

Elmswell Community Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124534
Local Authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	328157
Inspection dates	26–27 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Anna Coyle

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	First
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	184
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 Stuart Hartland
Headteacher	Mrs Diane Hurt
Date of previous school inspection	9 November 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Oxer Close Elmswell Bury St. Edmunds Suffolk IP30 9UE

Age group	4–9
Inspection dates	26–27 November 2008
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is smaller than average and serves the local village and surrounding area. While most of the children are White British and speak English fluently, there are a small number from other ethnic groups. Attainment on entry to the Early Years' Foundation Stage (EYFS) is similar to that seen in other schools, although it is sometimes a little lower in literacy skills. The proportion with learning difficulties or disabilities is average, but this varies from year to year and is occasionally higher in some year groups. The school gained the ActiveMark award in 2007, Healthy School status in 2008 and has the Eco-Schools silver award.

The school makes provision for a breakfast club, which is run by the governing body. There is also a privately run pre-school on the same site.

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 an effective school that provides a caring, supportive environment for its children. Most parents are appreciative of the education their children receive and comment favourably on the warm welcome they receive from the approachable, friendly staff. Children behave well, have good attitudes and enjoy lessons. They like coming to school and attendance is good. Their personal skills and spiritual, social, moral and cultural development are good.

The school provides a clean, attractive place for children to learn, which is well maintained and managed. It is enhanced by colourful displays of children's work, lots of photographs and interesting examples of models that children of all abilities have designed and made in the good curriculum provided. Within this inclusive atmosphere, children do well in creative subjects such as art and music, and they reach good standards in reading and physical education (PE) by the time they leave. From average starting points at the end of the EYFS, they attain the national expectations in English, mathematics and science at the end of Year 4. However, standards are less secure at Key Stage 1, and have varied significantly in writing over the last few years. Achievement is therefore satisfactory overall. Standards at the end of Year 2 were above average in reading in 2008, average in mathematics but below average in writing. These disparities are as a result of a few inconsistencies in teaching at Key Stage 1 and the lack of use of precise assessment information to guide planning for the mixed-age classes. This means that the most able children are not challenged enough to reach for the sky and aspire to high standards. Although teaching is good overall and standards are average currently, academic guidance is only satisfactory because teachers' marking and children's individual targets are not used consistently to spur on learning and help children know what they need to do to reach the next level.

Pastoral care is good. Staff know the children well and make sure that they feel well looked after. They provide good support and guidance to those who find learning difficult, and so these children make good progress. Good links with external agencies, such as the behaviour support service, aid learning effectively. The school complies with the requirements for safeguarding and protecting the children, and it follows clear procedures for providing information to parents.

The school is led and managed effectively so that it runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis. The headteacher and deputy work together well to make sure that children enjoy their education. Staff and governors are supportive of the school and work hard so that it functions effectively and has good capacity to improve. Subject leadership has been improved since the last inspection and is now good overall, although the leadership of English is not finely tuned. Governors are regular visitors to the school. They are enthusiastic and keen to develop their roles but they do not keep a close enough eye on things yet to hold the school to account for the standards it achieves.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children make particularly good progress in personal, social and emotional development and do well within a caring, supportive environment in which adults ensure their welfare is important. They leave their parents and carers readily and settle contentedly in the Nursery and Reception classes. Children quickly learn the routines of school life, mixing happily with each other when

they work and play. They are physically nimble and handle equipment confidently, reaching good standards. For example, children in the Nursery thoroughly enjoy lively lessons that involve dancing and using gymnastics apparatus in the hall. Good teaching helps the children to learn and develop well through a good balance of organised and free-choice activities. Staff promote children's language, numeracy and creative skills effectively, as well as their knowledge and understanding of the world, through plenty of indoor and outdoor opportunities. Children achieve well in these areas so that by the time they leave the Reception year they have become confident and independent learners. They achieve the goals expected for their age, and many exceed them, although writing skills are not as well developed as other aspects of learning, and this is an area upon which the staff continue to focus.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in writing at Key Stage 1 by strengthening the leadership of English and giving children more opportunities to use their literacy skills across the curriculum.
- Make better use of assessment information, targets and marking to help teachers plan their lessons and match work more precisely to challenge the most able.
- Improve governance by enabling governors to have a more critical eye and hold the school to account.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Children do particularly well in their personal and creative skills and quickly become independent learners. They build successfully on mathematical and scientific knowledge, and are good readers. Children achieve well in Years 3 and 4 and standards match the national expectations in English, mathematics and science by the time they leave. However, at Key Stage 1, standards in writing have fluctuated considerably over the last few years and were below average in 2007 and 2008 because not enough children attained the higher levels. The school has analysed these results and put together a suitable action plan to help raise standards in this area. It has already seen an impact of its work at Key Stage 2, where children are now making good progress. However, weaknesses still exist in Years 1 and 2 and so achievement is only satisfactory overall in basic skills. Children in the infant classes do not consistently form their letters properly or space words in written work, and punctuation is not developed effectively. In addition, not enough opportunities are given for them to use and develop their writing skills across the curriculum. Standards are good in art and singing and children do well in PE.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Children make good progress in their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Most have a well-developed social and moral awareness, and adapt their behaviour well to suit different occasions, although a few can get a bit over-boisterous in the playground at times. Behaviour in lessons is typically good, because children enjoy learning and feel happy and secure at school. This is reflected in the good attendance rates and prompt arrival at school. Children understand how to lead healthy lives, especially in terms of healthy eating, but are somewhat restricted in the chance to participate regularly in physical activities after-school by the limited provision on offer. They take the responsibilities given to them very seriously in the school council and Eco-team, making significant contributions both to their own and local communities, ranging, for example, from running the school Christmas post office to helping

a local community group look after the woodland area in the village. Children develop a satisfactory range of basic skills to help them prepare for their future education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers and teaching assistants work together as a good team to support and guide the children during lessons. They manage learning effectively in well-organised, clean classroom environments with good, colourful displays that are used well to stimulate children's interest. Teachers' planning sets out a good range of activities to interest and motivate learning although it does not identify clearly enough how the most able children will be challenged. Nevertheless, those with specific learning needs receive good help to ensure their success and help them make good progress. Marking is used appropriately to guide children on how to improve their work but this is inconsistent in some classes. Lessons usually proceed at a brisk pace and children are encouraged to participate fully in activities in the mixed-age classes. This helps them to maintain their interest and to work hard.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The good curriculum has been extensively revised over the last year to give greater importance to core skills. Closer links between subjects, and opportunities for more meaningful learning, are now well structured into the timetable. The added emphasis on calculation skills and the introduction of regular phonics sessions are gradually improving pupils' progress in mathematics and reading. However, remedying the underachievement in writing at Key Stage 1 has proved a slightly greater challenge. Action to ensure that the teaching and learning of writing skills is being embedded in teachers' planning across the curriculum is beginning to pay off, particularly at Key Stage 2. While its full effectiveness is too early to assess, there are clear signs of improved writing standards throughout the school this year. The various pupil groups requiring extra help are well served by the curriculum and by the support they receive. There is a satisfactory programme of after school activities and clubs which the school wants to develop further. The breakfast club provides children with a good start to the day. The good provision for personal, social, health and citizenship education and a wide range of visits, visitors, and involvement with the local community all contribute well to pupils' obvious enjoyment of learning, and to their personal development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Children are cared for and supported well by a team of committed staff whom children fully trust. Child protection and safeguarding arrangements are all in place. Procedures for monitoring attendance and any bullying or racial incidents are thorough. All staff are trained to know how to keep children safe. Support for minority groups, such as pupils from Traveller communities and those needing extra help with their learning, is well targeted and further strengthened by robust arrangements with outside partners and agencies. Academic guidance is not as consistently effective, although it is satisfactory overall. The results of the national tests are analysed suitably, but the information is not used effectively enough to help teachers identify the next steps in children's learning. A formal system for tracking progress has now been

developed which is enabling the school to have a clearer view of children's needs. However, its use is inconsistent and targets are under-used to help children know how much progress they are making and what to do to reach the next level.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher and deputy headteacher work well together to make sure the school runs smoothly, supported efficiently by the administrative assistant. They lead the staff well and provide clear direction for improvement. The school is developing its sound provision to promote community cohesion and has good links with parents, the local neighbourhood and developing links with a Polish community. Issues from the previous inspection have been dealt with suitably and a good school development plan has been put together which identifies the right areas for improvement. Subject leadership has been developed suitably to include curriculum teams. However, the leadership of English has seen several changes and is being developed further to help staff pinpoint precisely where they need to focus to help raise standards further. Governance is satisfactory. Several governors are new and some have only just taken on new responsibilities. They are keen to develop their roles through training but, as yet, they do not act rigorously enough as critical friends to challenge and hold the school to account on aspects such as the recent fluctuating standards in writing at Key Stage 1.

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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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

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?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

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	2
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?	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?	3

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	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
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

Annex B

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

28 November 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of Elmswell Community Primary School, Elmswell, IP30 9UE

You may remember that we came to visit you recently at your school to see how well you were learning. Thank you for being so helpful and for talking to us. You were all very polite and told us a lot about your school. This letter is to tell about some of things we found out.

- You go to a good school where the adults look after you and care for you well.
- Your behaviour is good and you enjoy learning.
- You reach standards that are similar to those expected in other schools.
- There are plenty of interesting things to do in lessons and the teaching is good.
- The school runs smoothly and is well led and managed.

We have asked your headteacher and the staff to do a few things to make your school even better.

- Help you to make better progress in writing so that you reach higher standards.
- Get the teachers to check your work more carefully and use the information to help them plan their lessons, set targets, and challenge the most able children.
- Ask the governors to keep a more careful eye on how things are going.

I hope you will all do your best to be better at writing and keep working hard. I wish you all a very happy Christmas

Yours sincerely

Dr Anna Coyle

Lead inspector