

Elm Tree Community Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124642
Local Authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	314999
Inspection dates	6–7 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Kathleen Campbell

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	242
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	19
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Peter Legind
Headteacher	Mrs Hilary Day
Date of previous school inspection	8 November 2004
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Ranworth Avenue Lowestoft Suffolk NR33 9HN

Age group	4–9
Inspection dates	6–7 November 2008
Inspection number	314999

Telephone number

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Age group 4–9

Inspection dates 6–7 November 2008

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Elm Tree is a larger than average primary school for pupils aged 4 to 9 years. It is situated in Lowestoft, and its catchment includes an area of rural deprivation. Pupils come from a wide range of social and economic backgrounds. Overall, they enter the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) of the school with levels of knowledge and understanding that are typical of children this age, though they are often below in their early literacy and mathematical skills. Pupils from a large part of north Suffolk also attend the language and hearing impairment units in the school. This leads to an above average number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with statements of special educational need. Most pupils are of White British backgrounds. The number of pupils entitled to free school meals is well below average as is the proportion whose first language is not English. The school has received a number of awards in recognition of its work. Most recently, it has been awarded Eco Bronze and Healthy Schools Awards. There is a breakfast club for pupils attending the school, which is managed by the Governing Body of the school. The school is currently the subject of consultation regarding reorganisation into a 4 to 11 years primary school.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory and improving school, with strengths in the good personal development and in the curriculum and pastoral care offered to pupils. The integration of pupils from the language and hearing impairment units is a particular strength that contributes greatly to the very inclusive atmosphere within the school. Artwork is an important feature of school life. Vibrant displays of the highest quality create a rich environment where pupils want to learn. Parents hold the school in high regard and those who responded to the questionnaire say they are happy with what it offers. As one parent commented, 'I have always thought highly of this school'.

Good provision is made for children in the EYFS and, as a consequence, they enter Year 1 confident and ready to learn. Elsewhere they make satisfactory progress, leading to standards that are broadly average at the end of Key Stage 1 and typical for their age by the end of Year 4. There was an upturn in standards in 2008. Pupils within the language and hearing impairment units and those who speak English as an additional language make good progress through effective individual support. However, not all groups of pupils make such good progress. There remains scope for greater challenge for higher attaining pupils across the school, but particularly in writing in Key Stage 1 and mathematics in Years 3 and 4.

The recent introduction of effective assessment and tracking systems has started to raise teachers' awareness of what pupils should achieve and, as a result, there is evidence that progress is starting to quicken. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Teaching and support staff do much to make learning enjoyable. However, not all teachers consistently evaluate what pupils learn in lessons. Consequently, their planning does not always enable pupils to build effectively on previous learning. Relationships are very secure across the school and contribute well to pupils' good personal development. The restructured curriculum is good. It has been sensibly adapted to meet pupils' needs more closely, with exciting, themed activities that enthuse pupils to learn. All adults take close interest in pupils' welfare and provide good pastoral care. Pupils behave well, know how to stay safe and have a good understanding of keeping fit and healthy. They are suitably prepared for the next stage of their education. Academic guidance for pupils is satisfactory but not yet of a consistent enough quality across the school. Some pupils know their targets for improvement well; others do not know what they need to do to improve.

Although leadership and management remain satisfactory overall, the headteacher, ably supported by her deputy headteacher and other senior managers, provides good leadership. She has successfully guided the school through a period of staffing turbulence. The capacity to improve further is currently no more than satisfactory because many new initiatives are not consistently applied and subject leaders, known as 'champions', do not have a prominent enough role in monitoring or evaluating the impact of their work in order to quicken the pace of improvement. As a consequence, the school has made satisfactory progress since the last inspection and provides satisfactory value for money.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children get off to a good start in the EYFS because extremely caring staff form excellent relationships with them. Teachers and teaching assistants work effectively together to provide

a good range of learning activities both in the classroom and, to a slightly lesser extent, outdoors. They gather valuable assessment information about how well children progress and about their particular needs and interests. This informs planning, resulting in children who are busy and involved. Children progress well to reach the standards expected for their age in most areas of learning by the end of the Reception year. They are certainly prepared well for the next stage of their education. Learning and development is no more than satisfactory for the most-able children because activities often do not provide enough challenge for them to progress as well as they can. Teaching strikes a good balance between child-initiated and adult-led learning activities. Staff take every opportunity to support the development of children's communication skills through, for example, asking searching questions. The seeds of independent, investigative learning are securely planted in the EYFS. Children's welfare is effectively promoted, ensuring their personal development is good. Children behave, work and play well on their own and with others. Through activities such as snack times, baking and outdoor play, children gain a good early understanding of keeping fit, healthy and safe. Arrangements for the leadership and management of the EYFS are very new and are satisfactory. There is a shared commitment towards developing happy, safe and confident children. All who lead the setting have yet to be fully involved in clearly identifying its strengths and planning for further improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise the proportion of pupils achieving higher levels, particularly in writing in KS1 and mathematics in Years 3 and 4, by ensuring consistently high expectations and work that challenges all pupils to do as well as they can.
- Strengthen the academic guidance provided for pupils so that it is of a consistently good quality throughout the school and pupils are always clear about how well they are progressing and what they need to do to improve further.
- Strengthen the role of 'subject champions' in monitoring and evaluating the work of the school in order to quicken the pace of school improvement.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next Section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Results in the 2008 teacher assessments for seven-year-olds were close to the national average. These results represent an improvement in reading and mathematics over previous years, with higher attaining pupils and girls performing well. There was a dip in writing, particularly at higher levels. In Year 4 there was also an upturn in standards, with boys making better progress than in previous years but the number of pupils reaching higher levels in mathematics was disappointing. The school is starting to focus more effectively upon the rates of progress of different groups. It is too early to measure the impact of improved tracking and assessment procedures as they are not yet embedded firmly or consistently applied. Inspection evidence available does confirm that, for some pupils, progress is quickening. It also confirms that not all groups of pupils make equal progress. Standards in art are above average throughout the school because of the high quality input of an art specialist.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils display positive attitudes and good levels of enjoyment. They work hard and feel successful. Behaviour is generally good, although some pupils complain about playground behaviour. They acknowledge that any incidents are dealt with swiftly and effectively. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils are co-operative and caring. They appreciate the world in which they live and demonstrate good understanding of life in a multi-cultural society. They know how to keep safe, although some are less secure about, for example, internet safety. They enjoy physical activity and most understand the importance of eating healthily. They make a good contribution to the school and wider community through, for example, concerts and fund raising. Those with jobs, such as sports' leaders and the school council, take their responsibilities very seriously, displaying high levels of care and trust. Pupils are prepared satisfactorily for the next stage of their education. Attendance is satisfactory and matches the national average.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Lessons throughout the school are enjoyable because teachers make good use of exciting resources to capture pupils' interest. They use information and communication technology (ICT) effectively when presenting and reviewing lessons. Teaching and support staff work well together and always try to respond to the complex range of learning needs. However, although teaching is always at least satisfactory, with some good practice, its quality is not consistent enough to promote good learning. Where teaching is good, pupils of differing abilities are engrossed in their work because activities are closely matched to their needs. When expectations are not high enough some pupils, particularly the more-able, do not make as much progress as they should. Work is often marked carefully but marking does not always guide pupils sufficiently to the next steps. Assessment is satisfactory overall but not yet fully recognised by all teachers as an important tool in raising standards. Consequently, teachers' use of performance information is inconsistent and not based sufficiently on prior knowledge.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The newly restructured curriculum is rich and diverse and includes a strong programme of personal, social and health education that successfully promotes positive attitudes towards learning. Changes have been carefully thought through to arrive at a curriculum that matches the ever-changing needs of pupils. It effectively supports pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, enabling them to participate fully in all aspects of school life. The curriculum is greatly enriched by artwork of the highest quality. Pupils are motivated to learn by the practical activities on offer. Links between subjects and opportunities to develop literacy and numeracy skills through other subjects bring the curriculum alive. ICT has improved significantly since the previous inspection and now plays an integral role in pupils' learning. Themed events, such as multi-cultural weeks, provide lasting effective learning. The school's Healthy Schools' award and its wide range of after-school sports' clubs promote a good understanding of how to stay fit and healthy.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Well-structured procedures to promote welfare and pastoral care ensure pupils' good personal development. Caring staff create a family atmosphere in which pupils are happy, safe and secure on a day-to-day basis. Teaching and support assistants make a positive contribution to the learning of those who are vulnerable or have specific physical or emotional needs. There are appropriate systems in place for safeguarding pupils. Strong links with a wide range of outside agencies benefit all pupils in need.

Academic guidance is satisfactory. Although parents receive clear messages about how well their children are doing in literacy, numeracy and science, pupils do not always know what they need to do to improve their work. Recently introduced targets for learning are still not challenging enough for some pupils.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher provides good leadership and has given fresh impetus to the drive to raise standards. Her evaluation of the school is generally realistic, although occasionally over generous. Moves to review the curriculum and implement rigorous systems for monitoring progress and achievement were accurately pinpointed as key to raising standards through higher expectations. Although further work remains to be done to ensure consistency of implementation, there is a shared whole school commitment to build upon the recent upturn by setting more challenging targets. Many initiatives to support community cohesion are already established, but not co-ordinated in any formal way. The recently restructured senior management team evaluates the school's strengths and areas for development with increasing accuracy. It measures outcomes, such as individual pupils' progress, with far greater precision than in the past. However, not all 'subject champions' are sufficiently empowered to play an active enough part in school improvement. Governors are supportive and have a satisfactory understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They, along with parents, greatly value the headteacher's strong sense of direction and the school's caring and inclusive culture. However, there is even greater scope for governors to hold the school to account for standards achieved, by monitoring its work more actively.

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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?	3
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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	3
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	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	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3
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?	3

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
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

Annex B

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

10 November 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of Elm Tree Community Primary School, Lowestoft, NR33 9HN

Thank you for looking after Mrs Harvey and me when we visited your school. You were helpful and friendly and we will remember your happy, smiling faces.

These are the things we liked most:

- you work hard and enjoy school. Most of you behave well
- you care about each other and all the grown-ups who look after you make sure you are safe and happy
- your paintings and artwork are brilliant. Well done!

These are the things we have asked Mrs Day and your teachers to do to make your school better:

- give some of you harder work, especially if you are good at writing and maths
- give more of your teachers a chance to look at how well you are doing so that they can help you to raise standards
- ask the teachers to make sure they let you know exactly what you need to do to improve your work.

Best Wishes to you all

Kath Campbell

Lead inspector