

Elham Church of England Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118741
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	313073
Inspection date	21 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Kevin Hodge

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	120
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Val Ives
Headteacher	Sue Hope
Date of previous school inspection	9 June 2003
School address	Vicarage Lane Elham Canterbury CT4 6TT
Telephone number	01303 840325
Fax number	01303 840325

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: how well Foundation Stage children make progress, how well pupils achieve in mathematics, and how effectively senior staff and governors are promoting improvement. Evidence was collected from lesson observations, looking at pupils' work and school documents. Parents' questionnaires and discussions with pupils, the chair of governors and staff also formed part of the process. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but evidence collected suggests that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, are accurate, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

This is a smaller than average sized school. There is a social mix among pupils, although many come from favourable backgrounds. Few pupils come from minority ethnic groups. Children enter the school with levels of ability that are typical for their age. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties is slightly higher than that found nationally. There are five classes and each one contains pupils from two age groups. The school has recently been awarded 'healthy school' status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

As soon as you meet the children, sense their enthusiasm for learning, and appreciate the progress they are making, it confirms the school's view that it provides a good standard of education. Many parents accurately perceive the school as having a 'lovely nature' and 'calm' ethos. Children get off to a good start in the Reception Year, where their learning benefits from being with Year 1 pupils. Their start to school is made as stress free as possible, assisted by helpful links with pre-schools and parents. In nearly all of the required Foundation Stage areas, activities develop children's skills effectively. Although children's ability to work independently is too limited in some activities, they make good progress in speaking and listening, early writing skills and in social development.

As pupils move through the school, they become confident and thoughtful because of the school's good care and support for personal development. Pupils readily tell visitors about the school's latest initiatives such as the 'eco' monitors who urge staff and friends to turn off lights when not needed. This reflects pupils' enthusiasm for school and the growing influence of the school and class councils. Helping to develop a travel plan, suggesting improvements to lunchtime arrangements and outdoor play equipment, reflect their recent successes. Classmates value the role of the recently appointed 'buddies' who help resolve disputes or befriend those feeling alone. Those pupils involved take the role seriously and friends say they are grateful for their help. Pupils have clear targets to guide improvement in English and these are proving to be effective, for example in developing writing skills. Not everyone is as fully aware of their targets in mathematics, which means not all have a clear idea of their areas to improve.

Pupils notice and appreciate that staff take time to listen to them. Teachers and their assistants are seen as very caring and approachable if help is needed. Good arrangements to aid transfer to local secondary schools are in place and links with other rural schools help pupils broaden their horizons. The school supports pupils with learning difficulties effectively including making good use of professional help beyond the school and skilled class assistants. Although a small number of parents feel concerned about levels of guidance, most others are happy. One accurately noted that the school's approach is 'friendly and supportive'. This combination results in pupils' very good attitudes to each other and their work, excellent standards of behaviour and a good appreciation of pupils' differing beliefs and backgrounds. One pupil summed up the views of many others by saying, 'I love school because it feels just like home.'

The curriculum is broad and well matched to the pupils needs in most areas. When asked, pupils eagerly recall recent topics such as the Second World War or work with visiting poets. This illustrates the good balance of academic work with other exciting activities to broaden pupils' knowledge and understanding. A good range of theme days, book weeks and links with schools overseas, adds some sparkle to the pupils' learning. Musical and artistic activities also figure highly and are very popular. The planning for mixed ages found within classes is good and ensures that pupils do not repeat topic work. Key literacy and science skills are developed successfully at all levels. Activities designed to develop pupils' calculation skills and solve mathematical problems in Years 2 to 6 are too few. This hinders their progress. Extra help for older pupils in mathematics and computer work has a high and much improved profile, and is proving effective in raising standards. Activities both in class and beyond promote pupils' fitness to good levels. The school's 'healthy school' initiatives have resulted in pupils adopting more healthy food choices and increasing their activity levels at playtimes. Many enjoy taking part in after school sports clubs.

The good levels of personal development and care help pupils achieve well. This is capitalised on by good teaching, which ensures that most key skills are taught effectively. Children listen very well during whole class question and answer sessions, but often too few pupils are involved in answering. As a result, opportunities to foster discussion skills are sometimes missed. Teachers organise exciting work such as history topics, where pupils often use their literacy skills to good effect. For example, pupils wrote sensitive diary extracts, inspired by readings from *The Diary of Anne Frank*. The computer suite helps skilled staff to promote pupils' information and computer technology (ICT) skills. This is an improvement since the last inspection. All staff make good use of audio-visual whiteboards to motivate pupils' learning. Teachers assess pupils' work regularly and guide them well within lessons. Although teachers' marking is regular, it varies in quality between classes. Some comments are too brief or sometimes over generous. The best gives clear, realistic advice to show pupils how they can improve more quickly.

This good quality teaching builds on the secure start in the Foundation Stage, so that pupils make good progress and achieve well in Years 1 to 6. This enables pupils to reach standards that are above average in English, science and some aspects of mathematics by the time they leave the school. Past test results paint a picture of above average levels of attainment, particularly for Year 6 pupils. The quality of current class work is above average and more able pupils do well reaching higher levels, particularly in English. Pupils' attainment in basic skills, particularly in writing and speaking, sets them up well for their next stage in education and prepares them effectively for opportunities in later life.

Helping to ensure the success of the school is the good quality of leadership and management provided by the headteacher, senior staff and chair of governors. Since her appointment, the headteacher has successfully improved many aspects of the school. A programme of regular, accurate and searching self-evaluation has resulted in senior staff being more motivated and better prepared to implement the sensible priorities identified for further improvement. These have included building improvements, better ICT provision and an increased number of parents' evenings to foster communication that is more effective. A parents' forum has also been established, which although in its infancy, is beginning to have positive effects in how the school can find out about parents' views. While a small minority of parents are still unsure of the value of this initiative, the school is striving to make it work. Governance is satisfactory. The chair of governors attends most staff and senior team meetings and gives the school good support. Although this does enable some monitoring to take place, governors do not have enough first-hand knowledge of the school's work to be able to evaluate the success of decisions taken and prompt improvements. Despite this, based on its recent and longer-term record of success it is clear that the school has good capacity to improve still further.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Provision for reception children is good. Teachers work well together to ensure that there is a very safe and secure environment for pupils to learn. Although in a class with Year 1 pupils, children build secure friendships and quickly settle into school routines. Parents comment that their children are happy and want to come to school. Children achieve well regardless of their starting points, and the good emphasis on encouraging personal development helps them gain early skills in reading, writing and number work. Children's speaking and listening skills are very good. Their creative development is also good, supported by inviting role-play areas such as the 'Pet shop' and 'Vets'. Children follow a broad range of very interesting activities. Many of these are adult led. This is effective, but does not always allow sufficient opportunity for children

to develop independence by deciding for themselves what to do next. Good teamwork and precise teaching ensure that by the time they enter Year 1, all children reach, and a significant proportion exceed, the learning goals expected of this age group.

What the school should do to improve further

- Help pupils in Years 2 to 6 gain more confidence and skill in calculation and problem solving work to improve their attainment in mathematics.
- Ensure that the quality of teachers' marking and target setting is consistent, particularly in Years 2 to 6, so that all pupils can be made aware of how to improve their work.
- Improve the effectiveness of governors' monitoring of the school's work to develop their ability to support and challenge senior staff to improve further.

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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?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
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?	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.

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	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

23 November 2007

Dear Children

Inspection of Elham Primary School, Elham, Kent CT4 6TT

I am writing to let you know about the findings from the inspection I carried out recently. Elham is a good school with only a few areas to improve. Nearly all of your parents and carers agree with me that your school looks after you well. Although some were not so sure, most said it was a 'friendly place' and they are right. Here are some of the school's highlights.

- You make good progress in your work and reach levels that are higher than average.
- The youngest children get off to a good start and work well.
- You all behave extremely well. The school really supports you if you need help.
- All of you work hard to make the school the friendly and caring place that it is.
- You said the staff make sure that you feel safe and are very well looked after.
- The school/class councils are really successful and are helping to make improvements.
- You really enjoy your work especially in topics such as the Second World War.
- The teachers make lessons interesting and are keen to help you with your work.
- The headteacher, staff and governors work as a good team to make the school a pleasant place. They are always looking for ways to make it even better.

I have asked the school to look at three things to improve.

- Give you more help with calculation and problem solving mathematics work in Years 2 to 6 so that you can use and apply your skills more quickly and confidently.
- Show you how you can improve your work in all subjects by making marking and target setting clearer and more helpful.
- Arrange for governors to come into school more regularly to see for themselves how you are getting on so they can better understand how to help the school be even more successful.

You can help keep the school's good reputation by continuing to work hard and by helping the staff spot where more improvements are needed.

Yours sincerely

Kevin Hodge Lead inspector

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Lead inspector

