

The Elmhurst School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110286
Local Authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	366517
Inspection dates	4–5 July 2011
Reporting inspector	Carmen Rodney HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills (HMCI) the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	277
Appropriate authority	Interim executive board
Chair	David Gamble
Headteacher	Mrs Diane De Wolf
Date of previous school inspection	9 July 2009
School address	Dunsham Lane Aylesbury HP20 2DB
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one additional inspector. They observed 10 teachers teaching 10 different classes. In addition, short visits were made to guided reading sessions and a scrutiny of pupils work in mathematics was carried out. Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board and the local authority School Improvement Partner, and three groups of pupils, as well as a few parents, who were spoken to. Inspectors observed the schools work, and looked at a number of policies including safeguarding and child protection. Questionnaires for parents and carers, staff and pupils were not distributed as part of this inspection.

The inspection reviewed the schools progress since the last inspection and since the previous monitoring visit and looked in detail at the following:

The extent to which the school has raised teachers expectations of what pupils can achieve and ensured that all groups, in particular the middle ability and more able pupils, are fully challenged.

How well the leaders have focused on monitoring the progress that pupils make in lessons and over time, and monitored their performance to identify where provision can be improved.

The extent to which the school has been successful in ensuring that in all lessons, pupils understand what they are learning and know their targets for improvement.

The extent to which the school demonstrated that it has the capacity to sustain improvement.

Information about the school

Elmhurst is larger than the average-sized primary school, with slightly more girls than boys. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is very high, as is the proportion who speak English as an additional language, but very few are at the early stage of learning English. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is very high, at around four times the national average. The school runs a specialist Additional Resourced Provision for the high proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs. The specific needs of these students include social and communication difficulties, autism and moderate learning difficulties. The number of pupils leaving or joining the school partway through the school year is above average. The school is part of the Improving Schools Programme (ISP), which is a government initiative aimed at raising standards. The school gained a number of awards relating to its provision, including Investors in People, Artsmark Silver and Activemark.

The school shares its site with other educational organisations, including a childrens centre. These are not overseen by the interim executive board.

When the school was inspected in July 2009, it was deemed to require special measures. Inspectors made monitoring visits in January, July and December 2010 and in February 2011 to evaluate the schools progress. There have been a few staff changes since the last inspection.

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

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

Elmhurst has been transformed since the previous inspection and is providing its pupils with a satisfactory and rapidly improving education. The school's transformation has led to rapid improvements in the quality of provision and, as a result, pupils are making satisfactory progress overall. Since the previous inspection, senior leaders and managers have received exceptionally good support from the local authority. This has contributed to them maintaining a sharp focus on developing provision so that pupils can make better progress. The quality of teaching is good and is one of the main factors contributing to pupils making satisfactory progress from a low base. Attainment is broadly average in English but is well below average in mathematics, partly as pupils do not apply basic mathematical skills confidently and accurately. While the gap in pupils' achievement and the national average has closed significantly in English, it is closing at a slower pace in mathematics.

The professional development support offered to teachers and teaching assistants to develop and refine their skills has been extremely beneficial and led to all pupils making better progress. Pupils' zest for learning is a direct response to the better teaching and positive changes in the learning environment. Another main factor linked to pupils' achievement is the great care that the school takes to track the progress that individuals and groups are making. Intervention strategies and guidance underpin the support available for pupils to learn at a quicker pace. A range of literacy strategies has enabled pupils to make better progress and attain higher standards than at the previous inspection. The school recognises that although a sound start has been made to developing pupils' basic literacy and numeracy skills, mastery of some of the more complex elements, such as the quality of expression, are still to be more developed by pupils. This limits the more able pupils in attaining higher levels. For example, there is not enough emphasis on supporting pupils to command an extensive vocabulary to help them choose words for variety and interest. Additionally, the emphasis on the development of literacy and numeracy across the curriculum is, as yet, undeveloped.

The school has changed its curriculum and approach not only to reflect the needs of pupils but also to develop their independent learning skills and inspire them to reach their targets. Pupils are therefore keen to learn and do well. They are proud to be a part of the school, and the few parents spoken to indicate that they are positive about the provision, their children's happiness and safety at the school. Opportunities for pupils to contribute ideas are developing, with the launch of a new approach to the school council influencing decisions about provision. The positive learning environment contributes to pupils behaving well and enjoying good relationships. Although the vast majority of pupils

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behave very well in lessons and around the school, a few present challenges, some of which are beyond the schools control. Nevertheless, the school has taken steps to guide and support pupils in challenging circumstances. Pupils report that when any form of misbehaviour occurs, teachers and support staff generally deal with it quickly.

The leaders are committed to further improvement and have developed clear lines of accountability, which extend from the interim executive board to senior and middle leaders, and from staff through to pupils and their parents and carers. Increasingly, clear communication and the involvement of parents and carers in the schools work demonstrate that the leaders have a clear understanding of the schools strengths and the next steps for improvement. Leaders and managers have researched into and adapted the best practices for the school, for example the new curriculum and progress meetings with pupils. These have been used effectively to explain and sustain the vision for improvement. The school does not stand still; it is forward looking and complacency is not an option. Since the previous inspection, the leaders, including the interim executive board, have addressed the weaknesses and increased capacity despite staffing difficulties, particularly in Key Stage 1. The schools capacity for sustained improvement is therefore good.

Up to 40% of schools, whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment further by:
 - working on pupils acquisition of skills in learning to blend accurately the sounds of letters to develop their reading skills
 - encouraging pupils to read widely, accurately and with understanding when using information, reading for meaning and responding to the writers craft
 - improving pupils skills in writing so that they have an extensive vocabulary and can write accurately for different audiences and in different styles
 - focusing closely on pupils applying mental calculations accurately
 - ensuring that the more able pupils are continually given opportunities to reach the higher levels in English and mathematics.
- Ensure that the new curriculum model is underpinned by opportunities to embed literacy and numeracy skills across the subjects to support pupils in mastering the most basic skills.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Pupils are happy in their school: they enjoy learning, respond well to challenges in lessons observed, and they see learning as a journey of discovering and using new information. As such, pupils, in their own time, work engagingly on their log books, taking time to research and present their ideas on a range of topics. In lessons, their positive approach to learning is unrelenting. All of this has happened because they have responded positively to the work ethic expressed through the teachers high expectations of their work and the changes in the learning environment. When pupils are asked to work in pairs, groups or

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independently, they respond quickly and effectively. They keep on task and respond well to questions, particularly when challenged to work through complex questions or to give an alternative response.

All groups of pupils are making satisfactory progress in their learning, overall. This includes pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, those from minority ethnic groups and those known to be eligible for free school meals. Test results in 2010 were significantly better than in the previous three years. Progress was stronger in English, notably in reading and writing, than in mathematics in both key stages. Pupils continue to make satisfactory progress in writing, and in English overall.

In 2010, pupils reached broadly average standards in English at the end of Year 2 and Year 6, but attainment in mathematics was below average. The 2011 unvalidated test results show a decline, particularly in mathematics, and fewer pupils than predicted attained the higher levels. The results do not reflect the mostly good progress seen in lessons, the improvements in learning over time and the schools tracking data and moderation of work which has been validated externally. The school is resolved to identify why the pupils in Year 6 did not perform well in the test at the level seen in the classroom, particularly in mathematics. However, inspectors observed that pupils did not reach the higher levels in English because they do not have an extensive vocabulary or the sophisticated writing skills to write accurately for different audiences and in different styles. In mathematics, confusion and inaccuracy in applying numbers, knowledge of shape, space and measurements, and insufficient matching of work to meet pupils needs hold them back. Nevertheless, in spite of previous staffing difficulties across the school, pupils made satisfactory progress from well below average starting points.

Pupils feel safe around the school and have a good understanding of personal safety and staying healthy. They know whom to go to if there are any problems and say that any concern is mostly dealt with quickly. Pupils keenness to do well in school and in their future life was expressed in discussions when they outlined ambitious goals. Their confidence and determination to be in positions to help others was seen in the caring approach they adopt when working as mentors and school council leaders. The good emphasis on developing pupils literacy and information and technology skills contributes well to their future education. Pupils spiritual, moral and social development has served them well in relation to their understanding of living with a range of people from different backgrounds. Relationships between all groups are good and, in discussions, pupils say that their multicultural school helps them to form bonds with many people.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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	2
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	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

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

How effective is the provision?

The quality of teaching and learning has improved and includes a number of features that are evident in lessons across the school. Good subject knowledge and expertise contribute to teachers structuring their planning and using carefully selected resources to meet pupils learning needs. Teachers spend time explaining the expected learning outcomes and outline how pupils can achieve them. This creates a positive learning climate, as pupils are clear about what they have to achieve and how that will meet expectations. Learning is well focused on pupils working independently, collaboratively in pairs or groups and using talk to develop their thinking. Clear questioning at timed intervals and feedback during and at the end of lessons ensures that pupils can evaluate their learning and use the visualiser to explain their work to the class. Excellent use of information and communication technology (ICT) contributes to a high level of pupil participation. This approach builds pupils self-esteem and contributes to them speaking fluently when addressing an audience. Teaching assistants provide very good support for pupils struggling with the work. In their role, they demonstrate, cajole, and explain each step of the work, which makes it easier for pupils to learn well.

Clear assessment procedures for learning give teachers a good understanding of pupils progress and make an effective contribution to meeting their needs. Pupils know and understand their targets and are well accustomed to evaluating their work. Nevertheless, although work is marked regularly and with a degree of precision, next steps are not

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always identified and pupils are not yet responding to the comments on their work. This is particularly so in mathematics.

The revised curriculum, introduced in the spring term 2011, is well matched to pupils needs. Although relatively new, it is used very well to promote learning. Topic work generates excitement and much exploratory investigations. Pupils demonstrate, for example, creativity, independent learning, and social and planning skills; they make enquiries and seek out information before presenting and defending their hypotheses. While it is too early to evaluate the full impact of the curriculum on pupils attainment, it is stimulating and holding their interests well. At this stage, the school has still to ensure that it incorporates and consistently applies basic skills across the curriculum. The development of the virtual learning environment is an exciting initiative for older pupils. The curriculum also promotes cultural and financial awareness well. A range of enrichment activities is offered, including an increasing number of opportunities for pupils to go on educational trips.

The pastoral care, and guidance on how well pupils are achieving, are of good quality. The school works hard to ensure that pupils with learning difficulties are very well supported. Initiatives such as progress meetings are informative and contribute to pupils and their parents and carers understanding the assessment system. The school uses carefully selected interventions to improve attendance and support individual pupils in challenging circumstances.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
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 leaders and managers at all levels have worked very hard to raise aspirations and drive change quickly. One of the striking features about the improvements has been the willingness of the headteacher and other leaders to accept and act on critical feedback. This has enabled the school to analyse the critiques and become focused on further improvement. The headteacher has led and managed the rapid changes well by engaging staff in the vision for improvement. The senior leaders have therefore maintained a relentless focus on improvement and established a strong system of accountability. The headteacher is well supported by the deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher. The strategic roles of these two new staff have contributed to the school forging ahead with changes. All middle leaders are involved in monitoring the schools provision and effectiveness. Extensive professional development has contributed to the middle leaders developing a clear understanding of the requirements and demands of leading and managing a subject and area of work. Evaluation of work and planning for future

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development are rigorous. Forward planning underpins future development; strengths are known and plans have already been identified to improve basic skills in all year groups. Nevertheless, the school recognises that there is still more to do in relation to analysing the minor weaknesses in pupils work that affects their overall achievement over time.

Very good use is made of the skills and expertise of the interim executive board to evaluate the schools work and drive improvement. They plan strategically and adopt a straightforward approach when holding the school to account; they ensure that improvement is not optional, but is ongoing.

The school values diversity and equality, and works well with local community leaders and faith groups. The context of the school is taken into consideration in relation to community cohesion, which is mostly linked to the local and wider community. The school has yet to audit its work and develop international links. Partnership work with parents and carers has developed very well since the previous inspection and their views are considered and taken seriously. Parents and carers appreciate the forum; improvements in communication, including consultation through discussions and questionnaires, subject workshops and the progress meetings have all contributed to parents and carers developing a positive perception of the school. Partnerships with external agencies are well developed but while the impact on pupils pastoral care is effective, it is not yet as strong in relation to the learning outcomes for all pupils. Safeguarding requirements are well met.

The school has not only strengthened the leadership team but also developed its capacity to be reflective and develop even further. The school provides satisfactory value for money.

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	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
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

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Early Years Foundation Stage

Children enter the nursery with skills that are well below age-related expectations, particularly in communication and language. Nevertheless, they make a positive start and by the end of Reception, progress is good and the majority acquire skills that are broadly average for their age group. Learning is well structured, both indoors and outdoors. The children are well supported to use each zoned area to develop a range of skills. Although the learning environment provides children with good opportunities to explore, it is not vocabulary rich to contribute to developing their vocabulary.

The children make good progress because the teachers effectively sustain a sharp focus on developing early reading and writing skills through developing childrens recognition of letters and reading simple words. There is also good attention to developing childrens speaking and listening skills. The Early Years Foundation Stage team has responded well to the advice and support from the headteacher and local authority consultants. As a result, there is effective teamwork and management, which contribute to childrens good progress. Childrens progress is carefully recorded and tracked. The information provides the staff with a clear assessment about how well each child is performing in the progression towards Reception and beyond. However, there is still more to do in relation to organising the transition arrangements into Year 1.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

Questionnaires for parents and carers are not normally distributed for monitoring inspections conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005, unless inspectors have specific reasons to request that the school does so.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Parental questionnaires are not normally distributed for inspections conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005, unless inspectors have specific reasons to request that the school does so.

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 school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' 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.



6 July 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Elmhurst Primary School, Aylesbury HP20 2DB

Thank you for the welcome and support given throughout all of my five visits to your school. I have always looked forward to visiting you and really enjoyed meeting and talking with you about your work and school on every visit.

Elmhurst has made a number of impressive changes that are making a positive difference to the way in which you are learning. I am pleased to announce your school is no longer in the special measures category because it is providing you with a much better education. Here are some of the reasons why I and other inspectors have been impressed with the changes.

The teaching is good. This has been one of the most important improvements. Teaching is stimulating and engaging you well in your learning.

Children in the Nursery and Reception are making good progress and in the main school you are also making satisfactory progress in your learning

The headteacher, staff and the governors have worked very hard to make changes. They are determined that the school will be even better than it is.

You behave very well, and you care about each other and enjoy being in a multicultural school

The school provides good quality care, support and guidance for you.

The leaders, staff and governors want to make Elmhurst a better school, so I have asked them to do three things to help you make even faster progress.

Improve the standard of reading, writing and mathematics.

Make sure that the plans for the new curriculum are completed.

Make sure that marking and other information on tests results are used accurately when setting targets for individuals and groups of pupils.

You have all worked very well with the staff to make better progress and I am confident that you will not give up and you will play your part, as you are all determined to do well in your tests. I wish you all every future success.

Yours sincerely

Carmen Rodney

Her Majesty's Inspector

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