

30 June 2017

Dear Parent/Carer

### **Castel Primary School States of Guernsey**

Recently, as you may know, my colleagues and I visited your child's school. During our visit, we talked to parents and children and worked closely with the headteacher and staff. We wanted to find out how well children are learning and achieving and how well the school supports children to do their best. The headteacher shared with us the school's successes and priorities for improvement. We looked at some particular aspects of the school's recent work, including the new *hobby club* initiative; and the range of ways that children receive feedback on their work. As a result, we were able to find out how good the school is at improving children's education.

#### **How well do children learn and achieve?**

Castel Primary School is a happy and very successful school. The purposeful and caring ethos allows all children to develop and learn very well. Children of all ages are articulate, kind to each other and very proud of their school. They willingly take on responsibilities and many demonstrate leadership skills in roles such as buddies, monitors and class helpers. Older children who carry out the roles of digital leaders, leaders of learning and playground leaders show high levels of commitment to their roles and most are trained in coaching techniques. As a result, children are respectful and keen to help each other whenever they can. The school's recent work on developing their motto, of 'persevere, believe, achieve', has impacted very positively on children's motivation.

In lessons, children are independent learners. They work very well in pairs and small groups on a range of motivating tasks. Their skills as learners are highly developed. Children have daily opportunities to review their own learning, and also the learning of their classmates. They do this with great confidence. Older children share feedback about their learning through the innovative use of digital technology. These exciting approaches allow children to share ideas in a highly creative way, as well as providing meaningful opportunities for peer assessment. As a result, children are able to provide high-quality and astute feedback to each other about their work, and know their own strengths and next steps as learners. Across the school, children are developing very well the skills to self-regulate their learning. They select from a range of increasingly challenging tasks that they 'must, should and could' complete. All children are motivated by this approach. Teachers should continue to raise children's expectations of their own ability. There is a need to ensure that all children, particularly those who are more able, choose tasks with the most appropriate level of challenge. This will enable them to make even better progress in their learning.

At all stages, children benefit from a wide range of enriching opportunities that develop and celebrate their wider achievements. The school takes part, and frequently achieves success in, a range of island-wide competitions, including sporting and musical events. Well planned cultural and residential experiences develop children's skills for life and build very well on their earlier experiences. Examples of recent highly motivational experiences for children include: Year 6 sailing on a tall ship; children in Reception classes building fires and cooking potatoes they had grown in their garden; and children in Year 4 demonstrating team work and resilience on an expedition to Lihou. The new *hobby club* initiative is a promising approach to ensuring equity of access for all children through participation in enriching out-of-class activities and in trying something new.

Across the school children benefit from improvements in approaches to learning and teaching in literacy and mathematics. Attainment data provided by the school and Education Services for 2016 shows that, overall, children's attainment in literacy and mathematics is good. By the end of Key Stage 2, numbers of children attaining minimum expected levels is well above the Bailiwick average. At the Reception classes, children's progress is in line with the Bailiwick average. By the end of Key Stage 1 almost all children achieve L2b+ in reading and writing and most attain L2b+ in mathematics. This is well above the Bailiwick average. However, there is room to improve the numbers of children achieving Level 3+ at Key Stage 1, which are currently below the Bailiwick average. By the end of Key Stage 2, most children achieve Level 4b+ in reading, writing and mathematics. This is well above the Bailiwick average for these minimum expectations. There is now a need to improve the numbers of children achieving Level 5+ by the end of Key Stage 2, since more children are capable of this than achieve presently.

In summary, there is a need, as planned, for the school to continue to raise attainment for children. Staff should continue to seek ways to challenge more able children in order that they can make very good progress in their learning and achieve the best possible outcomes. An increased pace of learning in some class lessons, and through more flexible curriculum pathways, will enable more children to attain higher levels.

### **How well does the school support children to develop and learn?**

Lessons across the school are well planned. Almost all staff are skilled at assessing and adapting learning in the course of lessons, and in providing feedback to help children understand what they need to improve. In almost all lessons, there is a cooperative approach to learning and teaching. This enables children to share ideas, develop very good communication and social skills and assess each other's work. The school makes very good use of digital technology to help children understand themselves as learners and to share information about learning with parents. Digital technology is used well to help children work independently. In almost all lessons, tasks and activities are well matched to the needs of learners. Teachers use creative and innovative approaches to motivate and interest children. In almost all activities, children are excited by what they are learning. Overall, the pace of learning and level of challenge is appropriate for almost all children. There is scope to provide further challenge and differentiation and to increase the pace of learning in a few classes.

The school has robust systems in place to help staff identify and support children who require additional help with their learning. The Special Educational Needs Coordinator works effectively within the time available to her. She helps to ensure that there is a coordinated approach to meeting children's needs. The school works very effectively with a range of partners to help meet the needs of children. For example, partner agencies such as the literacy intervention service and the speech and language therapist provide effective, targeted support for some children. Learning support assistants (LSAs) provide valuable support to children. They are deployed very effectively throughout the school to support individuals and groups of children who require extra help. LSAs are very creative in how they engage children in their learning and are reflective in their practice. They take great pride in their work and make a real difference for children. Staff have a good awareness of issues that may be impacting on children's wellbeing and respond sensitively and appropriately. The school has very effective procedures in place for ensuring the wellbeing needs of children are met. Across the school, almost all children say that they feel safe. They have a good understanding of what they need to do to lead a healthy lifestyle, and talk about the importance of a balanced diet, taking exercise and keeping safe when using technology.

Staff are very positive about their involvement in curricular change. They are working well individually as subject leaders, and collectively as a team, to adapt their practice to incorporate the new 'Big Curriculum' plans within the Bailiwick. A few staff have contributed to system-wide improvement by participating in working parties with colleagues from other schools. The curriculum is well planned overall to meet the needs and interests of children. Staff respond actively to children's ideas and incorporate their views in planning topics. Whole-school themed learning events, such as the recent 'science week', provide valuable opportunities for children at all stages to engage in high-quality, motivating and real-life learning. The creative approaches taken by staff included organising a family learning 'jellybean' challenge and capitalising on partnerships with local businesses and experts in the field of science. Children at all stages clearly benefit from such stimulating learning experiences, as well as developing important skills and knowledge about science and the world of work. In Reception and Year 1, children frequently initiate their own imaginative activities. Staff skilfully extend and support children's learning during these times, to make the most of such learning opportunities.

The school has programmes and frameworks in place for all curricular areas. The staff team are currently working together to review these programmes to ensure they are in line with the new 'Big Curriculum' guidance. We have discussed with the school the need to ensure that courses and programmes are used flexibly by teachers, to ensure a brisk pace of learning and to further raise expectations about what children can achieve. This will help to ensure that all children, including those who are more able, achieve the best possible outcomes.

### **How well does the school improve the quality of its work?**

Promoted staff carry out an ongoing programme of monitoring activities throughout the year, which provides them with an accurate overview of the school's strengths and areas for further development. These monitoring activities include learning walks, lesson observations, scrutinising teachers' planning and children's work and

monitoring the progress of learners. Staff, children and parents are meaningfully involved in helping to improve the life and work of the school. Led very successfully by the headteacher and promoted staff, there is a 'can do' ethos across the school which is leading to continuous improvement. Everyone associated with Castel Primary School is very proud of the school and committed to maintaining its very positive reputation in the community. At all levels, there is a strong sense of teamwork. The senior leadership team is highly effective and work together seamlessly to drive the school forward. Teachers collaborate willingly together, as stage partners and as a wider staff group, to review and refresh their practice.

Overall, parents are very positive about the work of the school. They feel that staff are very approachable; that their children are known as individuals; and, that the school is very well led. Parents like the regular newsletters and use of social media which keeps them up to date with important events. Building on parents' views, the school has plans in place to streamline further the range of ways that they keep in touch with parents, including how they use digital technology. Parents themselves add much value to the school community in significant ways. This includes helping with the hobby clubs and after-school activities. The Parent Teacher Association supports the school very well and helps to raise significant funds, for example, through family bingo evenings, quiz nights and the annual Christmas and summer fayres. Staff actively seek the views of parents and on aspects of the school's work. Regular 'Parent Forum' sessions provide very good opportunities for parents to share their views and ideas about different areas of school life. The school communicates the results of these consultative sessions through a 'You Said, We Did' approach. Children feel that they have a real say in helping to improve their school. Through the active School Council, they have been successful in making improvements to their playground. Children on the School Council used their creativity and information handling skills to very good effect to devise a questionnaire for their peers on the new school values. There is scope to now extend the range of pupil-led committees in order to make the most of their developing leadership skills.

The headteacher is very highly regarded by staff, parents and children. She places a high priority on supporting children, families and staff members and encourages a strong sense of community. As a result, morale is high and adults feel valued as part of the staff team. She makes astute, strategic decisions to ensure that the best practice in learning and teaching can be shared across the staff team. The headteacher is ably supported by the highly-skilled deputy headteacher and senior leader, who each carry out their roles and responsibilities very effectively. Distributed leadership is a strong feature of the school. Teaching and support staff alike are reflective practitioners who are keen to develop and improve their practice. They willingly participate in peer observations, professional dialogue and professional learning.

We are confident that, under the leadership of the very experienced and highly effective headteacher and senior leadership team, the school has very good capacity to continue to improve. Promoted staff have an accurate view of the strengths of the school and areas for further improvement. There are clear and focused plans in place to secure continuous improvement. At all levels, staff have an outward-looking approach and are keen to research best practice and learn together. HM Inspectors were able to validate the school's own judgements as part of the validation visit.

This validation visit found the following key strengths.

- The highly effective and dynamic leadership of the headteacher in creating a welcoming and inclusive school community. Together, the school's senior leaders are skilled in securing improvements through robust approaches to self-evaluation.
- Articulate, creative, independent and happy children. They persevere, are highly motivated to learn and understand themselves particularly well as learners.
- Innovative approaches to improving children's literacy skills in a holistic way. The impressive range of ways that children are provided with feedback to improve their own learning, including the use of digital technology.
- The strong sense of teamwork and commitment of all staff to engage in professional learning in order to provide a caring, vibrant and high-quality environment for learning. At all levels, staff go the 'extra mile' to support children and families.
- Positive and productive partnerships with parents, professionals and the local community which enhance children's experiences.

We discussed with staff and Education Service how they might continue to improve the school. This is what we agreed with them.

- As planned, continue to raise children's attainment as they move through the school. Teachers should use courses and programmes flexibly to ensure a suitably brisk pace of children's learning to enable them to achieve the best possible outcomes.
- Continue to share best practice in learning and teaching across the school.

Here are the evaluations for Castel Primary School.

<b>Improvements in performance</b>	<b>good</b>
<b>Learners' experiences</b>	<b>very good</b>
<b>Teaching for effective learning</b>	<b>very good</b>
<b>Meeting learning needs</b>	<b>very good</b>
<b>Improvement through self-evaluation</b>	<b>very good</b>
<b>Leadership of improvement and change</b>	<b>very good</b>

### **What happens at the end of the validation?**

We are satisfied with the overall quality of provision. We are confident that the school's self-evaluation processes are leading to improvements. As a result, we will make no further visits in connection with this visit. As part of its arrangements for reporting to parents on the quality of education, Education Services will inform parents about the school's progress.

Lesley A Johnstone  
HM Inspector

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## Appendix 1

<p><b>Excellent</b></p> <p>6</p>	<p><b>Outstanding or sector leading</b></p> <p>An evaluation of excellent applies to provision which is sector leading. Pupils' experiences and achievements are of a very high quality. An evaluation of excellent represents an outstanding standard of provision which exemplifies very best practice and is worth disseminating beyond the school. It implies that very high levels of performance are sustainable and will be maintained.</p>
<p><b>Very good</b></p> <p>5</p>	<p><b>Major strengths</b></p> <p>An evaluation of very good applies to provision characterised by major strengths. There are very few areas for improvement and any that do exist do not significantly diminish pupils' experiences. Whilst an evaluation of very good represents a high standard of provision, it is a standard that should be achievable by all. It implies that it is fully appropriate to continue to make provision without significant adjustment. However, there is an expectation that the school will take opportunities to improve and strive to raise performance to excellent.</p>
<p><b>Good</b></p> <p>4</p>	<p><b>Important strengths with areas for improvement</b></p> <p>An evaluation of good applies to provision characterised by important strengths which, taken together, clearly outweigh any areas for improvement. An evaluation of good represents a standard of provision in which the strengths have a significantly positive impact. However, the quality of pupils' experiences is diminished in some way by aspects in which improvement is required. It implies that the school should seek to improve further the areas of important strength, but take action to address the areas for improvement.</p>
<p><b>Satisfactory</b></p> <p>3</p>	<p><b>Strengths just outweigh weaknesses</b></p> <p>An evaluation of satisfactory applies to provision characterised by strengths which just outweigh weaknesses. An evaluation of satisfactory indicates that pupils have access to a basic level of provision. It represents a standard where the strengths have a positive impact on pupils' experiences. However, while the weaknesses are not important enough to have a substantially adverse impact, they do constrain the overall quality of pupils' experiences. It implies that the school should take action to address areas of weakness by building on its strengths.</p>
<p><b>Weak</b></p> <p>2</p>	<p><b>Important weaknesses</b></p> <p>An evaluation of weak applies to provision which has some strengths, but where there are important weaknesses. In general, an evaluation of weak may be arrived at in a number of circumstances. While there may be some strength, important weaknesses will, either individually or collectively, be sufficient to diminish pupils' experiences in substantial ways. It implies the need for prompt, structured and planned action on the part of the school.</p>
<p><b>Unsatisfactory</b></p> <p>1</p>	<p>An evaluation of unsatisfactory applies when there are major weaknesses in provision requiring immediate remedial action. Pupils' experiences are at risk in significant respects. In almost all cases, staff responsible for provision evaluated as unsatisfactory will require support from senior managers in planning and carrying out the necessary actions to effect improvement. This may involve working alongside other staff or agencies in or beyond the school.</p>

**Validation report:** **Castel Primary School**

**Validation dates:** **20 - 23 June 2017**

**Managing Inspector:** **Lesley Johnstone**

**Type of school:** **Primary**

**Age range of learners:** **4-11**

**Gender of learners:** **Mixed**

**Number on roll:** **363**

## **Introduction**

The validation was carried out by a team of three HM Inspectors, who spent three days in the school observing lessons, talking with learners and looking at their work, engaging in discussions with staff and parents, looking at school records and other documentation, and scrutinising responses to the pre-validation questionnaires.

## **The context of the school**

Castel Primary School is a two-form entry school in close proximity to St Germain Nature trail and Vazon beach. At the time of the validation, the school roll was 363. Around 15% of children are in receipt of uniform allowance. The percentage of children identified with special educational needs at Castel Primary School is below the average for schools across the Bailiwick. The headteacher has been in post since September 2015.



## **How well do children learn and achieve?**

### **Learners' experiences**

The purposeful and caring ethos of the school is developing children's skills very well. Children of all ages are articulate, happy and very proud of their school. The positive climate for learning is evident across all stages and within the wider school community. Motivation levels are high, and both staff and children benefit from the supportive climate that is embedded across the school. Children willingly take on responsibilities and many demonstrate leadership skills in roles such as buddies, monitors and class helpers. Older children who carry out the roles of digital leaders, leaders of learning and playground leaders show high levels of commitment to their role, and most are trained in coaching techniques. As a result, children are respectful, kind and keen to help each other whenever they can.

In lessons, children are independent learners. In all lessons observed by inspectors children were actively engaged in their learning. They work very well in pairs and small groups on a range of motivating tasks. Their skills as learners are highly developed. Children consistently review their own learning, and also the learning of their classmates, with great confidence. Older children share feedback about their learning through the innovative use of digital technology. For example, the effective use of digital technology enables children to receive immediate feedback on their learning, from both the class teacher and their peers. Teachers use a shared electronic folder to monitor children's writing, in real time, and record comments that children, working individually or in groups, can take into consideration to improve their work. In addition, children at Year 6 share their learning 'virtually' through their online profiles. These innovative approaches allow children to share ideas in a highly creative and motivating way, as well as providing meaningful opportunities for peer assessment. As a result, children are able to provide high-quality and astute feedback to each other about their written work, and know their own strengths and next steps as learners.

Across the school, children are developing very well the skills to self-regulate their learning through well planned opportunities for them to personalise the level of challenge within lessons. Children select from a range of increasingly challenging tasks that they 'must, should and could' complete. All children are motivated by this approach. Teachers should continue to share best practice to ensure that more children, particularly those who are more able, are choosing the best tasks to challenge themselves. At times, children were observed to choose a simpler task than they were capable of. Teachers should continue to raise children's own expectations of their ability.

### **Improvements in performance**

Across the school, children benefit from a wide range of enriching opportunities that develop and celebrate their achievements. Staff make effective use of social media and the local press to regularly share the successes of children and staff. The school takes part, and frequently achieves success in, a range of island-wide competitions and events. Members of the gardening club are very proud of their success in winning first place in the largest onion competition. In addition, they gain enterprise skills in

growing fresh produce and seedlings that they sell at the Farmers Market. Children participate in a range of sporting and music events. In addition, they benefit from taking part in school shows which provide valuable experiences performing to a live audience. Well planned cultural and residential experiences develop valuable skills for life and build very well on children's earlier experiences. Examples of recent highly motivational experiences for children include: Year 6 sailing on a tall ship; children in Reception classes building fires and cooking potatoes they had grown in their garden; and children in Year 4 demonstrating team work and resilience on an expedition to Lihou. The school should continue with their plans to develop opportunities for children to practice and demonstrate their skills in a wider range of contexts and to ensure all children benefit from participation. The new *hobby club* initiative is a promising approach to ensuring equity of access for all children in participating in enriching out-of-class activities and in trying something new.

Across the school children benefit from improvements in approaches to learning and teaching in literacy and mathematics. As a result, the predicted levels of attainment in mathematics at Year 6 show that children maintained a good pace of learning over the year. The recent focus on improving literacy has impacted very positively on children's experiences and the quality of children's writing continues to improve. Data and observations of learning show that children make the most progress at the early stages. The school has appropriate plans in place to continue to build on the strong start children make in the early years as they move through the school. Overall, children at the middle and upper stages are capable of making better, swifter progress as they move from year to year. The school has provided targeted support for a few children in order to improve their attendance. As planned, staff should continue to monitor their progress in learning and plan any necessary interventions as required.

Across the school children listen and speak very well. They talk confidently about their learning and use rich vocabulary to describe events, books they have read and about their experiences. They articulate their knowledge about learning and can describe strategies they use to solve problems. They demonstrate maturity when taking part in group discussions and readily build on each other's answers to form an opinion. Across the school, children develop their writing skills well through motivational contexts. Through digital technology and the 'Talk to Write' approach, they recognise and creatively replicate sophisticated techniques used by authors. In literacy, the school recently improved approaches to children's reading for pleasure and understanding of text. Children are encouraged to enjoy reading through a wide range of texts and have regular access to the school library. Older children are motivated by a reading challenge which encourages them to read 25 selected titles. In class, they interrogate text through novels linked to their topic.

Across the school children are making good progress in mathematics. Increasingly, children have opportunities to learn and apply their mathematical skills in a range of contexts. For example, in Reception classes, children regularly access numbers and use these in their own self-initiated play. In re-enacting 'Strictly Come Dancing', children held up number cards as judges while watching their friends flamenco dancing in authentic costumes. In Year 1, children made tickets and produced a timetable for their impromptu musical show. Improvements in approaches to teaching problem-solving skills are enabling children to make better progress in this area of their learning. They are knowledgeable about and can apply a wide range of strategies,

including logical reasoning, to tackle mathematical problems. The school plans to continue to improve approaches to mental calculations through reviewing the use of 'maths passports' to further support progress in mathematics.

Across the school children benefit from improvements in approaches to learning and teaching in literacy and mathematics. Attainment data provided by the school and Education Services for 2016 shows that, overall, children's attainment in literacy and mathematics is good. By the end of Key Stage 2, numbers of children attaining minimum expected levels is well above the Bailiwick average. At the Reception classes, children's progress is in line with the Bailiwick average. By the end of Key Stage 1 almost all children achieve L2b+ in reading and writing and most attain L2b+ in mathematics. This is well above the Bailiwick average. However, there is room to improve the number of children achieving Level 3+ at Key Stage 1, which are currently below the Bailiwick average. By the end of Key Stage 2, most children achieve Level 4b+ in reading, writing and mathematics. This is well above the Bailiwick average for these minimum expectations. There is now a need to improve the number of children achieving Level 5+ by the end of Key Stage 2, since more children are capable of this than achieve presently.

In summary, there is a need, as planned, to continue to raise attainment for children. Staff should continue to seek ways to challenge more able children in order that they can achieve the best possible outcomes. An increased pace of learning in some class lessons, and through more flexible curriculum pathways, will enable more children to attain higher levels. In addition, the school's own data highlights that staff should maintain their appropriate focus and planned interventions for vulnerable groups of children, including those with attendance that is less than 96% and children in receipt of uniform allowance.

Improvement plan priorities are well planned and based on robust self-evaluation. For example, improvements in literacy were informed through the careful analysis of assessment data and included a review of existing practice in how reading, writing, speaking and listening was taught. As a result of these planned developments in literacy, children's experiences have improved and the predicted levels of attainment for July 2017 show that increasing numbers of children will make better progress from their prior levels of attainment.

## **How well does the school support children to develop and learn?**

### **Teaching for effective learning**

The school's recent work on developing the bespoke motto, 'persevere, believe, achieve', has resulted in an ethos where children understand the importance of learning and their personal responsibility to achieve their best. The school's involvement of parents in developing the motto has helped to support children in applying the motto to activities and events outside school. This purposeful climate for learning, together with very positive relationships between children, their peers, staff and families, results in happy children who are very motivated to learn.

Staff have a very good knowledge about children and use this information well to plan lessons that motivate them. In the course of the validation visit, inspectors observed

and heard about a variety of creative, stimulating and very well-planned contexts for learning. In most lessons, the level of challenge was appropriate for all children. The 'must, could, should' approach enables children to experience more challenge and choice in their learning. Teachers should share good practice across the school in how the 'must, could, should' approach can be used to ensure appropriate challenge across all year groups. Further challenge for a few children would result in higher levels of sustained motivation throughout the activity. In a few lessons, children would have benefitted from a brisker pace in the delivery of lessons.

Lessons across the school are well planned. Staff are skilled at assessing and adapting learning in the course of lessons and in providing feedback to help children understand what they need to improve. In almost all lessons, there is a cooperative approach to learning and teaching. This enables children to share ideas, develop very good communication and social skills and assess each other's work. Children are skilful in being able to identify positive aspects of their partners' work and are able to give helpful suggestions about what to improve. The school makes very good use of digital technology to help children understand themselves as learners and to share information about learning with parents. Digital technology is used well to help children work independently.

Teachers routinely share learning intentions with children, using a range of strategies appropriate to the age and stage of the class. In the course of teaching and learning, children are provided with opportunities to communicate their understanding of tasks through active approaches. Children have a very good awareness of their own abilities, particularly in subjects such as literacy and mathematics. They use information and feedback from staff particularly well to help them identify what they need to do to improve. Staff are keen to explore further opportunities to provide individualised feedback to learners. In doing so, they should build on the good practice in Reception classes, where staff have individual, planned learning conversations with each child. Staff in Year 3 are using digital technology to provide instant feedback to children on their writing. This is very effective and could be extended to other year groups and to other areas of the curriculum.

The positive learning climate is conducive to children talking about their learning, expressing their views and asking searching questions. Almost all children are articulate and confident in lessons and when talking to adults about their learning. They are able to provide good explanations about the work they are involved in and can justify their ideas and opinions. In the course of lessons, children are given regular opportunities to discuss or work with partners or as part of a larger group. There are frequent opportunities and teaching techniques used for children to share ideas. These approaches enable children to think deeply about their learning.

### **Meeting learning needs**

In almost all lessons, tasks and activities are well matched to the needs of learners. Teachers implement creative and innovative approaches to motivate and interest children. As a result, learners are enthusiastic and inquisitive. In almost all activities, children are excited by what they are learning. Overall, the pace of learning and level of challenge is appropriate for almost all children. There is scope to provide further challenge and differentiation and to increase the pace of learning in a few classes.

Overall, children are highly motivated by their learning and feel the level of challenge is just right. Some children told inspectors that lessons in mathematics are not always challenging enough for them. Staff have a good understanding of the social and economic context in which children live and are taking action to ensure that they have equal opportunities to access learning and other activities.

The school has robust systems in place to help staff identify and support children who require additional help with their learning. There are clear procedures to ensure staff have a good understanding of children's needs and to implement interventions to support them. The Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) works effectively within the time available to her, to liaise with the senior leadership team, with staff across the school and with external partners to ensure the needs of children are identified. She helps to ensure that there is a coordinated approach to meeting children's needs. A helpful profile of needs, produced and updated by the SENCO, enables teachers to access relevant information about children. The school's inclusive and nurturing approach encourages class teachers to take good account of the support needs of all children, through a differentiated approach to learning and teaching. Whilst almost all teachers do this very well, there is scope to share and embed best practice to ensure that there is appropriate support and challenge for all. A wide range of resources is used well to support children who have additional needs. The school encourages a culture where staff are reflective in their practice and actively seek resources and approaches that will support learning and motivate their children. As a result, children who require help with their learning have access to interesting and enjoyable resources and experiences.

The school works very effectively with a range of partners to help meet the needs of children. For example, partner agencies such as the literacy intervention service and the speech and language therapist provide effective, targeted support which is integral to meeting the needs of children. There is very effective, collaborative practice between the school and other agencies. The progress and impact of specific interventions for individual children is monitored by class teachers and the senior leadership team at regular attainment meetings, reviews and professional discussions. Where appropriate, individual action plans or support plans are devised for children to identify targets and strategies. These plans are used well to identify specific outcomes and to track progress.

Learning support assistants (LSAs) provide very valuable support to children. They are deployed very effectively throughout the school to support individuals and groups of children who require help. They are skilful in providing appropriate interventions and have a very good understanding of the needs of children. Commendably, LSAs are very creative in how they engage children in their learning and are reflective of their practice. They take great pride in their work. They provide very high quality, targeted support across the school which results in improved literacy and numeracy outcomes for children.

The school has very effective procedures in place for ensuring the wellbeing needs of children are met. As child protection coordinator, the headteacher implements approaches to ensure all staff are fully aware of their responsibilities in keeping children safe. There is appropriate referral and liaison with other agencies to ensure that all partners are fully informed about issues related to the safety and wellbeing of

children. Across the school almost all children say that they feel safe. Children have a good understanding of what they need to do to be healthy and talk about the importance of a healthy diet, exercise and keeping safe when using technology. Staff have a good awareness of issues that may be impacting on children's wellbeing and respond sensitively and appropriately. They make good use of other services such as the bereavement service and health partners to support individual children.

## **Curriculum**

Children, at all stages, are developing very well as successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens. They benefit from a broad and balanced curriculum that includes many examples of joyous and purposeful learning, both in and out of class. The headteacher has led a highly successful process of staff and stakeholder consultation to create a shared vision, values and aims for the school. The school motto 'persevere, believe, achieve' is understood by adults and children alike, and can be seen in action in classes and across the day-to-day life of the school. Staff are very positive about their involvement in curricular change. They are working well individually as subject leaders, and collectively as a team, to adapt their practice to embrace the new 'Big Curriculum' plans within the Bailiwick. A few staff have contributed to system-wide improvement by participating in working parties with colleagues from other schools. This is mutually beneficial for the Bailiwick and Castel Primary School. There are plans in place to enhance further the roles and responsibilities of subject leaders within the school.

The curriculum is well planned overall to meet the needs and interests of children. Staff respond actively to children's ideas and incorporate their views in planning topics. Children generate questions that they would like to find out as part of their learning. In Reception and Year 1, children frequently initiate their own imaginative activities. Staff skilfully extend and support children's learning during these times, to make the most of the opportunity. Whole-school themed learning events, such as the recent 'science week', provide valuable opportunities for children at all stages to engage in high-quality, motivating and real-life learning. The creative approaches taken by staff included organising the family learning 'jellybean' challenge and capitalising on partnerships with local businesses and experts in the field of science and engineering. Children at all stages clearly benefit from such stimulating learning experiences, as well as developing important skills and knowledge about science and the world of work.

The school has programmes and frameworks in place for all curricular areas. The staff team are currently working together to review these programmes and the topics they teach to ensure the children experience a vibrant and relevant curriculum in line with the new 'Big Curriculum' guidance. Subject leaders have conducted audits for each curricular area and have formulated action plans in order to make improvements. These action plans are collated by the headteacher in order to inform the whole-school improvement plan. In line with the school's recent improvement priorities, there is a strong focus on developing children's literacy skills across their learning. As a result, children across the school are highly articulate; they listen to one another and to adults very well and are very respectful; they ably apply their reading skills to research facts and find information; and produce high-quality written work across a range of genres and for meaningful purposes. The school should continue with their plans to now

develop children's experiences, skills and knowledge in mathematics to the same high standards as they have achieved in literacy. We have discussed with the school the need to ensure that courses and programmes across all curricular areas are used flexibly by teachers, to ensure a brisk pace of learning and to further raise expectations about what children can achieve. This will help to ensure that all children, including those who are more able, achieve the best possible outcomes.

Children benefit from visits to places of interest across the island and on residential trips to the island to Lihou and further afield. These experiences help to enrich their learning and add value to the curriculum. There are many opportunities for children to learn outdoors within the school grounds, which provide a rich context for learning. The recent introduction of the *hobby club* initiative has proved to be popular with staff, children and parents. This carefully planned development is ensuring that all children from Reception to Year 5 have equality of access to participating in enriching out-of-class activities and clubs. This is in addition to the variety of lunchtime and after-school clubs that many children also attend. Through the hobby clubs, children are benefiting from learning new skills, working with other children in mixed-age groups and getting to know different adults. Parents, community partners, staff and pupils from other schools and local businesses are supporting this new venture very well in offering their skills, talents and spare time to help children try something new. The school has very good plans in place to evaluate the success of this initiative and are already keen to develop this further. For example, by extending the clubs to Year 6 and encouraging children to take the lead in some of the activities.

Reception staff have established very effective arrangements to help young children make a smooth start to school. This includes visiting children at their nursery placement prior to starting Reception. Arrangements for children as they transfer to secondary school are well embedded and have been developed over recent years to ensure more effective joint working and sharing of information about prior learning and the needs of learners. Staff work well with local secondary schools to provide appropriate support for all children as they move to secondary. Children with special educational needs receive appropriate additional support from secondary school staff prior to starting Year 7. There is good communication and transfer of information between teachers as children move from year to year within the school. This helps to ensure a shared understanding of children's prior learning.

## **How well does the school improve the quality of its work?**

### **Improvement through self-evaluation**

Promoted staff carry out an ongoing programme of monitoring activities throughout the year, which provides them with an accurate overview of the school's strengths and areas for further development. These monitoring activities include learning walks, lesson observations, scrutinising teachers' planning and children's work and monitoring the progress of learners. Commendably, the headteacher takes a focused, closer look at certain aspects of provision, closely aligned to the priorities within the school improvement plan. For example, she has evaluated the success of new strategies for teaching writing, and monitored the range of ways that children receive feedback on their learning. Importantly, she uses the information she gathers to inform future plans and to share best practice across the school.

Teachers use a range of assessment approaches to measure and track children's progress. They work collaboratively as stage partners to plan and assess children's learning in a consistent way. In addition, almost all teachers participate in local and external moderation exercises to check on standards of children's progress and confirm their professional judgements. The school should continue to develop teachers' confidence in scrutinising and analysing assessment data and in sharing increased expectations of what children can achieve, particularly within Key Stage 2, to help further improve standards in children's attainment.

Staff, children and parents are meaningfully involved in helping to improve the life and work of the school. Led very successfully by the headteacher and promoted staff, there is a 'can do' ethos across the school which is leading to continuous improvement. Everyone associated with Castel Primary School is very proud of the school and committed to maintaining its very positive reputation in the community. At all levels, there is a strong sense of teamwork. The senior leadership team is highly effective and work together seamlessly to drive the school forward. Teachers collaborate willingly together, as stage partners and as a staff group, to review and refresh their practice. Opportunities for staff to engage in professional learning are very well judged and support an appropriate blend of local and school priorities for improvement. As a result, staff feel empowered to lead learning, within their own classes and in the wider life of the school. The way that children support and encourage each other, at all stages of the school, is a key strength of Castel Primary School. In classes, children are helpful and kind to one another and are becoming skilled in helping each other to improve their work.

Overall, parents are very positive about almost all aspects of the work of the school. They feel that staff are very approachable; that their children are known as individuals; and that the school is very well led. Parents like the regular newsletters and use of social media which keeps them up to date with important events. The school has plans to streamline further the range of ways that they keep in touch with parents, including how they use digital technology to share with families the range of skills that children are learning. Parents themselves add value to the school community in significant ways, including by helping with the hobby clubs and after-school activities. The Parent Teacher Association supports the school very well and helps to raise significant funds, for example, through family bingo evenings, quiz nights and the annual Christmas and summer fayres. Almost all parents agree that their children enjoy coming to school and that they are developing confidence. They feel that staff prepare children particularly well for transitions into, within and beyond the school. Staff actively seek the views of parents and on aspects of the school's work. Regular 'Parent Forum' sessions provide very good opportunities for parents to share their views and ideas about different areas of school life. The school communicates the results of these consultative sessions through a 'You Said, We Did' approach.

Children feel that they have a real say in helping to improve their school. Through the active school council, they have been successful in making improvements to their playground. Children on the school council used their creativity and information handling skills to very good effect to devise a questionnaire for their peers on the new school values.



## **Leadership of improvement and change**

There is a very positive and nurturing ethos across the school, which is firmly underpinned by the recently refreshed vision, values and aims. The headteacher has led this process extremely well. The school motto, 'persevere, believe, achieve' has been developed in full consultation with staff, children and parents, with the wording very carefully and thoughtfully considered to reflect the context of the school. At all stages, children actively embrace their school motto. This is demonstrated in their high levels of engagement in their learning and in their eagerness to do their best and to help others.

The headteacher is very highly regarded by staff, parents and children. She places a high priority on supporting children, families and staff members and encourages a strong sense of community. As a result, morale is high and adults feel valued as part of the staff team. The headteacher continues to build on and encourage a culture of collaborative working across the school. The remits of promoted staff are suitably challenging and focused on securing improvement. The headteacher is ably supported by the highly-skilled deputy headteacher and senior leader who each carry out their roles and responsibilities very effectively. Distributed leadership is a strong feature of the school. Staff are reflective practitioners who are keen to develop and improve their practice. They willingly participate in peer observations, professional dialogue and professional learning. There is a strong sense of collegiate working across the staff. They work very well as a team and contribute to school improvement. They take on leadership roles and skilfully take forward school improvement priorities that impact on children's experiences. Of note is the collective impact of the literacy and digital technology improvement priorities on the quality of children's experiences and in using new ways to raise children's attainment in writing. Staff work well with colleagues to share practice and collaborate with teachers in other schools in the Bailiwick on moderation activities. The school should continue with plans to further develop the responsibilities of subject leaders, including their role in ensuring that courses and programmes across the curriculum are designed to raise attainment, achievement and expectations.

Commendably, a few members of teaching and support staff have undertaken enquiry projects and additional qualifications, including leadership programmes, to enhance their own skills. Children at Castel Primary School clearly benefit as a result of the commitment of staffs' professional learning and development. A few members of staff also contribute to system-wide improvement by sharing their expertise to support other schools and as active members of Bailiwick working groups.

The pace of change is managed very well by promoted staff. The improvement plan sets appropriate targets and staff work very well together to achieve these. Staff take good account of children's and parents' views to inform areas for improvement. The headteacher knows the staff team very well and capitalises on their strengths, talents and interests to take forward school improvement. She makes astute, strategic decisions to ensure that the best practice in learning and teaching can be shared across the staff team. Coaching, mentoring and shadowing opportunities provide very good opportunities for staff to share expertise and learn from each other.

## Summary

### Capacity for improvement

We are confident that, under the leadership of the very experienced and highly effective senior leadership team, the school has very good capacity to continue to improve. Promoted staff have an accurate view of the strengths of the school and areas for further improvement. There are clear and focused plans in place to secure continuous improvement. At all levels, staff have an outward-looking approach and are keen to research best practice and learn together. HM Inspectors were able to validate the school's own judgements as part of the validation visit.

This validation visit found the following key strengths.

- The highly effective and dynamic leadership of the headteacher in creating a welcoming and inclusive school community. Together, the school's senior leaders are skilled in securing improvements through robust approaches to self-evaluation.
- Articulate, creative, independent and happy children. They persevere, are highly motivated to learn and understand themselves particularly well as learners.
- Innovative approaches to improving children's literacy skills in a holistic way. The impressive range of ways that children are provided with feedback to improve their own learning, including the use of digital technology.
- The strong sense of teamwork and commitment of all staff to engage in professional learning in order to provide a caring, vibrant and high-quality environment for learning. At all levels, staff go the 'extra mile' to support children and families.
- Positive and productive partnerships with parents, professionals and the local community which enhance children's experiences.

We discussed with staff and Education Services how they might continue to improve the school. This is what we agreed with them.

- As planned, continue to raise children's attainment as they move through the school. Teachers should use courses and programmes flexibly to ensure a suitably brisk pace of children's learning to enable them to achieve the best possible outcomes.
- Continue to share best practice in learning and teaching across the school.

Here are the evaluations for Castel Primary School.

<b>Improvements in performance</b>	<b>good</b>
<b>Learners' experiences</b>	<b>very good</b>
<b>Teaching for effective learning</b>	<b>very good</b>
<b>Meeting learning needs</b>	<b>very good</b>
<b>Improvement through self-evaluation</b>	<b>very good</b>
<b>Leadership of improvement and change</b>	<b>very good</b>

## **What happens at the end of the validation?**

We are satisfied with the overall quality of provision. We are confident that the school's self-evaluation processes are leading to improvements. As a result, we will make no further visits in connection with this validation. As part of its arrangements for reporting to parents on the quality of education, Education Services will inform parents about the school's progress.

Lesley A Johnstone  
HM Inspector

If you would like to receive this letter in a different format, for example, in a translation please contact the administration team on the telephone number which appears at the bottom of the first page of this report.

If you want to give us feedback or make a complaint about our work, please contact us by telephone on 0131 244 4330, or e-mail: [complaints@educationscotland.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:complaints@educationscotland.gsi.gov.uk) or write to us addressing your letter to the Complaints Manager, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Livingston EH54 6GA.

## Appendix 1

<p><b>Excellent</b></p> <p>6</p>	<p><b>Outstanding or sector leading</b></p> <p>An evaluation of excellent applies to provision which is sector leading. Pupils' experiences and achievements are of a very high quality. An evaluation of excellent represents an outstanding standard of provision which exemplifies very best practice and is worth disseminating beyond the school. It implies that very high levels of performance are sustainable and will be maintained.</p>
<p><b>Very good</b></p> <p>5</p>	<p><b>Major strengths</b></p> <p>An evaluation of very good applies to provision characterised by major strengths. There are very few areas for improvement and any that do exist do not significantly diminish pupils' experiences. Whilst an evaluation of very good represents a high standard of provision, it is a standard that should be achievable by all. It implies that it is fully appropriate to continue to make provision without significant adjustment. However, there is an expectation that the school will take opportunities to improve and strive to raise performance to excellent.</p>
<p><b>Good</b></p> <p>4</p>	<p><b>Important strengths with areas for improvement</b></p> <p>An evaluation of good applies to provision characterised by important strengths which, taken together, clearly outweigh any areas for improvement. An evaluation of good represents a standard of provision in which the strengths have a significantly positive impact. However, the quality of pupils' experiences is diminished in some way by aspects in which improvement is required. It implies that the school should seek to improve further the areas of important strength, but take action to address the areas for improvement.</p>
<p><b>Satisfactory</b></p> <p>3</p>	<p><b>Strengths just outweigh weaknesses</b></p> <p>An evaluation of satisfactory applies to provision characterised by strengths which just outweigh weaknesses. An evaluation of satisfactory indicates that pupils have access to a basic level of provision. It represents a standard where the strengths have a positive impact on pupils' experiences. However, while the weaknesses are not important enough to have a substantially adverse impact, they do constrain the overall quality of pupils' experiences. It implies that the school should take action to address areas of weakness by building on its strengths.</p>
<p><b>Weak</b></p> <p>2</p>	<p><b>Important weaknesses</b></p> <p>An evaluation of weak applies to provision which has some strengths, but where there are important weaknesses. In general, an evaluation of weak may be arrived at in a number of circumstances. While there may be some strength, important weaknesses will, either individually or collectively, be sufficient to diminish pupils' experiences in substantial ways. It implies the need for prompt, structured and planned action on the part of the school.</p>
<p><b>Unsatisfactory</b></p> <p>1</p>	<p>An evaluation of unsatisfactory applies when there are major weaknesses in provision requiring immediate remedial action. Pupils' experiences are at risk in significant respects. In almost all cases, staff responsible for provision evaluated as unsatisfactory will require support from senior managers in planning and carrying out the necessary actions to effect improvement. This may involve working alongside other staff or agencies in or beyond the school.</p>