

Elmtree School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110309
Local Authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	363763
Inspection dates	25–26 May 2011
Reporting inspector	Bogusia Matusiak-Varley

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 under pilot arrangements; it was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Infant
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	3–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	271
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Michael Bateman
Headteacher	Elizabeth Seddon
Date of previous school inspection	20–21 September 2007
School address	Elmtree Hill Chesham Buckinghamshire HP5 2PA
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Age group	3–7
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Introduction

This pilot inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors who observed 19 lessons, led by eight teachers, early years' practitioners and support staff. Meetings were held with pupils, staff, parents and carers and members of the governing body. The inspectors also heard pupils read both individually and in guided reading. They observed the school's work, and looked at curriculum plans, assessment documentation, safeguarding systems and procedures, the school development plan, behaviour policy and a wide range of other information. They analysed 101 questionnaires received from parents and carers.

Information about the school

The school is a larger-than-average sized infant school with a 15-place Additional Resources Unit for pupils with a statement of special educational needs for speech, language and communication difficulties. These pupils are fully integrated into all aspects of school life. The school has just over a quarter of pupils on the special needs register and just over a tenth of pupils have a statement of special educational needs. A third of pupils are learning English as an additional language, the majority of whom are Pakistani. Since the last inspection, the school's intake has altered considerably with many more pupils of Eastern European backgrounds attending the school, including pupils from Poland, Russia and Sweden.

On entry to the Nursery, children learning English as an additional language are at the very early stages of language acquisition. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. The school has gained many awards in recent years, including the Basic Skills Quality Mark, Investor in People, Activemark, Charter Mark, Healthy School, Eco-Schools Silver, Eco Green Flag and has won the Southern England Excellence Award.

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	1
Achievement	1
Teaching	1
Leadership and management	1
Behaviour and safety	1
Does the school adequately promote the pupils' well-being?	Yes
Does the school adequately promote community cohesion?	Yes
Does the school provide value for money?	Yes

Key findings

- This thriving, inclusive school provides an outstanding quality of education for its pupils.
- Pupils' attainment by the end of Year 2 is above average in reading, writing and mathematics and the achievement of all groups of pupils is outstanding. This year, the school has successfully narrowed the gap in boys' achievement.
- By the end of Year 1, pupils have excellent reading skills because of the exemplary teaching of linking sounds and letters (phonics) and guided reading. The excellent partnerships with parents and carers, who support the school's homework policy by being true partners in learning, also contribute to pupils' outstanding achievement.
- Teachers are expert at teaching basic skills through fun activities. The excellent tracking of progress, early identification of underachievement and personalised education plans ensure that no pupil is left behind.
- Pupils behave exceptionally well, both in lessons and around the school.
- Rigorous routines, safety procedures and excellent care, guidance and support contribute to pupils' well-being. Pupils feel safe because their uniqueness is valued.
- Pupils' excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, coupled with successful provision for developing skills of independence, result in pupils being confident, articulate and happy to learn.
- The school is expertly led by a highly effective headteacher, senior leadership team and governing body who are totally committed to giving pupils equal access to learning while preparing them to be active citizens.
- Provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage is outstanding, especially in personal, social and emotional development, but there are some missed opportunities in free play activities for children of all abilities to develop correct letter and number formation skills.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Capitalise on every opportunity to engage children through play and self-chosen activities to be more precise in forming their letters and numbers correctly.

Main report

Achievement is outstanding for all groups of pupils as the school is committed to aiming high and improving on its previous best performance. Standards are above average in reading, writing and mathematics and, from a low baseline on entry to the Nursery, pupils make exceptional progress as they move up the school. On entry to Year 1, they exceed the expectations of five-year-olds in personal, social and emotional development and attain the expectations of five-year-olds in all areas of learning other than in writing and calculating where they attain levels that are marginally below those expected. This is because there are some missed opportunities for children to form their numbers and letters correctly in their play and self-chosen activities.

For two years running, pupils' attainment has been above average. In 2010, their attainment was in line with the national average, lower than the previous two years, as nearly one fifth of the Year 2 cohort had a statement of special educational needs. In the same year, boys' achievement lagged behind that of the girls. The school took immediate action to introduce 'boy-friendly' topics in its curriculum such as learning through drama and exploring topics such as space. By the age of six, pupils make exceptional progress in reading and they are on course to attain above average standards by the end of Year 2. This is due to the determination of the headteacher and all staff that all pupils will be literate and numerate by the time they leave school. The governing body's decision to invest in training support staff to teach pupils the sounds that letters make has paid dividends. All staff are united in their efforts to engage and enthuse pupils by assessing their progress and identifying any difficulties which require intervention. Guided reading is taught very well and the literacy coordinator has produced some excellent tracking sheets of pupils' acquisition of skills. By the end of Year 2, all groups of pupils are confident readers, writers and mathematicians. 'I want to be an author, I can see myself writing all day,' said one Year 2 pupil. The expertise of staff working in the Additional Resources Unit is used to develop teaching strategies across the school. For example, small groups of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are regularly seen working on the same objectives as their peers but at a slightly slower pace so that any misunderstanding can be immediately rectified. When writing about *The Witch's Cat* (Nick Butterworth), they wrote three well-thought-out, phonetically-justifiable sentences, achieving the learning intention in a very short space of time. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, learning is characterised by children listening attentively to instructions, choosing their own resources for learning and having 'a go' at the exciting activities provided for them. When learning about positional language in mathematics, they act out the words 'in

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front of', 'behind', 'next to'. In Years 1 and 2, pupils are eager to write spellings on their whiteboards and check them with their partners. They sit on the edge of their seats when listening to stories and when writing have very secure skills of editing.

Teaching is outstanding and is characterised by:

- a whole-school approach to teaching phonics, guided reading, mental mathematics and problem solving
- effective teamwork to implement the headteacher's vision
- modelling of reading and writing, placing emphasis on intonation, expression and correct letter formation
- providing opportunities for pupils to read in other subjects on the curriculum
- regularly assessing pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics and using this information to plan challenging next steps, as well as marking pupils' work in their presence and discussing areas for improvement
- teaching subject-specific key words at every opportunity so that pupils can access knowledge
- hearing pupils read at least four times per week, both in guided groups and individually
- ensuring parents and carers are regularly updated on their child's progress.

The key to the outstanding teaching is the responsibility taken by the senior leadership team and subject leaders to ensure that staff are given the support and training they need to develop their practice. The monitoring of teaching and learning is rigorous and thorough.

The headteacher is the driving force in the school's success. She leads with a passion for excellence, which starts in the classroom. Staff receive excellent training opportunities, especially in the teaching of reading, and this enables them to ensure that pupils attain the ambitious targets year after year. Everyone with responsibility is held to account by the governing body who receives regular updates on the impact of national interventions, such as using the national guidelines for 'Pitch and Expectation' and 'Overcoming Barriers'. Boys' achievement has improved this year because of the purchasing of multi-sensory resources such as bricks for mathematics and information and communication technology programs for the teaching of letters and the sounds they make.

An exceptionally well-thought-out curriculum, which builds upon simple sequences in learning and clearly identifies expectations for each unit of work, contributes to pupils' enthusiasm, engagement and highly positive attitudes to learning. Pupils are taught about issues that matter, for example saving energy, recycling, and caring for children in Africa by helping them to build a school. These contribute to their excellent spiritual, moral, social, cultural and personal development. The school is at the heart of the community and community cohesion is excellent. Pupils took part in the Chesham Carnival riding on the float built by their parents. They also support a wide range of local and national charities. The school has links with Australia and Africa, which contribute particularly well to pupils' knowledge of global issues.

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Staff give generously of their time, running extra-curricular clubs such as gardening, French, maypole dancing, sport, cookery and computer club to name a few. Pupils behave impeccably because learning is interesting and they can see a purpose in why they need to learn. Behaviour in and around the school is exemplary because pupils value one another and do not want to miss out on a second of learning. Parents and carers are exceptionally supportive of the school and are very pleased with the learning opportunities offered. They say that their children are safe and very well looked after and that there is virtually no bullying. Pupils say that, even if there were, it would be sorted out straight away. Pupils feel safe and make exceptional progress because staff do everything they can to help them. Pupils are valued for their uniqueness, and as a result, the school is a racially harmonious community. Attendance is average as there have been several outbreaks of normal childhood-related illnesses.

The school has excellent capacity for improvement as demonstrated by its track record of high attainment and the recent rise in standards of mathematics which had been identified as an area needing improvement. Equality of opportunity underpins all the school's development planning, so that any pupils at risk of falling behind are given extra support. As a result of excellent outcomes, accurate self-assessment and a secure track record of improvement, the school provides value for money.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Elmtree 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 12 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 101 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 271 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
Q1 My child is happy at school	80	79	21	21	0	0	0	0
Q2 My child feels safe at school	86	85	12	12	0	0	0	0
Q3 The school helps my child to achieve as well as they can	77	76	20	20	2	2	0	0
Q4 The school meets my child’s particular needs	70	69	26	26	2	2	0	0
Q5 The school ensures my child is well looked after	80	79	19	19	1	1	0	0
Q6 Teaching at this school is good	86	85	14	14	0	0	0	0
Q7 There is a good standard of behaviour at this school	66	65	31	31	1	1	0	0
Q8 Lessons are not disrupted by bad behaviour	55	54	32	32	1	1	0	0
Q9 The school deals with any cases of bullying well	60	59	25	25	2	2	0	0
Q10 The school helps me to support my child’s learning	72	71	26	26	1	1	0	0
Q11 The school responds to my concerns and keeps me well informed	81	80	19	19	0	0	0	0
Q12 The school is well led and managed	91	90	9	9	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 all 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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

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 are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 December 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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 achievement of all pupils. ■ Behaviour and safety. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The effectiveness of leadership and management. <p>and taking into consideration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ how well the school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
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.



27 May 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Elmtree School, Chesham HP5 2PA

Thank you for making us feel so welcome when we came to inspect your school. You attend an outstanding school which is preparing you very well for junior school.

- Your school is expertly led by your headteacher, senior leadership team and governing body.
- You make outstanding progress in reading, writing and mathematics. It was a pleasure hearing you read. You have excellent blending and decoding skills which you apply very well to all aspects of reading and mathematics.
- You attain above average standards in reading and writing and this year you have made exceptional progress at improving your mathematical skills.
- You are very well behaved both in lessons and around the school and you treat all your teachers and your friends with respect.
- You have excellent knowledge of how to save the planet and we were very impressed with all of the very hard work that you put in to receive your many awards such as the Green Flag Award and Healthy School Standard.
- You are developing into outstanding citizens, you organise fund raising and you have excellent knowledge of life in other countries, such as Africa.
- Teaching in your school is excellent, your teachers care about you very much and not only do they help you make excellent progress in learning but they keep you safe and look after you very well.
- The school council has worked very hard at seeking your views on all aspects of school life.
- You love learning because of a very well planned curriculum and an excellent range of extra-curricular activities that are tailored to your interest levels; as a result, you are developing into independent learners, a skill needed for life.

There is a little pointer for improvement: those of you who are in the Early Years Foundation Stage would benefit from asking your teachers to give you more opportunities to help you form your letters and numbers correctly. We wish you all the best in your junior school.

Yours sincerely
Bogusia Matusiak-Varley
Lead inspector

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