

Elmswell Community Primary School

Oxer Close, Elmswell, Bury St Edmunds, IP30 9UE

Inspection dates 20–21 March 2014

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		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

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

- Pupils' achievement varies across the school because teaching is not consistently good.
- In the Year 1 reading check last year the proportion of pupils that reached the required standard was well below average.
- Too few pupils reach the higher levels of attainment in writing because not all teachers have the same high expectations of what pupils can achieve.
- The presentation of pupils' work is too untidy.
- Teachers do not always take enough account of what pupils already know in order to plan work that is at the right level for them.
- Marking does not always show pupils how to improve their work or expect them to act upon teachers' advice.
- Questioning does not always extend pupils' thinking or elicit detailed answers.
- The school's rate of progress towards good has not been as rapid as it could have been because not all senior leaders have been fully committed to the headteacher's plans for improvement.
- Leaders and managers have not made sure that teachers' assessments of how well pupils are doing are always accurate.
- Not all the judgements about aspects of the school's work, including teaching, have been secure.
- Governors are relatively inexperienced at influencing the school's improvement.

The school has the following strengths

- Children in the Nursery get off to a good start.
- Pupils read well in Key Stage 2.
- Pupils behave well and have good attitudes to learning. They say they feel safe in school.
- The headteacher is having a positive impact on improving the school.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 20 lessons or parts of lessons, including some jointly with the headteacher.
- The inspection team heard pupils read and, with the headteacher, looked closely at samples of pupils' work.
- The inspectors looked at a wide range of school documents, including development plans, policies, self-evaluation reports, monitoring files, safeguarding and subject materials, evidence of the school's partnership work and information for families.
- Meetings were held with groups of pupils chosen at random. Discussions were held with senior leaders, subject leaders, teachers and other staff, the Chair of the Governing Body and five other governors, and two representatives from the local authority.
- The inspectors took account of the 55 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and spoke informally to parents in the playground.
- The inspectors considered the staff questionnaires that were completed.

Inspection team

Nick Butt, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Marion Lloyd	Additional Inspector
Piers Ranger	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is larger than the average-sized primary school.
- Most pupils are White British.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium (which in this school provides additional funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals) is below average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is average. The proportion supported at school action plus, or with a statement of special educational needs, is also average.
- The school is moving towards becoming an all-through primary school. It currently has Year 5 pupils, who will become its first cohort of Year 6 pupils in September 2014.
- The school has a Nursery which runs mornings only.
- As the school has no Year 6 pupils, there is no judgement about floor standards.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make all teaching at least good by making sure that:
 - all teachers take full account of what pupils already know and can do in order to plan activities that are neither too easy nor too difficult for them
 - questions make pupils think and give extended responses
 - teachers pick up pupils' misconceptions in class quickly and deal with them straight away
 - marking clearly shows pupils how to improve their work and that teachers expect them to act upon it.
- Raise achievement in writing by:
 - making sure that all teachers have the same high expectations of the quantity and quality of pupils' writing
 - ensuring that the presentation of pupils' work and handwriting is consistently neat.
- Strengthen leadership and management at all levels by making sure that:
 - all senior leaders are fully committed to supporting the headteacher's plans for the school and drive for improvement
 - teachers' assessments of how well pupils are doing are always accurate
 - all leaders make reliable judgements about the quality of the school's work
 - governors' skills in influencing school improvement are further developed.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- Pupils' progress has been patchy in different year groups because of variations in the quality of teaching. This means that not all have done as well as they could.
- Children join the Nursery with skills that are expected for their age. While these children make good progress, half the children who join the Reception classes come from other settings and have had a range of experiences.
- In Reception there is some good practice but also some that requires improvement. Some tasks are not demanding enough nor have a clear purpose that would develop children's learning further. Most children make expected progress, but too few make good progress by the time they join Year 1.
- In 2013 the proportion of Year 1 pupils reaching the required standard in phonics (the sounds that letter make) was disappointing and down on the previous year. The headteacher acted swiftly to tackle this and appointed a senior member of staff with responsibility for phonics. The way phonics is taught was changed and a new approach adopted. This has had a positive impact and pupils are now on course to do much better this year.
- Standards by the end of Key Stage 1 in 2013 were broadly average and a little above in mathematics. Pupils did not perform so well in writing, particularly at the higher levels. This is because teachers' expectations vary about the quantity and quality of writing and the presentation of pupils' work. Often handwriting is too untidy.
- There were too few pupils supported by the pupil premium to comment on their attainment last year. The progress of these pupils varies across different classes in line with how good the teaching is.
- Progress in Key Stage 2 is uneven. Often pupils are all given the same work to do, which can be too easy for the most able and too difficult for the least able. As a result, these groups of pupils do not achieve as well as they could.
- The school's progress information is not fully reliable as some of the assessments are not supported by pupils' work in their books. In general, pupils' work shows that attainment and progress are lower than some of the school's performance information might indicate.
- Support programmes for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs have been effective, particularly in phonics, and some pupils have done particularly well because their needs have been very well supported. However, their books sometimes show that the work they have been given is not appropriate for them, and this is borne out in some classes when they are not receiving specific support from teaching assistants. At these times their progress slows.
- Pupils develop positive attitudes to reading, especially in Key Stage 2. They select their own books and read regularly at home. Year 2 pupils' phonics skills have improved this year and they can now sound out unfamiliar words confidently. Year 5 pupils talk with enthusiasm about their favourite authors.

The quality of teaching requires improvement

- Teachers do not always plan activities which take account of what pupils already know or extend their learning further. On too many occasions the same work is given to all pupils regardless of their skills. This is particularly true of subjects other than English and mathematics.
- The use of questioning by teachers varies. While in some classes pupils engage in high quality discussion as a result of sensitive and open-ended questioning, in other classes questions are too limiting and simply elicit one-word answers. An excellent example of the former came when Year 5 pupils were discussing whether keeping animals in a zoo can be morally justified. Probing questioning by the teacher ensured that pupils engaged in a lively debate and used evidence from relevant texts to support their arguments.
- In some classes teachers do not pick up quickly enough the misconceptions which pupils have or take decisive action to tackle them. This means some pupils continue to make the same mistakes and this slows their learning.
- Where there are elements of good teaching, teachers are very clear about what pupils will learn and challenge their thinking, anticipating possible pitfalls. For example, Year 4 pupils learning about coordinates were reminded to 'go along the corridor and up the stairs' when plotting points, and were expected to find the missing coordinates to complete different shapes.
- Books show that progress varies between classes and across year groups. There are inconsistent approaches to marking and feedback to pupils. Individual teachers adopt different methods, some of which are more successful than others in showing pupils how to improve their work. Often they are not given enough information, and when they are, pupils are not always encouraged to act upon the guidance, so repeating the same errors.
- Teaching in the Nursery is mainly good. Staff developed children's language well when the children were building a 'strong house' to withstand the attentions of the wolf in the story of the 'Three Little Pigs'.
- In an excellent class assembly, Reception children rapped their way through the story of 'Goldilocks', much to the delight of their parents. However, there are also weaknesses in Reception teaching when children are given activities to do that do not challenge them sufficiently.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils behave well both in the classrooms and around the school building. They are calm and orderly at playtimes. Pupils understand what the school expects of them in terms of behaviour and they follow the code.
- Pupils treat each other with respect. They are proud of their school, wanting to share all the things they like about it. They said, 'If you're struggling, teachers help you.' They have positive attitudes to learning and are keen to play an active role in class.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. All parents who responded to Parent View agreed that their children were kept safe. The school has recently held a very successful anti-bullying week and pupils talked confidently about what to do should any bullying occur, even though they do not see it as an issue in their school. Pupils know how to keep safe on the

internet.

- Pupils enter into all that the school offers them with enthusiasm. For example, the whole school assembled in the playground for a 'wake and shake' exercise session using 'the monster mash' and all pupils participated with great gusto and enjoyment.
- The older pupils support the younger ones well. They enjoy taking on responsibilities such as junior road safety officers and members of the school council.
- The school keeps a close eye on pupils' attendance to make sure it does not fall below average.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- Leadership and management require improvement because teaching is too inconsistent and progress is patchy. Too many pupils are not doing as well as they could. While most pupils make expected progress, not enough make good progress and teacher assessments of their progress are not always accurate.
- The headteacher has a very clear plan for improving the school, which sets the needs of each individual pupil at the centre of its work. Recent appointments to the senior leadership team have fully embraced this approach and are having a positive impact on driving improvement. However, not all senior leaders have been so receptive to change and at times the headteacher has struggled to form a cohesive and united team.
- Things are changing and the rate of school improvement has been accelerating this year as staff are held increasingly accountable for their performance and conduct. The school makes sure that all pupils are included in its activities, but not all groups do as well as they can because of the unevenness in the provision. Discrimination of any kind is not tolerated.
- There are regular checks on teaching. The headteacher makes accurate judgements, but some other leaders are less secure in their judgements. This means that weaknesses in teaching and learning are not always picked up promptly. For example, the disappointing results in phonics last year came as somewhat of a surprise.
- The headteacher ensures that the management of teachers' performance is robust, with challenging targets linked to pupils' progress. Pay rises are not awarded unless there is clear evidence of a teacher's positive impact on pupils' performance.
- The range of subjects and topics gives pupils a broad understanding. There has been some recent interesting work on the ancient civilisations of Mesopotamia. The curriculum contributes well to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Books show that the amount of work in particular subjects, such as science, varies from class to class. Pupils' experiences are enriched by clubs, visits and visitors, including a residential visit to an outdoor pursuits centre.
- The primary school sports funding is being spent on coaching for pupils and training for staff. Pupils are also taking part in more tournaments and enjoying success, as was recently seen in a cross-country event. As a result more pupils are involved in sport and staff are becoming increasingly confident in teaching physical education.
- Support from the local authority has recently intensified with help from the headteacher of

another school. There has also been useful local authority support for the Early Years Foundation Stage.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The governing body, under new leadership, brings a wide range of skills to support the school and is well motivated to see the school improve. While governors are aware of how pupils are doing compared to other schools and the quality of teaching in the school, their checks have been fairly informal to date. They are not always given accurate information, because there are some weaknesses in teachers' assessments. They rightly asked searching questions about last year's phonics results. Governors understand what the school is doing to improve teachers' performance and how salaries are linked to pupils' progress. They ensure that safeguarding arrangements meet all current statutory requirements.

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	124534
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	430806

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	3–10
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	257
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Chair	Bryan Windus-Smith
Headteacher	Jane Ash
Date of previous school inspection	3 May 2012
Telephone number	01359 240261
Fax number	01359 242364
Email address	admin@elmswell.suffolk.sch.uk

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