

# Castle Lower School

Goldington Road, Bedford, MK40 3EP

**Inspection dates** 3–4 October 2013

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	<b>Outstanding</b>	<b>1</b>
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is an outstanding school.

- Castle Lower School is an outstanding school providing an exceptionally high quality of education for all its pupils.
- Achievement is outstanding overall although pupils' writing in Key Stage 2 is not always quite as strong as their reading and mathematics.
- Teaching is consistently good or better and a very high proportion is outstanding.
- Teaching inspires pupils. This is why they are making rapid progress.
- Pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage settle in very quickly and make rapid progress.
- Pupils are exceptionally polite. Through their outstanding behaviour in lessons, they help each other do better. They feel safe and secure in school. Their attendance is well above average.
- Leaders and managers work extremely effectively to make sure key aspects of the school, including teaching and achievement, continue to improve. This results in an excellent learning experience for all pupils.
- Governors regularly check how well the school is doing and they have taken very effective action to make sure improvements have been sustained.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 24 lessons, some of which were seen together with a senior leader. They listened to groups of pupils reading and held a learning walk with the headteacher.
- Discussions were held with the headteacher, the Chair and representatives of the Governing Body, a local authority representative, the headteacher of a neighbouring school, senior leaders, staff and groups of pupils.
- Inspectors took account of the 122 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View), the 35 responses from the staff questionnaire and letters and emails from parents.
- Inspectors looked carefully at a wide range of documents, including, the school improvement plan, systems to track pupils' progress, records relating to behaviour and attendance, information on teachers' performance, governors' systems for monitoring progress, safeguarding records and a sample of pupils' work.

## Inspection team

Neil Stanley, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Andrew Sierant

Additional Inspector

Lynn Lowery

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- Castle Lower School is much larger than the average primary school, with pupils aged 3-9.
- The school includes a nursery which is attended by 60 children on a part-time basis.
- The school population is mainly White British, although the proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is higher than the national average.
- A significant minority of pupils speak English as an additional language.
- A below-average proportion of pupils are supported by the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, children looked after by the local authority and other groups of pupils.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported by school action is below average, as is the proportion supported by school action plus or through a statement of special educational needs.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of writing, particularly by boys, so that pupils make as rapid progress in writing as they do in reading and mathematics by:
  - giving pupils more varied and regular opportunities to produce, review and improve their extended writing.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- Pupils' attainment when they join the school in the Early Years Foundation Stage is slightly below average. When they leave at the end of Year 4, it is well above average in writing and exceptionally high in reading and mathematics. This is because of teaching that is often outstanding.
- Children achieve well in the Early Years Foundation Stage. They build on their good social skills to make particularly fast progress in their language and number skills. This is because they have many opportunities to practise these in all areas of their learning. Learning through song is particularly effective at helping them learn their different sounds. By the end of the year, their attainment is in line with children nationally.
- Pupils make very fast progress by the time they leave Key Stage 1. At the end of Year 2 they are typically two terms ahead of pupils nationally in their reading, writing and mathematics. In their number work, pupils make skilful use of different sized objects that reflect numbers. This gives them a sense of relative values and helps them to count accurately.
- In Years 3 and 4, pupils continue to make rapid progress, particularly in their reading and mathematics. They typically leave school with attainment that is almost three terms ahead of pupils nationally. Attainment in writing is not quite as high as in reading and mathematics. This is because boys' progress in writing is not as rapid as it is in reading and mathematics.
- Students for whom English is an additional language make outstanding progress. This is because they are given extra help when they join the school. At first, they do very well in mathematics, before their reading and writing catches up. When they leave the school, their attainment is typically two terms ahead of all pupils nationally and well ahead of similar pupils.
- Disabled pupils and pupils with special educational needs make outstanding progress thanks to the very effective guidance and help they get from the staff. Their attainment gets closer to that of other groups of pupils as they move up the school.
- The school has gone out of its way to provide excellent levels of support for pupils who are eligible for the pupil premium. It has used this funding very effectively to provide additional teaching assistants and resources and has also drawn up carefully customised learning programmes for individual pupils in English and mathematics. There are, however, too few such pupils in any one class for the report to comment on their attainment relative to their classmates since this would risk identifying them.
- Last year, the school identified small groups of Year 2 pupils who were in danger of falling behind in reading, writing or mathematics. It organised small catch-up groups, taught by senior teachers. As a result, these pupils made rapid progress and caught up quickly. This scheme is now being introduced to other pupils.
- In the first year of the phonics screening check (the use of sounds to build words), the school's results were below those expected. Because of this, the school changed its phonics systems and, as a result, pupils' phonics scores have increased significantly and are now well above those of last year.
- The most able pupils make outstanding progress in the school and consistently reach high levels

of achievement in the statutory tests in Year 2 and throughout the school. In addition to classroom activities, the school provides additional activities, including workshops at the Children's University and weekend master-classes at Bedford School.

## **The quality of teaching** is outstanding

- Teachers plan inspiring lessons that engage their pupils. As a result, pupils relish their learning. This was seen in the Early Years Foundation Stage, when pupils investigated the inside of a marrow, finding its pips. The teacher encouraged them to use interesting words to describe their discovery.
- Teachers plan lessons that help pupils of all abilities make rapid progress from their different starting points. For example, in a Year 3 lesson on punctuating speech, groups of pupils were given different activities that challenged them. Effective modelling helped the less confident understand the work. As the teacher explained, 'Speech marks are like lips opening and closing when people speak'.
- In typical lessons, teachers expect pupils to work at a fast pace, which ensures they make good progress towards clear learning goals. Teachers revisit these goals regularly throughout the lesson to make sure pupils understand what they are doing.
- Pupils are given many opportunities to comment on the work of others. They do this with encouragement and respect and, as a result, pupils are confident about sharing their work. This was particularly effective in a Year 3 lesson, where pupils evaluated each other's role play, praising each other and helping them do even better. As a result, they made exceptional progress.
- Teachers use probing questioning in lessons to check pupils' understanding. This was particularly effective in a Key Stage 2 lesson on the Titanic, where the teacher's questions encouraged the pupils to develop their ideas about how the survivors must have felt.
- Teachers teach the skills of writing well but they do not always vary the writing activities to encourage extended writing, particularly in Key Stage 2. This is one reason why progress in writing is not as strong as in reading and mathematics.
- Teachers provide pupils with detailed written feedback on how to improve their work. This means pupils know what they have done well and what they need to do to improve. However, pupils are not always given enough time to review and improve their extended writing.
- Classrooms are vibrant and attractive environments and teachers were seen referring to wall displays to help pupils improve their work. This inspires pupils to do their best and helps them think for themselves as they look for solutions to problems and ways to improve their work.
- Teachers find imaginative ways to make their lessons exciting. For example, pupils were keen to describe their work on the Great Fire of London, which involved recreating the scenes on the playground. These memorable experiences help them apply the skills they have learnt.
- The teaching of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is consistently strong. In class and in small groups, adults provide work that is challenging yet achievable and work hard to build pupils' confidence and interest in what they are learning. Because of this support, these pupils make rapid and sustained progress.

**The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding**

- Pupils' consistently excellent behaviour in lessons and their calm, polite and courteous manner around the school make a significant contribution to the positive school environment and their own academic and personal achievements.
- In class, pupils' attitudes to learning are very strong. They listen to each other and respect each other's opinions. They praise each other when they answer a question correctly and support each other when they are not right. Because of this, they are confident and ready to try new and challenging activities.
- In the Early Years Foundation Stage, pupils who have attended the school's Nursery are paired with pupils who are new to the school. This support helps the new pupils settle in very quickly and make friends.
- Pupils quickly learn how to work by themselves and do not rely on teachers to direct them. For example, in the Early Years Foundation Stage, pupils were working on their own and in small groups, organising their learning and being considerate to each other.
- Pupils and their parents do not feel bullying is a problem in this school. However, they are very confident that if any did arise it would be dealt with quickly and effectively by teachers. Pupils are appropriately aware of different types of bullying, including cyber-bullying, racism, sex and gender bullying and other forms of harassment.
- Pupils are very keen to take responsibility and the school council has led the way in improving facilities. In recent years, the school council has increased the school's recycling and suggestions for improving the outdoor classroom have been adopted by senior leaders.
- Pupils are very keen to talk to visitors to the school. They enthusiastically joined inspectors at lunch and were very keen to talk about their learning. Pupils in the Reception class were particularly confident. This shows how safe they feel in the school.
- Pupils' enjoyment of school is reflected in their attendance, which is well above average. Levels of persistent absence are very low. Pupils' punctuality reflects their enthusiasm for the school and their learning.
- The school has a consistent and highly-effective system for encouraging good behaviour. Pupils were involved in writing the behaviour policy and say the system is clear and fair. As a result, no students have been excluded from school in the last 3 years.

**The leadership and management are outstanding**

- Castle Lower School is exceptionally well led by its headteacher and all senior leaders focus relentlessly on improving the school. For example, they are not satisfied that attainment in writing is above average and want it to be as good as reading and mathematics.
- Subject leaders have confidence in, and the support of, their senior leaders. This has enabled them to be innovative in the classroom and in their decision-making. Topics have been adapted to interest boys and the school's phonics system has been changed. As a result, pupils are

making outstanding progress.

- The school emphasises the importance of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and this is evident throughout all subjects. Through its 'values education' programme pupils are able to reflect on how their own behaviour and attitudes can help make the world a better place.
  - The school provides a wide range of subjects and places a strong emphasis on music with the well-attended school choir being very successful in the Bedfordshire Festival of Music and Drama. The topic work provides a rich and rewarding experience for pupils. Topics such as monsters and dinosaurs are exciting for boys and helping them make very strong progress.
  - Regular and rigorous lesson observations are highly effective in helping staff, who are very keen to learn from their feedback, to improve their teaching. Good use of the results from these observations leads to appropriate and effective training for individual teachers and forms an important part of the regular meetings held with teachers about their performance and decisions about their pay and promotion.
  - Senior leaders have used pupil premium funding specifically to help those for whom it is intended. They make sure that the funding is divided equally among the pupils it supports and closely monitor its impact.
  - The school has built very strong links with parents. This is reflected in the very high response to Parent View. The school has organised workshops for parents on phonics and mathematics and this has helped parents support their children's learning. The school has made very effective use of translation software to help parents for whom English is an additional language.
  - The school has built strong links with the local community. This is shown by the school's links with the elderly and its fund-raising for the local Salvation Army.
  - While it has not yet received the funds themselves, the school is aware of the new primary school sports funding. The school plans to further develop its long-standing and highly effective links with local sporting groups, such as the Riverside Tennis Club, Priory Marina Sailing Club and Bedford Rugby Club to give its pupils more varied sporting opportunities.
- **The governance of the school:**
- Governance is outstanding. The governors play an important role in school life. They regularly meet with staff and pupils to gather evidence about how well the school is doing compared to other schools. Senior leaders keep governors very well informed about the achievement and progress of different groups of pupils in the school. Governors make exceptionally effective use of interactive software to track pupils' progress and hold leaders to account. They monitor pupil premium spending and its effectiveness very well.
  - Governors check pay decisions for teachers and where teaching is at its best and what might need to improve. They demand that pupils' progress is at the centre of any discussion about increases in pay and promotion. Through rigorous planning and prudent budgeting, governors are ensuring the school's financial stability. They make sure that the school's policies and procedures for safeguarding fully meet national requirements.

## What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	109435
<b>Local authority</b>	Bedford
<b>Inspection number</b>	427219

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Foundation
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–9
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	423
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Michael Ridley
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mick Marsh
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	13 March 2008
<b>Telephone number</b>	01234 300800
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