidance and support. All have targets and know what they need to do to achieve well. They are skilled in evaluating their own and others' learning. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and those with statements of special educational needs, receive all the support and guidance they need. As a result, their achievements are better than those of similar children nationally. Individual children's needs, and the wishes of parents, are catered for extremely well. One parent said, 'The school bends over backwards to consult and accommodate the family's religion', and praised the way her son, who joined school reading well, is individually challenged. Children in the special support class are extremely well supported and are integrated into the mainstream classes whenever relevant. All children have access to quiet areas, including a light sensory room, when they need some 'time out'. The school meets all the requirements for protecting and safeguarding children.

The inspection totally endorses the parents' views that leadership and management are outstanding. The headteacher's ideals and commitment to developing children's thinking skills are shared by the whole staff. She and the deputy headteacher, who is often responsible for the school while the headteacher is at the Nursery school, make a very effective team. Accurate and astute self-evaluation generates clear plans for improvement. The rigorous monitoring of learning and teaching and regular staff appraisal ensure high quality education is maintained. The school provides excellent value for money and has an outstanding potential for future development. New teachers undergo extensive support to help them get up to speed with the innovative curriculum. Governors are skilled in supporting and challenging decisions and monitoring the school's effectiveness. There are strong links with parents and the Nursery school. The before and after school club provides well for both infant children and children from the junior school with which the school is increasingly developing educational links. The school promotes community cohesion well. The sense of community within the school is very strong. The school is seeking ways to broaden this to include links with other schools in the United Kingdom or worldwide, but these plans have not yet been implemented.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Children in Castle Hill Infant School get off to a flying start to their school lives. Although many children have only one or two terms in the Reception classes before joining Year 1, most have above average knowledge and skills by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, having made rapid progress from their starting points. This is because of the excellent provision that

fully reflects the ethos of the school. Children's physical, emotional and educational needs are paramount and there are excellent relationships between staff and children. Highly effective leadership ensures that children have access to a superb indoor and outdoor environment that generates a love of learning.

Children know how to keep healthy and are very sure about healthy eating and drinking. In a physical education lesson, children were able to tell their teacher how their bodies change after exercise. Very astute planning, firmly rooted in what it is children need to learn next, enables children to learn through interesting themes, such as the rainforest. All aspects of learning are subtly linked to generate excitement and interest. Children's progress is carefully monitored and teachers use these assessments to plan new activities to extend learning. Children's personal and social skills are extremely well developed far exceeding national expectations. This is because, from the time they start school, children are encouraged to take responsibility for their learning, the environment, relationships with others and personal care. They all know, however, that the adults are there to help and support them, giving them the security to thrive. Parents say that children can't wait to get to school in the mornings.

What the school should do to improve further

- Consolidate and extend opportunities for children to integrate actively with other groups locally, nationally and internationally, to deepen their understanding of common values and their role in society beyond school.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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

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

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	1
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	1
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?	1
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	1

Achievement and standards

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

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

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

Leadership and management

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

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

19 March 2009

Dear Children

Inspection of Castle Hill Infant School, Ipswich, IP1 6QD

Thank you all very much for your friendliness and help during our visit to your lovely school recently. What a lovely day we had! We were so impressed with all your hard work, the way that you decide for yourselves how to solve problems and find things out and your excellent behaviour and care for each other. Well done. You told us how much you enjoy school. I am not surprised! Your teachers take excellent care of you all and plan lots of exciting and interesting things for you to learn. We enjoyed looking at all your lovely work in your bright and cheerful school. We really enjoyed seeing how each of your classes thought about different things when you looked at Renoir's painting of a rainy day. We were pleased to see that fewer of you miss school than at the time of your school's last inspection, unless you are too sick to come.

One of the things that helps you enjoy school so much is the way your teachers show you how to think for yourselves. I was very interested to hear your views about what would happen if weapons were free or if war was banned. These thinking skills really help you decide how to do your work. Your school is very special because all the grown-ups like to learn with you. You all live up to your school motto, 'Together we make the difference.' Grown-ups lead and manage your school beautifully; helping you gain the skills you need for the future as well as making rapid progress while you are there. Your teachers are always looking at ways to make things even better for you. We have asked them to help you meet or communicate with more groups of people outside school, locally, in the United Kingdom and from around the world. This will help you see what we all have in common, as well as what life is like for others. Maybe then there will be no wars for your children to ban!

We were so lucky to arrive on the day that the chicks started hatching. I know you will take good care of them and each other in your excellent school. We wish you all the best for the future.

Yours faithfully

Mrs Judy Dawson

Lead inspector