

Elsenham Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115129
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	311847
Inspection date	12 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Jill Bavin

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	138
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr N Yeadon
Headteacher	Mrs L Reid
Date of previous school inspection	29 November 2004
School address	Elsenham Bishop's Stortford Hertfordshire CM22 6DD
Telephone number	01279 813198
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector. This inspection evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues.

- What the school has done about the relative dip in attainment in mathematics at Key Stage 2, including the proportion of Level 5s, and what impact those actions have had on standards and achievement.
- What the school is doing to improve boys' writing at Key Stage 2.
- What the impact of recent curriculum initiatives has been, including the focus on gifted and talented children and the Department of Children, Schools and Families 'Making Good Progress Pilot'.

Evidence was gathered from: talking with children, sampling their work, observing lessons, analysing school documentation, discussions with staff and governors and analysing the results of questionnaires returned by parents. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail and the inspection found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments of these areas, as given in their self-evaluation, were not justified. These have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

This is a smaller than average sized primary school serving children from a wide variety of backgrounds. A percentage of children join school with skills that are below or well below national expectations, with few higher attainers. The percentage of children with learning difficulties is below average overall but in some classes the proportion is high. A higher than average proportion of children have statements of special educational need. Most children are from White British families and a few are from minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of children speaking English as an additional language is lower than that found nationally. However, this fluctuates and on occasions higher proportions of children whose first language is not English join the school and leave within a school year.

The school holds the Activemark, Healthy Schools and Investors in People awards. It is currently working towards achieving the Challenge Award, provision for Gifted and Talented children, the Eco Bronze award, and accreditation for 'Thinking Hats'.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good and improving school. Some elements of its work are outstanding. Parents have overwhelmingly positive views of the school and particularly value the headteacher's leadership. They rightly feel that she is responsible for the school's many strengths, which include a culture of open communication with parents, excellent nurturing of children and fostering their love of learning. Inspection evidence confirms parents' views, shared by governors, that the headteacher provides extremely strong leadership. This has been instrumental in moving the school on well since the previous inspection.

Children's immense enjoyment of school arises, from the excellent pastoral care they receive and from an outstanding curriculum. Work is planned extremely carefully, often around topics. Links between subjects give children exceptionally good opportunities to learn through using their creativity and imaginations, such as making theatre props for 'Perseus and the Gorgon' during literacy work on myths. The school makes much use of drama. Children in Years 4 and 5, for instance, relished enacting scenes depicting Shabbat, demonstrating their good understanding of Jewish beliefs. Personal and social education is skilfully woven throughout various activities. The result of such strengths is apparent in children's excellent attitudes to school and to each other, as well as above average standards in religious education, information and communication technology and design and technology.

The headteacher has forged exceptionally effective links with other professionals in order to develop various curriculum initiatives. These have been carefully selected to focus on raising standards and improving achievement by addressing particular needs that she and the teaching team have identified. For example, aware that boys were not doing as well as the girls in writing, the school adopted a project linking technology with writing. Similarly, realising that fewer children reached higher levels in mathematics than in science and English, the school introduced a 'challenge mathematics' project. This was aimed specifically at enhancing children's problem solving skills. Projects such as these are relatively new but are much appreciated by children and are already beginning to have a positive impact on their achievement. The school has identified more able children and makes good provision for them.

Because children are so well informed by teachers and have such faith in them, they not only feel extremely secure but are also remarkably self-aware about their learning. One girl explained that she 'used to be scared of everything' about mathematics, but now 'chooses which way to do things' because she has several strategies to select from. Personal development is outstanding and behaviour is excellent. Children willingly embrace responsibility which extends beyond taking on roles such as 'eco-monitors' or 'play leaders', to being actively involved in assessing their own learning. Their maturity is equally evident in the respect they afford beliefs that differ from their own and their positive views about diversity within their school. Attendance rates are above average.

Alongside excellent personal development, pupils' achievement is good and has been for several years. Standards overall are above average and have been over recent years. In Year 2 there are particular strengths in reading. Since the previous inspection standards in science by the end of Year 6 have improved significantly and become a consistent strength. In the national tests in 2007 for pupils in Year 6, results were above average. The current Year 6 children have reached, and in some cases exceeded, their challenging targets. Their standards overall are somewhat lower than those in 2007 but this represents good progress from their starting points.

The good levels of achievement are the result of good teaching and good academic guidance. Strengths lie in teachers' planning and their effective use of assessment to meet the needs of different groups within the class. Children receive good feedback about their work in lessons. Relationships between adults and children are good throughout the school and contribute to good behaviour. Teaching assistants make a valuable contribution to children's progress, especially those who find learning difficult. The quality of teaching is improving and there are increasing examples of excellent practice. The best lessons are characterised by ambitious expectations supported by highly skilful questioning so children make discoveries at an impressive rate.

The leadership and management of the school are good overall. Governors, senior managers and subject leaders share the headteacher's commitment to doing their best for the children and constantly seek school improvement. They share with her the responsibility for checking how well children are doing and discussing how to improve provision further. They do this well because they have a good knowledge and understanding of the school's strengths and priorities for improvement. While their effective support has been crucial to the school's success, they remain a little over-dependent on the headteacher as to how to proceed with academic improvements in their areas of responsibility. The development since the previous inspection indicates that the school has a good capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Children in the Reception class get off to an exceptionally strong start to their learning. They make outstanding progress during the year. They join Year 1 with standards that are in line with national expectations in most areas but with real strengths in social development. Children make particularly impressive progress personally, rapidly increasing in the confidence to share resources and become enthused by new experiences. These strengths are the result of the class teachers' extremely good leadership and management. They have a deep understanding of how to meet the needs of young children whatever their respective strengths and needs. There is a very good balance of opportunities to work with an adult or independently. Adults support children's learning with comments and questions that are tailored extremely well to individual needs, based on thorough and accurate assessment. Teaching assistants and teachers work very well together as a team so children receive consistent messages about what is expected of them and feel secure. Parents appreciate this enormously, exemplified by one written comment, 'She has been privileged to have had the teachers she has had educating her through the year'.

What the school should do to improve further

- Build on the growing management and leadership skills of staff to extend further their capacity to lead and initiate change within their areas of responsibility.

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Annex A

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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
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?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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.

Annex A

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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

13 June 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of Elsenham Primary, Elsenham, CM22 6DD

Thank you for being so friendly and helpful when I visited your school recently. I agree with you and your parents that you go to a good school and that some of the school's work is excellent.

You told me how much you enjoy school for many different reasons, some of them were that your teachers are so helpful, other children are friendly and kind, and there are lots of enjoyable activities. I could see how much you liked school by the excellent way you behaved in lessons and around the building. I was really impressed by how sensibly you answered questions or worked in small groups in lessons as well as the way you look after each other. Some of you told me how much you appreciated extra help, particularly with challenging mathematics on Friday afternoons, or writing about using technology. I could understand this because your school is exceptionally good at finding special projects for you that are just what you need.

Many of your parents wrote and told me how much they appreciate the way Mrs Reid leads the school. They also made complimentary comments about how well the teachers help you and I could see what they meant when I visited your lessons and looked at how they plan your activities. The teachers and governors already work closely with Mrs Reid to keep improving your school. I have asked the teachers to take even more of a lead with new developments.

You can help the school get even better by continuing to behave so brilliantly and working to the best of your ability. I wish you every success in the future.

Jill Bavin

Lead inspector