

The Elmgreen School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	129649
Local Authority	Lambeth
Inspection number	328519
Inspection dates	30 April –1 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Bill Stoneham

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	11–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	354
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Nigel Rogers
Headteacher	Ms Asma Mansuri
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Gipsy Road London SE27 9TG
Telephone number	020 8766 5020
Fax number	020 8761 2312

Age group	11–13
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The Elmgreen School is the first ever parent-promoted school, a school established directly at the behest of local parents with support from the local authority. It opened in September 2007 and was designated a specialist humanities college. This is the school's first inspection. It currently provides education for students in Years 7 and 8 only. Eventually it will cover the entire 11-18 age range. Though hugely over-subscribed, it is a smaller than average school, with significantly more boys than girls attending. The proportion of students entitled to free school meals is well above average. Well over half the students are members of minority ethnic groups, many of whom have a first language other than English, though few are at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well over twice the national average and covers a variety of complex needs. The proportion with a statement of special educational need is similarly over twice the national average. The school is currently located in temporary accommodation, but will be moving to new, purpose-built, facilities for the start of the next academic year.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The Elmgreen School offers its students a good level of education. There are a number of outstanding features, especially in aspects of how personal development is promoted, its curriculum, the way equality of opportunity is fostered and the contribution made by the governing body. The most impressive feature, however, is the outstanding leadership and management. The school has an impressive and inspiring headteacher who leads her staff brilliantly. They, in turn, offer excellent support. There is a strong corporate commitment to ensuring the success of the school. Despite poor and cramped temporary accommodation, the school has, in a very short time, made massive strides to create a happy, harmonious and successful educational community where students, irrespective of their background, ability or creed, are valued and nurtured.

Students enter the school in Year 7 with standards that are at best below average, particularly in English and mathematics. Inspection evidence indicates that most students are making good progress in their academic work. Subject targets are challenging and the students respond well. Most students are now working at a level expected for their age, which indicates good levels of progress and achievement. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make equally good progress because they are given good support. Students achieve well because they are well taught. In all the lessons seen, learning was at least good and often outstanding. Staff use many strategies to engage and motivate the students. This is done with success, although, in some lessons, students are not given enough opportunities to work independently or in small groups.

The students' personal development and well-being are good. They are well prepared for life in a modern and ethnically diverse society. They are taught to respect different backgrounds and religious viewpoints. The school successfully encourages the students to pursue healthy lifestyles. Healthy eating is promoted well and outstanding efforts are made to encourage the students to adopt safe practices. For example, highly effective work is done to educate the students about the dangers of drugs, smoking and alcohol. The students are given many opportunities to develop responsibility. This is, in part, reflected in their attendance. The attendance level mirrors the national average but is improving at a good rate. The students have had a significant say in how the facilities for their new school, opening in September 2009, have been developed. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well. Most students have an overwhelming enthusiasm for the school and greatly enjoy their education. The school works extensively and successfully with many local, national and international partners. Such efforts promote good levels of community cohesion. Of particular note is the work undertaken with the local Somali community.

Most parents are very supportive of the school. The majority of those who responded to the inspection questionnaire praised most aspects of the school's work. A significant minority expressed some reservations about the quality of behaviour. During the inspection, the students behaved well in classes and around the school. Behaviour is good.

An outstanding and thoughtfully planned curriculum further contributes to the students' achievements and personal development. The curriculum offers choice and there are many enrichment activities for the students to enjoy, including a gardening club. The school is unique in having been awarded specialist status at start-up. It chose humanities because it believed that these areas have a positive impact for all students all of the time. It has wisely concentrated

its efforts on equipping students with improved communication and listening skills which help them to become better learners.

Another strength of the school is that it has avoided an 'excuse culture'. It would be easy for the school to cite its cramped temporary accommodation as an impediment to progress but it has not done so. From the outset, there has been an overwhelming drive to establish a successful school. The headteacher, her senior team and all her staff share a vision of how the school should develop and flourish. Development planning is good. Key objectives are clear, though some success criteria are not precisely stated and are not easily quantified. This means that the school's ability to measure its success is made more difficult. Considerable care has been taken to recruit high-calibre staff and the successful way in which new teachers are assimilated is another key ingredient of the school's success. Monitoring arrangements, including setting students targets, are very good and the school benefits from having a dynamic governing body. Because the school is a parent-promoted school, the engagement of families and carers, particularly via the governing body, has been strong from the outset. The present governors are a talented group of people who have a strong educational vision. They support the headteacher and her staff well, and at the same time fulfil their function as critical friends thoroughly, with rigour and sensitivity. They have an excellent understanding of the school's strengths and know where improvements are needed; their planning for the new site cannot be faulted.

The Elmgreen School has travelled a vast distance in a very short period of time and offers good value for money. Most parents are delighted with the school and many enthused about its progress in their comments in the inspection questionnaire. As one stated, 'Elmgreen is wonderful! The headteacher, staff, governors and parent promoters have done an outstanding job in creating an inspiring and safe environment for our children to flourish in.' Given its current success, the considerable progress that has been made and the quality of leadership and management at all levels, the school has an outstanding capacity for further improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the quality of learning by giving students more opportunities to work independently and collaboratively in lessons.
- Ensure that success criteria are clearly stated in the school development plan and that all outcomes can be readily measured.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students enter the school with levels of attainment that are below average. The school carefully monitors the improvements that are made. There is good evidence to show that levels of attainment are rising and achievement is good in both year groups. Many students in Year 8 are now working at the levels that are expected for their age. Progress is good in most subjects and especially strong in mathematics. Across the school, there are no significant differences in the achievement of different groups, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The school has quickly established a community where all are valued and students can develop their personal skills and understanding. There is a strong sense of cohesion where every person

is respected and valued for their individuality. Students play a key role in the running of the school and they relish the chance to express their ideas through their school council and through the timetabled personalised learning sessions. These sessions are when the school provides the students with personal, social and health education (PSHE). Every student spoken to rated the school as outstanding, a place where they feel safe, cared for and supported and which they would recommend unreservedly to others.

Students eat healthily and act safely. They strongly support the school's very positive moral framework. They have a very good understanding of local and international culture and a growing understanding of spirituality. They are developing some excellent academic and social skills that will enable them to progress into the world of work or to further or higher education. Future economic well-being is being fostered well, though some students have low skills in both literacy and numeracy.

Attendance is satisfactory because the school has rigorous systems to monitor and support the regular attendance of all its students. Staff have worked hard to set an ethos for the school that encourages good behaviour. Students are also successfully encouraged to take responsibility for their actions. This percolates through all aspects of school life so that students respect and care for each other regardless of their differences. Consequently, the school is a harmonious community. Behaviour is good and often excellent because the relationships built within the school avoid confrontation and encourage harmony.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers have a strong rapport with their students, which encourages them to investigate and explore ideas with confidence. Lessons are well planned and organised. Teachers in most lessons have high expectations and provide suitable, stimulating challenges. As a result, students enjoy learning. In an outstanding mathematics lesson, the teacher's excellent subject knowledge inspired students to take risks and accept challenges. Skilful questioning helped students to deepen their understanding, as well as determine how much they had learnt. Teachers and teaching assistants know and understand the learning needs of their students well. They have high expectations of the students and set them challenging but realistic targets. In a minority of lessons, though learning is good, teachers do not provide enough opportunities for students to work independently and collaboratively.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum has been successfully organised to meet the full requirements of the National Curriculum but has sufficient flexibility to enable Year 8 students to have some choice. They are offered a range of diverse activities for each term and they can choose those that interest and support their development. For example, some may choose extra English or mathematics lessons, while others may follow business studies or an additional language. A very popular course is one that concentrates on supporting the wider community with fundraising activities, which are actively supported by the school community.

Though the present accommodation is cramped and restrictive, there is a very good range of cultural and sporting extra-curricular activities. These are very well attended, despite the distance that many students currently have to travel in order to access off-site provision.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The high-quality personal care offered by the school contributes significantly to the students' good achievement and enjoyment. The risk assessments of the building and when students go on visits are thorough. This ensures that they are properly protected and learn in a safe and caring environment. The school works effectively with a number of external agencies and vulnerable students are given excellent support. Child protection procedures are firmly embedded and all staff have received training. All statutory requirements are met. The provision of support for students who have learning or behavioural difficulties is effective and, as a result, they achieve well. Students who are in the early stages of learning English make good progress because of the good support they receive. Systems for monitoring and tracking students' progress are effective and the school uses the information rigorously to set and monitor targets. Those identified as underachieving are appropriately challenged and, where necessary, given additional help. Marking is good and informs students about what is good in their work and how to improve further. Most students have a good understanding of their targets, of how well they are achieving and of what they need to do to improve. However, the involvement of students in the assessment of their own learning is in its early stages.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The success that the school is already enjoying can be attributed to the high quality of leadership and management. The headteacher and her senior team have a clear vision for the school and this is transmitted to all staff and stakeholders. There is an overwhelming sense of shared responsibility and staff at all levels are working tirelessly to ensure that the vision is delivered and that the students receive a high-quality education. The daily work of the school is supported by a highly effective, knowledgeable and committed governing body who are true critical friends of the school.

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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	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
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	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	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	2

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?	2

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	2
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	2
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**

15 May 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of The Elmgreen School, London, SE27 9TG

Thank you for the welcome you gave us on our recent visit. We thoroughly enjoyed meeting with you and learning about your work. The Elmgreen School is a good school. The standard of education is good and there are some outstanding features, especially in terms of the curriculum, some aspects of your personal development and the way in which the school is run. Your headteacher, her staff and the governors are all working very hard to help you and to plan the move to your new, purpose-built, facilities.

Your standards of work are improving. Most of you are making good progress in your studies. Despite your cramped accommodation, the school provides you with a safe and caring environment in which to work. We were pleased to see how well you behave in your lessons and around the buildings. It was also pleasing to see just how much you enjoy your work and that many of you are very keen to succeed.

We have suggested a couple of areas where the school could improve further.

- Though you are well taught, we have asked your teachers to give you even more opportunities to work on your own, or in small groups, in lessons.
- We have also suggested that senior staff review their targets for the school to ensure that they are clearer, so that progress against such targets can be easily measured.

Thank you for your contribution to this inspection. We really enjoyed meeting you and we would like to wish you every success in your future endeavours. We also hope that you will enjoy and appreciate your new school building when you move there in September.

Yours faithfully

Bill Stoneham

Lead Inspector