

Elstow Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109448
Local Authority	Bedfordshire
Inspection number	324961
Inspection date	4 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Philip Mann HMI

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)	289
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	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Kevin Hunter
Headteacher	Mrs Jenny Winder
Date of previous school inspection	21 November 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Abbeyfields Road Abbeyfields Elstow Bedford Bedfordshire MK42 9GP
Telephone number	01234 302300

Age group	4–9
Inspection date	4 February 2009
Inspection number	324961

Fax number

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Age group 4-9

Inspection date 4 February 2009

Inspection number 324961

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Additional Inspector.

The inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and its ability to make further improvements. It also investigated the provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and progress made in literacy and numeracy in Key Stages 1 and 2. Evidence was gathered from classroom visits, discussions with staff and pupils and examination of school documents, especially assessment data. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Elstow Lower School is larger than many other lower schools. It mainly serves the local village and surrounding residential area that includes pockets of social disadvantage. Just over half of the pupils are of White British origin. Many others are from diverse ethnic backgrounds. The number of pupils who speak English as an additional language is above average. The proportion of pupils who qualify for a free school meal is broadly average. The number with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above that found nationally. The attainment of children when they start in the Early Years Foundation Stage is below that of similar aged children. The school holds Investors in People status and awards for the promotion of healthy living, environmental activity and sport.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school that continues to provide an excellent range of high quality learning experiences for all of its pupils. The impact of the school's excellent support and guidance for its pupils, the outstanding curriculum, and the good and sometimes excellent teaching, results in pupils' exceptional personal and academic progress. Leadership at all levels instils an ethos of improvement, sets very high expectations for both pupils and staff to reach and monitors the work of the school particularly carefully to identify further areas for improvement. This is a happy and inclusive school where a positive nurturing ethos permeates everything it undertakes. An overwhelming number of parents value greatly what the school provides for their children. One parent wrote, 'I feel that Elstow Lower has helped my child benefit in learning and he enjoys going to school. He looks forward to each day.' Another wrote, 'I could not ask for anything more!'

High quality displays in classrooms and corridors celebrate pupils' work and play. These contribute extremely well to the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils' attitudes to school are excellent and their behaviour is exemplary. Pupils demonstrate their enthusiasm for learning through animated participation in everything provided. Relationships between staff and pupils and pupils themselves are very positive. As a result, pupils say they feel extremely safe and happy. Pupils love coming to school and attendance is satisfactory. School council members and 'Eco Warriors' undertake their roles wholeheartedly. They talk with enthusiasm about making decisions and about the work they do, such as measuring how much power the school uses, making playtime more enjoyable and supporting charities both at home and abroad. Pupils' excellent personal development, combined with their exceptional educational achievement, prepares them particularly well for the next stage of their education.

Achievement and standards are excellent. From below average levels, all pupils make outstanding progress across the school to attain above national expectations in English, mathematics and science by the end of Year 4. Progress is particularly good in writing, although pupils' handwriting is not always neat enough. Pupils also achieve exceptionally well in subjects such as art and information and communication technology (ICT). Many parents express their pleasure about the progress their child is making with one stating that their child, 'Always comes home full of information.'

The quality of teaching and learning is consistently good across the school with some outstanding practice evident. Teachers work hard to ensure that lessons include activities that are matched very carefully to the needs of all pupils in the class. However, some lessons do not always include the imaginative use of activities and resources to really inspire pupils and accelerate learning. The assessments at the end of lessons are exceptional. Excellent use is made of innovative digital projectors to display and share pupils' work with others at the end of lessons. Such activity fully informs pupils about what they have achieved and how to improve. The quality of marking is good and teachers fully involve pupils in setting targets for themselves and assessing the progress they have made.

The curriculum is outstanding because of the very wide range of learning experiences planned for all pupils. Provision for more gifted and talented pupils is excellent, including participation in a children's university during holidays. Good links exist between subjects and a wide variety of extra-curricular activities, trips, and residential outdoor activity weekends provide extensive levels of further enrichment. A strong international thread is woven through many activities

with good opportunities for pupils to develop a greater understanding of their place within a multicultural society. The school actively engages members of its very diverse local community in its work but is yet to formulate a strategic plan for the development of community cohesion.

The level of care and support is of the highest quality and safeguarding and risk assessment procedures are rigorously applied. Staff endeavour to ensure that the needs of all pupils are fully met and they are. This is a real strength of the school because very effective teamwork amongst teachers and support staff ensures pupil progress is monitored closely. Furthermore, support is carefully targeted to those who find learning more difficult and to those who speak English as an additional language to ensure that these pupils make similar progress to the rest of the pupils. Both the breakfast clubs and activity clubs after school are managed well, providing good levels of extended provision.

Leadership and management are excellent and the headteacher sets very clear direction for the school's work. Governance is outstanding with all governors playing a vital role in monitoring the school and planning for further improvement. Self-evaluation and review are regularly and rigorously undertaken and fit alongside the school's highly effective monitoring procedures. However, governors recognise that these procedures could be refined even further, for instance to measure the impact of new initiatives, such as the purchase of the projectors, on pupils' outcomes. Good improvement has been made in relation to the issues identified at the previous inspection and the school demonstrates excellent capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

When children start in Reception, their skills, knowledge and attributes are below the levels expected for their age, particularly in language and mathematical development. Excellent provision enables children to make good progress and some occasionally make better progress so that they enter Year 1 with standards that are as expected for their age. This success is because the Early Years Foundation Stage is very well led and there is a common sense of purpose amongst the cohesive team. Close observation ensures careful monitoring of how well individual children are learning. However, there are missed opportunities to share the 'special moments' books regularly with parents, therefore involving them further in supporting their children in the 'next steps' in their learning. Skilful questioning encourages good listening skills and thoughtful responses from the children. Highly skilled staff have a clear understanding of how young children learn and this expertise is used to provide high quality activities, both inside and outside the classroom. The use of ICT is a particular strength. For example, children use the ICT suite with competence, program a moveable robot and get very excited when using the interactive whiteboard to complete activities. Children's personal development is outstanding, which enables them to be active, inquisitive and independent learners. The safe, supportive environment allows all learners to thrive. Good links exist with parents who are delighted with the induction and transition procedures. One parent typically said, 'Elstow Lower School provides our children with the best start in their educational and social needs.'

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and achievement even further by refining self-evaluation techniques in order to effectively measure the impact of provision on pupils' outcomes.
- Develop a strategic plan for the promotion of community cohesion.

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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?	1
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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	1
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?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	1
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	1

Achievement and standards

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

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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	3
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	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of 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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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**

5 February 2009

Dear Children

Inspection of Elstow Lower School, Abbeyfields, Bedford, MK42 9GP

On behalf of the inspection team I would like to thank you all for making us feel so welcome. We really enjoyed visiting your school and we were so pleased to see you all working hard and getting on so well with each other.

It is very clear to us that you all love taking part in all the exciting things that the teachers plan for you to do. You clearly enjoy being at school and are keen to talk about your experiences with others. It was good to see you working so hard in lessons and taking on the challenges set for you with such enthusiasm. We feel that this is because the staff work as a team to make lessons interesting for you. Your behaviour is excellent. It was so pleasing to see you playing happily together in the classrooms when it was snowy outside. Clearly, you gain much satisfaction from working with other classmates and you display a strong sense of responsibility for your environment and the wider world around you.

The headteacher leads and manages the school extremely well. Under her very careful guidance, all the staff work together to ensure that you all succeed at school. The teachers plan interesting lessons for you. They also provide you with excellent opportunities for you to understand what you have achieved in lessons and what you need to do next to improve. You are all making particularly good progress in your writing and you can improve your work even further by writing as neatly as possible.

The governors work very closely with the headteacher, the staff, parents and yourselves to learn what is needed to make the school even better. This information is used very well to make a plan that ensures that the school runs smoothly from year to year. In the future, they are also going to make sure that this plan takes into account the needs of the whole community. They are also going to work even more closely with the school to make sure that all of you can achieve the highest standards possible.

Thanks again for making us so welcome and I wish you all the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Phillip Mann

Her Majesty's Inspector