

Elmtree School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110309
Local Authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	310255
Inspection dates	20–21 September 2007
Reporting inspector	Bernice Magson

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	214
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr M Bateman
Headteacher	Mrs E Seddon
Date of previous school inspection	9 December 2002
School address	Elmtree Hill Chesham HP5 2PA
Telephone number	01494 771474
Fax number	01494 785254

Age group	3–7
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This average sized Infant and Nursery school includes a centre for pupils with speech and language difficulties. Most pupils are of white British origin. A significant number of pupils speak English as an additional language. The number of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is well above average and includes twelve pupils with a formal statement for their special needs. There has been recent instability in leadership and management.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Elmtree is a thriving and popular school, which is at the heart of its community. Inspectors agree with parents that it provides a good quality of education and has some outstanding features. Parents praise its 'inclusive environment where all children are encouraged and nurtured along the way.' Progress in pupils' personal development is excellent, because of the outstanding care, guidance and support of staff. By the age of seven, most pupils attain average standards, except in reading, where there are differences in the performance of boys and girls. The school has introduced strategies to raise the achievement of boys.

The school promotes an ethos of mutual respect and trust, and teamwork is very strong. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is good, because teachers are excellent role models. A strength in pupils' personal development is the kind and caring way they look after each other. Pupils make an outstanding contribution to the community. They are eager to go on visits and invite many visitors into school. Through the school council pupils contribute well to school improvements, for example deciding how assemblies are organised. Despite the best efforts of the school, attendance remains just below average.

The quality of teaching is good and has some excellent features. Relationships are outstanding and pupils feel safe and secure. As a result, pupils are eager to learn. Information and communication technology is used very effectively in most lessons. The teaching of basic skills of literacy and numeracy is given a high priority. Pupils with English as an additional language and those with learning difficulties and disabilities are supported very effectively and they achieve very well. However, in a few lessons in Years 1 and 2, teachers do not plan sufficiently for the more able pupils and there is not enough challenge in their learning tasks. This slows the pupils' rates of progress.

The curriculum is excellent. It is enriched with a wide range of activities with appropriate specially chosen themes. A recent topic involved learning about traditional weddings of various faiths. Very good use is made of the local area, helping pupils to develop an appreciation of their community and cultural heritage.

Leadership and management are good. The vision and ethos of the school have been maintained well over the last four years, despite significant changes in key personnel. The new headteacher is giving the school a clear direction and is establishing rigorous procedures in order to meet challenging targets which are identified for school improvement. Senior managers, governors and subject leaders are supportive, although some are newly appointed and not yet fully effective in their roles. The school has a good capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

'Although my child has just started, it already feels a lovely school,' commented one parent, appreciative of the well-established procedures, which have helped her child to settle and meet new friends. Relationships are excellent. Children are confident and happy, with a good understanding of school routines. Under the direction of an effective manager, provision in the Foundation Stage is good. This is an improvement on the last inspection. Teaching and learning are good. Adult-led and child-initiated activities are planned well to challenge children of differing ages and abilities. Staff are receptive to children's views and interests and work hard to make tasks meaningful. As a result, children concentrate intently as they make a collage

or peel potatoes to make mashed potato. They listen intently to stories told by their teachers, or from Year 2 pupils on a visit to the Reception classroom. By the end of the Reception year children are well-prepared for Year 1. Apart from in their skills of communication, language and literacy, children attain standards close to expected goals in most areas of learning.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise the achievement of boys in reading in Years 1 and 2.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning so that pupils of all abilities are challenged consistently, especially the more able.
- Ensure that monitoring systems are robust, so that challenging targets for school improvement are achieved.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils' achievement is good. Results in national tests by Year 2 vary considerably each year, because of the well above average number of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities, including some with formal statements for their language and communication needs. Nevertheless, standards are close to the national average by the age of seven. In reading, the performance of girls is better than boys. Strategies to improve boys' achievement are already beginning to have an impact. The school predicts the current Year 2 will attain higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics in the 2008 national tests. Most pupils make good progress in writing, mathematics, science and information and communication technology. However, higher attaining pupils do not always make as much progress as they could, because learning tasks lack a sufficient challenge. Pupils identified with learning difficulties and disabilities and those speaking English as an additional language make excellent progress because of outstanding levels of support.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils respond very well to the school's positive ethos of mutual respect and teamwork, and relationships are excellent. They like to help each other and behave well. Pupils enjoy their lessons and work hard. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils can articulate what constitutes a healthy lifestyle, such as eating sensibly and taking exercise. Very popular are themed activities, such as munching Mondays and tasty Tuesdays. Pupils say that they feel safe in school, and know what precautions to take to keep themselves protected. They make a very positive contribution to the life of the school, such as by acting as representatives on the school council or as 'Friendship Leaders' in the playground. Skills necessary towards their future well-being are developing well, especially in using computers to illustrate their work. Most pupils attend regularly and punctuality is good.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

There are some outstanding features in teaching and learning. Staff have a very good knowledge and understanding of how young children learn. They plan well-organised and carefully constructed lessons, which are well-supported by a good range of resources, including good

use of information and communication technology. Staff are deployed effectively and are vigilant in offering support. Outstanding help is given to pupils identified as having learning difficulties and disabilities and those speaking English as an additional language. However, there are some inconsistencies in how well-matched the range of tasks is to meet pupils' different levels of abilities. Sometimes, there is not enough challenge for the more able pupils to reach their full potential. Nevertheless, there are high expectations for behaviour, with excellent relationships, which means the pupils respect each other and their teachers and work well together.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is enhanced through a very wide range of activities. It is broad and well-balanced and there is an effective emphasis on literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology. The school provides several clubs, which pupils enjoy very much. They would like to have more opportunities to be involved in extra curricular activities. However, there is a very rich diversity of activities in art, dance, drama and an extensive range of cultural experiences for them to share with their friends. The provision for the pupils' personal, social and health education is strong and the programme of activities includes citizenship, which impact very positively on the school's ethos of mutual respect. Outstanding provision is available for the pupils identified as having learning disabilities and difficulties and for those speaking English as an additional language. This includes an excellent programme of inclusion for those pupils attached to the language department so that they are able to take part in all school activities.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The care, guidance and support given to pupils reflect very well the caring and nurturing ethos of the school. There are very effective systems to ensure the pupils are safe and free from harm. Risk assessments are undertaken rigorously. Adults take good note of any concerns pupils may have, and deal with these sensitively. Child protection procedures are good. Staff are fully aware of what they should do if there are any concerns. The partnership with parents is outstanding. Information given to parents is excellent. Newsletters and reports inform them about the curriculum and about their child's progress. Excellent links exist with parents of children attached to the language department, many of whom are not in the local catchment area. Assessment systems are robust and enable staff to have a very clear indication of pupils' progress. Targets for learning are well-established in literacy and aid pupils' learning very well. There are extremely good links with outside agencies to support learning, as necessary. Effective systems are in place to ensure pupils attend school regularly. Some procedures are relatively new, but they are already beginning to have an impact.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The leadership skills of the new headteacher are good. Staff and governors recognise her ability to identify the strengths and weaknesses within the school in order to bring about improvement. Parents appreciate the stability she is providing, after a recent period of significant change in headship. Under her guidance, the school is a happy place, where the talents of pupils and staff are recognised, developed and shared. Self-evaluation procedures are good and actions are

taken to address perceived weaknesses in standards. Outcomes are monitored regularly, but not always robustly to ensure challenging targets are achieved. Senior managers make a good contribution to the leadership and management of the school, especially in the Foundation Stage and for pupils identified with severe learning difficulties. The outreach service to other schools for pupils with communication and language difficulties is managed extremely well. Financial procedures are good and monies are targeted effectively to perceived needs. The Bursar has given good support to the governing body during recent changes in key personnel.

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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?	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
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	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

2 October 2007

Dear Children

Inspection of Elmtree School, Chesham, HP5 2PA

Thank you for making us so welcome, when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed our visit and finding out about all the interesting things which you are doing each day. We think that you have a good school.

The things we liked are:

- you respect and care for each other very well
- you work hard in lessons and achieve well
- you are friendly and welcoming to visitors
- you make an outstanding contribution to your local community, especially to the senior citizens who live nearby
- your parents and carers are happy that you attend this school. They love to visit to see your work.

To make your school even better we have asked your headteacher, staff and governors to make sure that, although lessons are interesting and exciting, they sometimes need to make work more challenging. We are glad to see that teachers are trying to improve your reading standards and we think that, with help, the boys could work even harder to make their reading better. Also, we think that the headteacher, staff and governors could improve how they check on the school's performance and your progress.

We hope that you continue to enjoy your time at Elmtree School.

Yours truly,

Bernice Magson

Lead inspector