



Elm Court School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 100659
Local Authority Lambeth
Inspection number 285838
Inspection dates 16–17 January 2007
Reporting inspector Stuart Charlton

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

Type of school	Special	School address	Elmcourt Road
School category	Community		West Norwood
Age range of pupils	11–16		London SE27 9BZ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	02086706577
Number on roll (school)	79	Fax number	02087660309
Appropriate authority	The local authority	Headteacher	Mr W Hutcheson
Date of previous school inspection	4 February 2002		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–16	16–17 January 2007	285838

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

All students at Elm Court have a statement of special educational need. These are mainly related to social, emotional and behavioural needs and often linked with speech and communication difficulties. Nearly one third of students are White British and about the same number come from Black British/Caribbean or Black British backgrounds. A higher proportion than usual speaks English as an additional language. Students' attainment on entry is well below average. A significant, and rising, majority of students come from disadvantaged backgrounds and the number and complexity of their needs is increasing. The school gained Full Service extended status in April 2004.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Elm Court is a good school. It has many strengths and is effective in enabling students to manage their own behaviour and gain access to qualifications, which prepare them well for life after school. Comments such as 'this is a brilliant school' and 'everyone helps and supports us even when we have a wobbler' show that parents and students hold the school in high esteem. It is overly modest in celebrating its success, but self-evaluation is robust.

All students, regardless of their needs or ability, achieve well. Although standards are well below average, every year most students attain at least one GCSE or Entry Level qualification. Many students attain five or more GCSE grades A* to G. This good achievement is based on good teaching and the very effective way in which all staff help and support students in managing their own behaviour. Very good relationships are developed between students and staff and these are used well to improve students' motivation, attendance, behaviour and attainment. All students have improved their performance considerably compared with that in their previous schools and re-engage in active learning. However, the school does not always make best use of the information it collects about students' progress to ensure that all are able to fully evaluate and celebrate their achievements. Attendance is satisfactory, but because a few students do not fully recognise the importance of regular attendance this has a negative impact on their learning.

The contribution which all students make to the community both within and outside the school is outstanding. For example, the school council takes a very active role in school life with older students mentoring and supporting new arrivals. Through the extended school status very strong links have been developed with groups, such as those who attend the Falls Clinic, and these are used very well to enhance students' personal and social skills.

The curriculum is well matched to the needs and aspirations of students with a good balance of academic, vocational and work-related courses which prepare them well for life after school. There is a very strong programme of enrichment activities provided through out-of-school clubs which makes an important contribution to developing students' motivation and aspirations. The care, guidance and support provided by all staff is good and ensures that students can be successfully challenged in a safe, secure environment to face the demands of the outside world.

The headteacher and his deputy lead by example and provide a very clear vision and direction for the work of the school. They are well supported by senior and lead managers. There is a strong team spirit and all staff are very well supported in their professional development. Governors play an active role in school life and act effectively as the school's critical friend. Very strong links have been developed with other agencies and these are used well to support and enhance students' personal and academic development.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that all students get sufficient information about their progress to enable them to fully evaluate and celebrate their achievements.
- Work with parents to ensure that all students attend regularly in order to achieve as well as they can.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Given their starting point on entry to the school, the results that students achieve in GCSE and Entry level examinations represent good achievement for these students. The inspection findings show that all students, regardless of their ability, make good progress and progress for some is very good. The strong focus the school places on literacy, numeracy and information communication technology (ICT) ensures that students make good progress in developing the skills they will need in later life.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' personal development and well being, and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good. Their behaviour is good and has improved significantly since they have been at Elm Court. The success of the school's behaviour policy is clearly shown by the fact that the final sanction of exclusion is rarely used. There are few instances of bullying and students are clear about what they should do if any occur. Most students enjoy their lessons and are keen to come to school. Overall attendance is satisfactory. The recently introduced rewards system is having a positive impact on improving attendance rates. However, there is still a small number of students and their parents who do not fully appreciate the need for regular attendance. Students of all ages can explain the importance of adopting a healthy lifestyle and are very aware of the need to adopt safe practices. All students in Year 10 take part in work experience and all students in Year 10 and Year 11 attend local colleges for one or two mornings each week to gain work related qualifications or to get extra help with subjects they are studying in school. This makes a good contribution to the skills students will need to ensure their future economic well being. A particularly strong feature of students' personal development is that the majority are able very quickly to manage their journeys to and from school for themselves.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching is good overall and a significant proportion is outstanding. Teachers develop very good relationships with their students and these are used well to develop students'

confidence and self-esteem. Praise is used well and all staff have very good knowledge of the needs of individual students. Consequently, the work and particularly questioning is well matched to the wide range of students' needs. Support staff make an important contribution to the development of students' academic and personal skills. Teachers plan lessons well and make good use of National Curriculum levels and Entry Level criteria to inform students on these courses how well they are doing. However, students who are not working at these levels do not always have sufficient information to enable them to evaluate their progress, and consequently the rate at which they improve is not as rapid as that of their peers.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good with an effective balance of academic, vocational and work-related activities which are well matched to the needs and aspirations of students. Throughout the curriculum, strong emphasis is placed on developing students' literacy, numeracy and ICT skills in order to prepare them for life after school. There is a very good programme of personal development which pervades all aspects of school life and enables students to make good progress in managing and taking responsibility for their own behaviour. The school has used its extended status very effectively to develop an extremely wide range of activities outside the school day to support and develop students' learning. There are many sporting clubs, such as those for football, volleyball and table tennis, as well as activities which directly support the subjects which are studied, such as the science club and the art and sculpture club. The extension of these activities into the wider community to improve students' personal and social skills even further has been somewhat frustrated by uncertainties about the move to a new site.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Very good care is provided for students based on the strong relationships between students and staff. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils are robust and reviewed on a regular basis. The health and safety of students is promoted very well. Teaching and support staff show commitment to ensuring high levels of care for pupils at all times, for example during breaks and at lunchtime and within the out-of-school activities. At these times they are vigilant and conscientiously implement the school's procedures. All staff give generously of their time to escort students through the school site to the bus stops so that they quickly develop the confidence to manage their own journeys to and from school.

The 'Pastoral Room' is used very well to provide students with opportunities to reflect on and manage any inappropriate behaviour without it affecting the learning of others. The school's information about students' achievements is not used to full effect to ensure that all are able to evaluate and celebrate the progress they make both in their personal and academic development. Careers guidance is good.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher provides clear vision and direction for the work of the school. He is very well supported by his senior managers and has established a strong team ethos which ensures an effective climate for learning is established and maintained. The recently revised management structure, involving lead managers, is proving helpful in providing regular opportunities for staff to meet with students to review and refine performance. However, there is not sufficient information made available to some students to enable these discussions to be fully effective. Governors support the school well and act as an effective critical friend. The school has very good systems to develop the skills of all its staff and is particularly effective in ensuring that support staff gain the qualifications they need to fully develop their role. Very good links have been developed with other agencies such as the Health Service, Social Services and other professionals which considerably enhance the well-being of students. By maintaining its performance despite the increasing complexity of students' needs and through the uncertainties created by the planned move to a new site, the school has demonstrated that it has good capacity to improve. It provides good value for money.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank for all the help you gave me when I inspected your school on 16 and 17 January. I was particularly helped by the discussions I held with the school council.

You told me that Elm Court is a good school and I agree with you. It has many strengths, notably the wide range of activities which are provided after school and the way in which staff help you to manage and take responsibility for your own behaviour so that you can achieve very well and gain qualifications which will help you when you leave school. You also said that there are many good teachers and that all staff are very approachable and spend a great deal of time helping you to develop skills which are important when you look for a job.

The headteacher and senior members of staff spend a lot of time in ensuring that the school is a safe and secure place in which you can develop your personal and social skills. All staff emphasise the importance of regular attendance so that you can achieve of your best, but there are still a few of you who do not take this to heart and so the school does not meet the attendance targets it has set. Those of you who are working towards GCSE or Entry Level qualifications are given good information about the progress you are making and so you know how to improve your work. This information is not as good for those who are studying other programmes and staff are going to make great efforts to improve this. You need to help by using what they tell you to good advantage when you review what you have achieved and the progress you have made. This will enable you to tell your parents and others how well the school is helping you.

Yours sincerely,

Stuart Charlton

Lead inspector