

Elm Tree Community Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	135457
Local Authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	341647
Inspection dates	22–23 March 2010
Reporting inspector	Alastair Younger

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	5–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	28
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs E Hodgeson
Headteacher	Mr David Lamb
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one additional inspector. The inspector visited six lessons, seeing five different teachers. Over 40% of inspection time was spent checking upon pupils' learning and progress. The inspector held meetings with governors, staff and a group of pupils. He observed the school's work, and looked at plans for future improvement, monitoring records, the progress records of pupils and reports from the local authority. Six questionnaires were returned by parents or carers and their views were taken into account. Pupil and staff questionnaires were also scrutinised.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- how well level of challenge in lessons is informed by assessment
- whether the self-assessment of teaching as good is compatible with progress evaluated as satisfactory
- the effectiveness of changes made by the new headteacher.

Information about the school

The school opened in September 2008 following re-organisation within the local authority. An associate headteacher was appointed in September 2009 following the resignation of the original headteacher. The position of the associate headteacher has very recently been made permanent.

The school is operating under its full capacity for 40 pupils. All are currently in Key Stage 2 with over half of them in Year 6. Boys significantly outnumber girls. Nearly all pupils are White British. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs, reflecting the severity of their behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.

The school serves a very wide geographical area, ranging from inner city to rural.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

The school got off to a hesitant start but over the past two terms it has been transformed. This is largely due to the way in which the inspirational leadership of the headteacher has contributed so effectively to driving improvement by instilling in staff a sense of pride and ambition. In this atmosphere, pupils are responding well. Behaviour is vastly improved and pupils are trying hard in lessons. As a result progress is speeding up and a legacy of underachievement is being overcome. The school self-evaluates every aspect of its work accurately and wherever weaknesses are discovered rapid action is taken to address them. Parents, carers, pupils, staff and governors are unanimous in their support and respect for the headteacher. All of these factors contribute to the school's good capacity for further improvement.

Attendance and attainment are low, but in each instance are improving. Most pupils enter the school at a very low level of attainment and last year provision was not good enough to help them make up for lost ground. This is no longer the case, teaching is now good and although pupil progress is satisfactory it is accelerating quickly and securely. This is less so in writing than in other areas of the curriculum. The formal assessment of progress is satisfactory but time at the end of lessons is not always best used to check what pupils have learned and remembered.

Nearly all pupils feel safe because they know staff have the skills to look after them. There is a strong sense of support for pupils around the school rather than a need to control their behaviour. This is a very positive development and an improvement that has been achieved over the past two terms.

Good links are being forged with mainstream schools. These are opening up opportunities for some pupils to access part of their education in these schools. This is a very positive initiative in that it sends out a clear message to pupils, parents and carers that an eventual return to mainstream education is possible.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make better use of assessment to speed up progress by;
 - making sure that time at the end of lessons is used more effectively to check what pupils have learned and remembered and what must subsequently be done to help pupils to consolidate their learning and move forward
 - using the results of ongoing assessment to adapt learning opportunities within current lessons as well as in future ones.
- Raise standards in writing by increasing expectations of pupils to take more care

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with their work.

- Extend strategies and initiatives to promote better attendance, for instance by considering the possible benefits of creating learning mentor or family support roles for existing staff.
- About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

During lessons pupils work hard and usually behave well. They listen attentively to adults and are keen to join in with discussions. Many are less keen to take care in putting their thoughts down on paper and this contributes to them making relatively slower progress in writing than in other aspects of literacy. In most of the lessons observed, the majority of boys and girls learned well because they were well taught. There were instances when better progress could have been made if the work had been adapted more quickly, for example, to make it harder for the more able pupils. Up until the current school year, records show that many pupils made negligible progress. Good teaching now is ensuring improved progress, which is helping to redress the situation, but the fact remains that, for the majority of pupils, progress over time from their starting points is only satisfactory.

Personal circumstances frequently interfere temporarily with progress but school records and the evidence of inspection show that no group of pupils is making significantly different progress to any other. Carers of looked after children are particularly pleased with the progress they are making. Although low, in the context of the school attendance is not poor. It is below the national average for primary schools and broadly average for a special school. Nevertheless, it does not meet the target agreed by the school and local authority. Absence is at a level where it can be considered to be impacting on pupils' prospects for the future and low attainment compounds the issue. This is more than balanced by the beneficial impact of rapidly improving moral and social values and pupils growing awareness of how their previous poor behaviour could have been interpreted by members of the community.

Improvements in behaviour are notable. Exclusion, which was commonplace in the past, is now a rarity and has not been used as the ultimate sanction since November.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	4
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Teachers are becoming increasingly confident in their own ability to meet the needs of pupils. They have developed positive and constructive relationships which recognise the difficulties pupils face but do not allow these to become an excuse for bad behaviour nor to intrude overly on learning. Lessons are well planned to take into account the range of individual needs but teachers do not adapt tasks consistently within lessons, even when they become aware that a pupil has mastered the set challenge. Value is added in those lessons where pupils are encouraged to work in pairs or small groups and hence develop social and personal skills in tandem with learning. Lessons are very well resourced, with teachers taking every opportunity to provide pupils with material stimulus such as pictures, diagrams and artefacts to help them learn and remember. Misbehaviour is very well managed, often through very discreet teamwork between teachers and skilled support staff. Not all teachers make the best use of time at the end of lessons to check what pupils have learned and remembered. This is partly because they do not leave themselves sufficient time to do so and partly because, when they do so, there is a tendency to focus on what pupils have enjoyed rather than what they have learned.

The curriculum is developing well. As teachers have become more confident they are making it more adventurous, adding to pupils' enjoyment of school and broadening their experiences in and out of the classroom. Pupils are soon to embark on their first residential visit on the 'Elm Retreat'. This is a visit to an outdoor education centre where an extensive programme of events to promote exercise, healthy living, teamwork and social skills is being provided. The development of a creative curriculum is still in the early stages of development. The school is checking that the way it uses a commercial

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scheme facilitates full coverage of all requirements of the National Curriculum.

Parents and carers express total confidence in the way that the school cares for, guides and supports their children. Pupils feel safe and well cared for. Most staff demonstrate a good understanding of the difference between pupils needing, rather than wanting, attention. Links with the many agencies involved in what are often very complicated personal circumstances are well coordinated. The school works closely with the local authority to try to improve attendance. This joint venture is succeeding but the drive for improvement from within the school is not quite as proactive as it might be.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher leads from the front. He has been hugely influential in the embedding of ambition and the successful drive for improvement. Through replacing the post of deputy headteacher by the appointment of two assistant headteachers the senior leadership team has been expanded, allowing duties to be more extensively shared. Good training is being given to staff to help them look beyond their own classrooms and contribute more to whole school issues. Teaching has been improved through good management but teachers' skills in assessment for learning are still being developed. Governors are supportive but rely to some extent on the headteacher's reports for information about what goes on in school. Considerable care has been taken to promote equal opportunities. New clubs and activities have been introduced to ensure that the specific needs of the small minority of girls are not overlooked. The nurture class gives the most vulnerable pupils opportunities to participate in activities well matched to their developmental and emotional needs.

Safeguarding procedures meet all requirements. Extensive risk assessment includes the assessment of risk that individual pupils may subject themselves to through impulsive or irrational actions. Staff are well trained in the handling of pupils who are experiencing moments of crisis. The curriculum includes many opportunities for pupils to learn how to keep themselves healthy and safe. The school works extensively and effectively with parents and carers as well as with the many professionals and agencies who are concerned with the well-being of children and families.

In serving such a huge geographical area, the school does not have a distinct local community but it does work effectively to draw together pupils from different backgrounds to create a strong sense of community within the school and an improving

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understanding of their place within wider society as good citizens. The inroads being made into the development of inclusion opportunities in mainstream schools are helping pupils to be educated increasingly in their own communities.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Views of parents and carers

Parents and carers are wholeheartedly supportive of the way in which the school is helping, not only their children but also themselves. They comment positively on the cheerfulness of staff and the sense of team spirit amongst them. Parents and carers speak very highly of the headteacher and the difference he has made to the school in such a short time. The inspector agrees with these positive views.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Elm Tree Community Primary School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspector received 5 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 28 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	3	50	3	50	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	3	50	3	50	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	4	67	2	33	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	3	50	2	33	1	17	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	3	50	3	50	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	3	50	3	50	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	3	50	2	33	1	17	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	2	33	4	67	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	5	83	1	17	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	5	83	1	17	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	5	83	2	33	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	5	83	1	17	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	5	83	1	17	0	0	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



25 March 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Elm Tree Community Primary School, Skelmersdale WN8 6SA

I'm just writing to say 'thank you' for looking after me so well when I visited your school the other day. You made me very welcome and told me lots of interesting things.

I listened to what you had to say. I also listened to your headteacher's views and the staff's. Afterwards I looked at your parents and carers comments. You nearly all say the same thing - you like the school!

You will have noticed me sitting in your classrooms, watching what you were doing and how you behaved. I also looked in some of your books. You are taught well and your behaviour is good. You are learning well at the moment but you still have a bit to make up from when you were not doing so well in the past.

Before I left I told your headteacher that it was my view that Elm Tree is a satisfactory school, that it does many things well and that it is rapidly improving. To speed the process up I suggested that your progress could be quickened if a bit more care was taken to check exactly what you were learning and remembering in each lesson. It would also help if some of you could improve your attendance and take more care with your writing.

I would like to wish you all the best for the future and hope that the 'Elm Retreat' goes well.

Yours sincerely

Alastair Younger

Lead inspector

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