



Elmwood School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 123938
Local Authority Somerset
Inspection number 292833
Inspection date 9 October 2006
Reporting inspector Sarah Mascall

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

Type of school	Special	School address	Hamp Avenue
School category	Community		Bridgwater
Age range of pupils	7–16		TA6 6AP
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01278 422866
Number on roll (school)	58	Fax number	01278 445157
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Juliet Staunton
		Headteacher	Jaqui Tobin
Date of previous school inspection	20 May 2002		

Age group	Inspection date	Inspection number
7–16	9 October 2006	292833

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This small special school educates pupils with a wide range of special educational needs. All pupils have statements of special educational need. Just under half the pupils have moderate learning difficulties and a third have severe learning difficulties. Other pupils have statements of special educational needs for social, emotional and behavioural difficulties or autistic spectrum disorders. They come from Somerset and nearby local authorities. A small number are in the care of their local authorities and over a third are eligible for free school meals. Since the last inspection, the school has gone through a period of instability with the threat of closure and then consideration of joining with another special school in the area. Recently, the school has been assured that it can continue as it is. This year, it received recognition for its work through the British Artsmark Gold Award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Elmwood is a good school. Leadership has ensured that, despite a considerable period of uncertainty, the school has maintained a number of its strengths. This is particularly so in making sure that pupils do well in their personal development. As a result, pupils become mature, independent members of the community. Parents confirm this. They are very supportive of the school and comment that they feel their children are happy at school and are doing well. As one parent commented, 'If my daughter could attend school seven days a week, she would!'

Pupils themselves talk very positively about school and feel it has done a lot for them, especially in helping them improve their behaviour. They speak enthusiastically about keeping fit and all the exercise and clubs they attend which help them keep healthy. Pupils show a good understanding of keeping safe because the school places good emphasis on this aspect through its effective systems to support personal, social and health education. Although pupils' standards are below national expectations because of their special needs, their achievements overall are good. This is because they benefit from good teaching and the high expectations of the staff that pupils will make progress in their learning. As a result, by the time they leave school in Year 11, many pupils have gained recognition for their hard work through passes in GCSE or entry level.

The school has rightly recognised that the progress made by pupils in literacy slows in Years 10 and 11. Not enough time is allocated for them to improve their skills sufficiently and this is reflected in the small numbers who are entered for examination courses in literacy. The curriculum, although basically satisfactory, is not developed as well as it should be for older pupils and has not been reviewed to provide pupils with a more relevant range of experiences. Staff are looking at ways to widen the range of examinations so that all pupils, regardless of their ability, can gain recognition for their achievements.

A real strength of the school is the close links with mainstream schools and these support pupils' academic and social development well. Considerable hard work by the headteacher has enabled the school to develop at a reasonable pace and she is well supported by a strong deputy. Between them, there is a good understanding of what needs to be improved and good progress has been made in dealing with the issues from the previous inspection. The school has collected a considerable amount of information about pupils' achievements and good steps have already been taken to improve the procedures for assessing the progress pupils are making. Senior staff recognise the need to use this information more effectively to make improvements that will help pupils to achieve even more.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that pupils in Years 10 and 11 make better progress in developing their skills in literacy.
- Develop the curriculum so that it is more flexible for pupils in Years 10 and 11 and provide better opportunities for all pupils to gain accreditation.

- Make better use of the information gathered on pupils' performance to ensure whole-school priorities are more closely linked to pupils' progress.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Despite standards that are understandably below average, pupils achieve well, and by the time they leave school, many have gained recognition through passes in GCSEs and entry level accreditation. The majority of pupils make good progress in practical subjects and most gain qualifications in science, design and technology and information and communication technology. The best progress, though, is made by pupils in art and design and this year all passed their GCSE exam. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 make satisfactory rather than good progress in English and only a small number were entered for, and passed, entry level examinations. Although pupils of lower ability make good progress, they do not have enough opportunities to celebrate their successes because their achievements are not recognised through any form of accreditation. Younger pupils achieve well in their literacy and numeracy skills because there is a good focus on ensuring that they make the best possible progress. Pupils with communication difficulties benefit from good use of symbols which are used well to enable them to understand, and be involved in, all activities. As a result, they make good progress in their learning. Appropriately, the school is developing staff skills in signing to support pupils further.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils clearly enjoy their time in school. This is reflected in their good attendance and cheerful faces when they arrive at school. Although pupils feel they are making progress in their work, their enthusiasm is mostly about all the clubs they can join in with and how fit and healthy this has helped them to become. Pupils are proud of the fact that they are given responsibilities and are keen to talk about the jobs they have to do. They say they feel grown up and this is reflected in their sensible manner around school. Parents commented on how polite and friendly pupils are and this is very evident in the way they look after each other and behave well. Older pupils have responsibilities to support other pupils who are lonely or are having problems during playtime. They take these roles very seriously and clearly have a real sense of being part of a community. The opportunities to experience education in mainstream schools contribute greatly in developing pupils' social skills. All aspects of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good and pupils are well prepared for life when they leave school. Those pupils who attend college develop an understanding of business enterprise but opportunities are missed in school to develop pupils' business skills and improve their economic well-being more effectively.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Pupils feel they are learning well and say this is because teachers make lessons fun! Teachers make good use of resources to make lessons interesting. Pupils are often actively involved in their learning through the effective use of interactive whiteboards. As a result, pupils concentrate well in lessons and enjoy their work. Because teachers know pupils well, tasks are kept short and sharp so that pupils remain on task. Teachers, though, do not always use this knowledge effectively to make sure that work is planned carefully enough to match the needs of each individual. The school has appropriately recognised this as an area for development. There is a good sense of teamwork in lessons amongst staff and teaching assistants have a clear understanding of their roles. This enables them to work well with individuals and small groups of pupils. All staff are consistent in the way they manage pupils' behaviour. As a result, pupils know what is, and is not, acceptable and behave well in lessons. Teachers respond positively to pupils' work, giving them stickers and praise when they do well, but there is not a consistent approach to providing pupils with a good understanding of how they can improve their work further.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is successful in providing pupils with a wide range of learning experiences. However, the school has not reviewed the balance of time for subjects across the curriculum and this has resulted in weaknesses in the curriculum for Years 10 and 11. Rather than providing a more flexible curriculum for this age group, the school is still trying to teach all the subjects in the National Curriculum as well as prepare these pupils for their next stage of education. This has resulted in insufficient time being allocated to literacy and limiting the experiences available to pupils. The school does, though, provide a good range of work related activities which support pupils well and they talk enthusiastically about these. The very good links with local schools have enabled pupils to benefit from opportunities to attend mainstream schools which support their learning well. Educational visits are used well to add to pupils' learning experiences and their enjoyment of school life.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The care, guidance and support of pupils are good. There are particular strengths in the care and well-being of pupils which enable pupils to be educated in an environment where they feel safe. Health and safety is given a high priority and staff are generally well trained in all areas linked to pupils' safety. Whilst child protection procedures are effective and staff are kept updated on new initiatives, the school has recognised that procedures for regular formal awareness training are not as good as they should be

and more opportunities for training need to be established. Parents comment on the amount of good support they and their children get from school and there are good links with a range of outside agencies. Pupils' personal development is supported well through the school's many effective procedures and the well planned personal, social and health education programme. Targets to help each pupil improve in their personal development enable pupils to make good progress. Support for pupils' academic progress is satisfactory rather than good and consequently the school has already started to develop this aspect through a range of training initiatives. It recognises that it needs to be more effective in setting academic targets that are both challenging and achievable and ensure that teachers are more confident in measuring whether or not the targets have been achieved.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school is well led and managed. Despite the fact that the school has been through a very difficult period, the headteacher has ensured that the school has been kept on an even keel and that standards in the key areas of pupils' personal development and academic achievement have been maintained. The headteacher and her deputy are very clear about the strengths and areas for improvement within the school and have good capacity to move the school forward. Much of their understanding has come about through effective systems in checking the quality of teaching and learning. As a result, they have already started to improve procedures for assessment and literacy for Years 10 and 11 pupils. A good amount of information has been gathered about pupils' achievements and some work has already been done in checking and analysing how well different groups of pupils are doing. The senior team knows that it needs to ensure the curriculum is appropriately balanced as well as to link the findings from its analyses more closely with whole-school priorities for improvement. This will then provide an even better understanding of how to ensure pupils can achieve. The governing body is enthusiastic in its support of the school but recognises that it needs to be more challenging in questioning the work of the school so that it is clearer about the areas for improvement.

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	3
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	2
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	2
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?	3
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	3
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 you for being so helpful and cheerful when we visited you. Mr Kell and I very much enjoyed talking to you and looking at your work. You told us that you thought Elmwood was a good school and we agree with you.

You do very well in becoming sensible, mature young adults because the school encourages you to take on responsibilities. We were very impressed by how keen you were to do your different jobs, especially in helping others at playtimes. You told me you like school and work hard. Because of this, you do well in your work and teachers and teaching assistants help you in this. The school is a safe place because the staff have got some very good ways of making sure you are kept healthy and safe. Although you learn about lots of different subjects, the school has not looked closely enough at ways of changing the curriculum for you in Years 10 and 11. Because of this, there is not enough time given to really important things like literacy. You do well in your exams but the school needs to make sure that you have a chance to celebrate all your good work by getting recognition for what you have achieved. The school has got lots of information about how well you do but it has not used this as well as it could to make sure that you make even better progress.

There are three things we have asked the school to do to make improvements:

- Make sure that in Years 10 and 11 you do better in literacy.
- Make the curriculum better for you in Years 10 and 11 and give you the chance to have all your achievements recognised.
- Use all the information about how well you do, to improve what goes on in school even more.

We wish you well for the future and hope you carry on staying fit and healthy and working hard.