

Elmhurst School

Dunsham Lane, Aylesbury, HP20 2DB

Inspection dates 18–19 July 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Not enough pupils make good progress over time, especially in reading. Consequently, attainment by the end of Year 6 in reading is below that of all pupils nationally.
- Pupils' skills in the use of information and communication technology (ICT) are under-developed. In this respect, they are not well prepared for the next stage of their education.
- Teaching over time is not yet consistently strong enough to secure good achievement for most pupils. In the recent past, this has been especially the case in Years 3 and 4. Not all tasks set are well matched to pupils' abilities, and in some lessons, there is insufficient challenge.
- Teachers do not always check carefully enough whether all groups of pupils are achieving well in lessons, and do not adapt their planning quickly enough when progress slows.
- Teaching does not always promote pupils being independent in lessons; sometimes, they are too reliant on adult support so their progress is restricted.
- The teaching of all aspects of reading is not consistently effective across the school, although it is improving. Pupils' ability to understand the texts they are reading is too variable.

The school has the following strengths

- Both rates of pupils' progress and the quality of teaching have improved rapidly in the past academic year in most year groups.
- Leadership and management, including that of the governing body, are strong and improving at all levels.
- Essential systems to ensure regular and good-quality information about pupils' achievements and the quality of teaching are securely in place.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make at least good progress because the quality of teaching is consistently effective.
- Pupils behave well in and out of lessons and typically have positive attitudes to learning.
- There are strengthening partnerships with parents and carers and other schools which indicate clear capacity for further improvement.

Information about this inspection

- During the inspection, 23 part-lessons were observed. Meetings were held with: senior leaders, including the headteacher; middle leaders; members of the governing body, including the Chair; officers from the local authority; and two groups of pupils, one from each of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2.
- Inspectors looked at: planning and self-evaluation documentation; assessment information and examples of pupils' work; and a range of policy documents.
- There were insufficient responses to Parent View, the Ofsted online questionnaire, in order to register parental views of the school. However, the school's analysis of the views of parents and carers, and pupils, from surveys undertaken in June 2013 were considered. In addition, the views of the 47 staff who responded to the inspection questionnaire were analysed.

Inspection team

Ken Bush, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Fiona Robinson

Additional Inspector

David Westall

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Elmhurst is larger than most primary schools and the number on roll is increasing.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs supported through school action is close to the national average, while the proportion supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is above average.
- The proportion of pupils for whom the school receives the pupil premium (additional funding for specific groups, including those known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after by the local authority) is close to the national average; this represents about one quarter of pupils in the school.
- About 90% of pupils come from a range of minority ethnic groups. About 80% of pupils are believed to speak English as an additional language.
- The school has a special educational unit on site known as the Additional Resourced Provision (ARP). This has accommodation for up to 10 pupils with autistic spectrum disorder. Currently, there are three pupils on roll in this facility, all of whom are taught for at least part of the time in mainstream classes.
- The school runs a daily breakfast club.
- The school meets the government's current floor targets, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- There have been significant changes in staffing and leadership since the previous inspection. The current headteacher has been in post since September 2012.
- An Interim Executive Board (IEB) has been in place to oversee governance since 2010, although it has, in practice, functioned as a 'shadow' governing body since the previous inspection in 2011. From September 2013, it will revert to conventional governing body status.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that it is typically good over time in all year groups by ensuring that:
 - tasks are consistently well matched to pupils' needs and abilities to ensure that there is a high level of challenge for all, including in Years 3 and 4
 - teachers check more carefully on how well groups of pupils are achieving during lessons, including through the use of questioning, and adapt their planning accordingly if progress slows
 - teachers develop pupils' ability to work more often without direct adult support.
- Increase achievement, notably, but not exclusively, in reading, by ensuring that:
 - the teaching of all aspects of reading, including developing comprehension skills, is of consistently high quality
 - all pupils are encouraged to read widely and often, including at home
 - pupils' skills in using ICT are better developed, especially in Key Stages 1 and 2.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Achievement requires improvement because not enough pupils make good progress over time, especially, but not exclusively, in reading. In the 2012 national tests, pupils' attainment at both the age-expected Level 4 and the higher Level 5 was below that of all pupils nationally. Rates of progress in reading and mathematics were also well below national expectations, although were much better in writing.
- The results from the 2013 unvalidated tests show significant improvement in both progress and attainment in mathematics compared to the previous year, but slower progress in reading. Consequently, attainment by the end of Year 6 in reading remains lower than in writing and mathematics in the school, and below that of all pupils nationally.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and pupils in Key Stage 1 are developing a secure grasp of phonics (the sounds letters make), as shown in their much improved outcomes in this year's phonics screening check. However, pupils' comprehension skills are not always as well developed as they progress through the school, especially relating to inference and deduction. Moreover, many pupils do not reinforce the regular reading practice they receive in school when they are at home.
- Pupils' writing is increasingly well developed and they are given a wide range of opportunities to practise their skills in different subjects. Mathematical skills are also beginning to improve as a result of better teaching in the past year. Although teachers promote the development of ICT skills well in the Early Years Foundation Stage, this is not done as consistently or effectively in Key Stages 1 or 2. Consequently, in this regard, pupils are not well prepared for the next stage of their education.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs achieve broadly in line with other pupils in the school, as do those from all minority ethnic groups. Inspection evidence indicates that the rates of progress of most pupils are accelerating rapidly as a result of improving teaching and more timely and rapid intervention when progress dips. Progress has been slowest in Years 3 and 4, where there have been a high number of changes to teaching staff in the past two years, but even here, progress is now starting to improve.
- In the 2012 national tests, the attainment of those Year 6 pupils who benefit from the pupil premium was equivalent to six months' slower progress in English and about 12 months' slower in mathematics compared with other pupils in the school. However, in the case of both subjects, these gaps were no greater than those found nationally. Overall, this group of pupils progress at a comparable rate to their peers in school and, in some case, better, illustrating that the gap is beginning to narrow.
- As a result of consistently effective teaching, children in the Early Years Foundation Stage get off to a strong start in all aspects of their learning. From well-below-average starting points in both Nursery and Reception classes, they quickly gain the skills needed to flourish in school and acquire positive attitudes to both learning and play.
- Those few pupils in the ARP make good progress as a result of effective teaching and high-quality liaison both with other colleagues in school and outside agencies.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement as, over time, it has not been consistently strong enough to secure good achievement for most pupils. However, there is evidence of rapid improvement in most year groups during the past academic year.
- In the most effective lessons seen during the inspection, teachers planned lessons which pupils found to be stimulating and in which they made significant gains in their learning. In a highly successful lesson seen in the Reception class, all groups of children made excellent progress in writing shopping lists. However, not all tasks set were as well matched to different pupils'

abilities, and in some lessons, there was insufficient challenge, notably in Years 3 and 4.

- Sometimes, rates of progress are too variable when teachers adhere too strictly to their plans and do not take enough account of how well different groups of pupils are actually accomplishing the tasks set. This is often because teachers' questioning is not always probing enough to check on pupils' levels of understanding.
- Progress is limited, too, when teaching fails to make enough demands upon pupils to work independently and, as a result, they become too reliant on adult support.
- The teaching of phonics is improving as a result of strong leadership of this aspect of teaching. In a well-managed session seen in the inspection, Year 1 pupils enjoyed roaming the outdoor play area searching for words which contained different phonic sounds. This was then briskly reinforced back in class so a great deal of learning was achieved in only 20 minutes.
- The teaching of other aspects of reading is not as consistently effective across the school. This is especially the case in Key Stage 2 as insufficient focus is placed on helping pupils to develop their understanding of texts. The establishment of 'guided reading' sessions is a useful recent addition to the daily programme, but the quality of this, as seen during the inspection, is too variable across different classes.
- The teaching of mathematics is beginning to improve as a result of a 'root and branch' review of practice at the start of this academic year. Teachers are now more consistent in how they approach the teaching of basic counting skills and 'mental maths'; the introduction of 'guided numeracy' also shows early signs of success.
- The quality of marking has improved since the previous inspection and pupils are generally given clear and useful guidance about how they should improve their work.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils mostly display positive attitudes to learning both in and out of lessons. They cooperate well with one another, their teachers and other adults, and are polite and courteous to visitors.
- When teaching is not fully effective, pupils occasionally become inattentive and distracted, but instances of serious misbehaviour are relatively rare. Behaviour has improved over time and there are now far fewer instances of exclusion from school than in the past. Those pupils with known behavioural issues are well managed; liaison with parents and carers, and with outside agencies, is speedy and effective.
- All groups of pupils spoken to during the inspection reported that they feel safe and that incidents of all forms of bullying are rare; when they occur, they are dealt with well by staff. Pupils are aware of cyber-bullying and the dangers posed by the internet and social networking.
- Attendance has been slow to improve over time but in the past year has sharply increased, notably for Key Stage 2 pupils. Leaders continue to raise awareness of the link between attendance and achievement with those parents and carers who persist in taking their children out of school during term time for holidays.
- Parents and carers, and most staff, express high levels of confidence in how well the school ensures that pupils behave well and are kept safe.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher has made a significant contribution to accelerating the pace of school improvement in the past year against a backdrop of extensive changes in teaching staff and leadership roles. Staff morale, as reflected in the very positive responses to the inspection questionnaire, is high.
- There is clear evidence of notable progress, including in addressing those areas highlighted for improvement at the previous inspection. Teaching is improving rapidly in most areas and there are now no major weaknesses. There is consistently high quality of provision and achievement in

the Early Years Foundation Stage and behaviour is good. Rates of progress across most classes and for different groups have accelerated rapidly in the current academic year. This includes in Key Stage 1, where an almost entirely new team of teachers is working with increasing effectiveness.

- Self-evaluation is accurate and robust, with both strengths and areas for development clearly defined in most cases.
- Essential systems to ensure regular and good-quality information about pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching are securely in place, and the data derived from these are well understood by leaders and other staff.
- There are rigorous procedures for checking the performance of teachers, who are held firmly to account through their annual objectives, which are regularly reviewed. Teaching and, to a slightly lesser extent, the quality of learning, are regularly and effectively monitored by senior, and increasingly, leaders responsible for subjects and key stages. Leadership of all key stages is strong, as is the leadership of the ARP and whole school inclusion.
- The curriculum is a key strength of the school. It is well managed and gives ample opportunities for pupils to practise and apply their literacy and, to a lesser degree, their numeracy skills in different subjects. The promotion of ICT skills across Key Stage 2 is less effective. The curriculum promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well.
- The breakfast club is well managed and enables those pupils who attend to begin the day well prepared for school.
- The partnership with parents and carers has become much stronger since the previous inspection. The Parental Engagement Officer has made a significant difference to increasing the school's understanding of its diverse cultural community and how best to support parents' and carers' engagement in school life. Parents and carers, including those who are harder to reach, have responded well to initiatives such as Parent Forums and family- and adult-learning courses.
- The school has an outward-looking approach and works effectively in partnership with the adjacent children's centre and another school within the local authority judged by Ofsted to be good and led by a Local leader of Education. Elmhurst is also one of a group of six primary schools involved in a school improvement project known as Aspire, which seeks to raise aspirations and achievement in the locality. This is already beginning to contribute to the Elmhurst's capacity for further improvement.
- The local authority has provided useful and well-focused support for the headteacher and other staff over a sustained period.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The IEB has provided strong and effective strategic leadership to the school over a period of time. Members of the Board are knowledgeable about how well the school achieves compared with all primary schools nationally and understands the school's relative strengths and weaknesses, including with regard to the quality of teaching. They are clearly aware, too, of the need to ensure that how well staff are financially rewarded is aligned with how well pupils achieve. They are up to date with all requirements relating to teachers' performance management and appraisal.
 - Scrutiny of IEB minutes and other inspection evidence indicates strongly that it holds leaders to account robustly, including with regard to the use of pupil premium funding. The IEB ensures that all current safeguarding requirements are met in full and that equality of opportunity is given a high priority; discrimination in any form is not tolerated.
 - The IEB makes very effective use of the range of expertise in its membership and ensures it undertakes regular training updates. It continues to build its capacity to be increasingly effective and to help to secure further improvement for the school.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	110286
Local authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	400073

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	317
Appropriate authority	Interim executive board
Chair	David Gamble
Headteacher	Rachel Kirk
Date of previous school inspection	4–5 July 2011
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