

Elm Court School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	100659
Local Authority	Lambeth
Inspection number	335572
Inspection dates	6–7 October 2009
Reporting inspector	Sheila Nolan

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	96
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs M Baker
Headteacher	Mr W Hutcheson
Date of previous school inspection	6 January 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 18 lessons, and held meetings with the chair of governors, senior leaders, staff and students. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at a range of evidence, including all the records of students' progress, documentation on policies and procedures, and the questionnaires returned by 15 parents, 50 students and 16 staff.

The inspectors reviewed many aspects of the school's work but looked in detail at the following:

- the school's judgements about students' attainment and progress in different areas of learning
- how well the students' behaviour contributes to learning in lessons
- the impact of the school's actions to improve punctuality and attendance
- the contribution of the extra activities outside of the timetabled day to the students' personal development.

Information about the school

Elm Court School provides for students with a wide range of barriers to learning. All students have a statement of special educational needs. Approximately four out of ten statements relate to behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, often linked with communication and speech challenges. Around a third of the students experience disorders within the autistic spectrum. Others have specific learning difficulties. Elm Court offers a wide range of additional services beyond the school day. Although seven out of ten students have minority ethnic heritages, only a slightly higher proportion than average have a home language other than English. The school has moved recently to new purpose-built premises. As a result, it now takes more students than previously. Many more students than usual are eligible for a free school meal. The school roll fluctuates significantly because students move in and out of the school as their needs dictate. Elm Court has Healthy Schools status.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Elm Court is a good school which cares exceptionally well for its vulnerable young people. Since the last inspection, the school has not only sustained the good elements of its practice but has also managed smoothly a major building project, the move to a new site and an efficient start to the new term. It has improved on many fronts, not least in raising the students' attendance. Although there is still erratic attendance by some students and a number of persistent absentees, the drive to highlight for students the importance of continuity in learning, and of acquiring good habits to fit them for their futures, is having a positive impact. This was illustrated in the attendance display for last week when all students managed at least 95% attendance. Nevertheless, the school recognises the need for further improvement, has not exhausted all efforts to ensure consistently regular attendance and is ready to try sanctions as well as rewards.

Although standards remain low, students are achieving well in their learning because of good classroom experiences, the greater involvement of parents through the family learning programmes and better information than previously on pupils' progress over time. Staff work hard to help students make up lost ground and to develop the best possible communication skills they can, often with the help of experts in other fields such as speech therapists. The school has been successful in helping the overwhelming majority to again enjoy learning. For example, a parent commented, 'My child hurries to get to school as soon as possible each day.' As a result of high levels of individual support, students behave well and make rapid strides towards their personal targets. Nevertheless, although teaching is good overall, there are missed opportunities in some lessons to engage students in practical opportunities to evaluate the steps in their learning and to show them how to improve.

The school has preserved and strengthened its inclusive ethos so that it is a generally harmonious community based on all in the school having respect for each other. The good relationships between staff and between staff and students do much to help students understand how to treat each other and how to behave in wider contexts than the school. The students are taking great care of their beautiful new environment, its superb practical facilities and its play areas, including the amphitheatre. Exceptionally strong partnerships with local groups, institutions and businesses offer imaginative opportunities to broaden the good curriculum through work experience, vocational courses, visits and other out-of-hours activities. These also contribute well to the students' good personal, moral, cultural and social development.

The school's experienced and effective senior leaders have provided real stability for the school over many years. They have a genuine desire to make Elm Court as good as possible. Both they and the very supportive governors evaluate honestly, albeit

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modestly, the school's strengths and areas for improvement. They know and accept, for example, that the evaluation of the impact of the school's work to promote community cohesion at national and international levels is patchy. The school's track record of improvement since the last inspection, its honest self-assessment and the opportunities provided by the growing roll and new facilities demonstrate its good capacity to sustain further improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Take forward the school's plans to evaluate the impact of its work to promote community cohesion at the national and international levels by:
 - analysing fully and developing further its existing activities
 - Ensure teaching strives consistently to help students improve their work by:
 - making the most of practical opportunities to engage them in a dialogue about the tasks accomplished
 - Work more intensively with families to improve attendance by:
 - using alongside the existing worthwhile reward system a greater range of sanctions for persistent unauthorised absence or lateness.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

The quality of learning and progress in lessons is good because the school ensures that support staff and teachers work collaboratively so that students learn how to relate to and help each other. This was very clear in a Year 8 English lesson where each of the three groups worked purposefully to summarise the plot of their reading texts and improve their literacy skills. In a Year 7 mathematics lesson, the well-planned activities to develop the students' money skills allowed them to make fast progress in using and applying their understanding. They learned well and enjoyed the lesson. Students are motivated to learn because of the good relationships with staff. The students' progress in managing their behaviour and their growing self-esteem, reinforced by praise and rewards, contribute very effectively to their learning. They are able to make up much previously lost ground, especially in their literacy skills.

When they join the school, students' attainment is low, sometimes because of medical conditions, sometimes as a result of disrupted schooling and challenging histories, and sometimes because of very particular learning difficulties such as those related to speech and communication. Results in examinations and other forms of accreditation remain well below average by the time students leave Elm Court. Nevertheless, students are successful in gaining entry-level qualifications in basic skills and around a half of the last Year 11 cohort gained four or more GCSE grades between D and G. Some acquire other qualifications in motor mechanics, construction, horticulture, childcare and beauty. Students' performance in art and design is especially notable with a few gaining a GCSE grade C. The school has accurately identified that this is because students respond well to the practical nature of the course. This explains the variation in students' performance across subjects, particularly those that involve significant amounts of

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written work.

The school's records show that students achieve well in relation to their personal targets by the end of their time at Elm Court. Across all groups, the school ensures that students make good progress in basic skills. Those in need of behaviour support, for example, make brisk progress in understanding and managing the triggers that cause them distress. Students with significant communication and speech challenges, as well as those with autistic spectrum disorders, make giant strides in explaining their needs to others. The school does well by its students from the many minority ethnic groups, including those with Black Caribbean heritages. This is because Elm Court promotes a truly inclusive ethos that ensures the individual students' needs come first whatever their backgrounds.

Students are proud of the way they bring about changes through the school council. For example, they have seen to it that the breakfast club menus and activities have improved. They show real interest and enthusiasm for keeping healthy, joining in the many opportunities for physical exercise as far as they can. Students are happy in school and report that they feel safe because of the high level of support from staff. Many are keen to take on responsibilities, even, for example, continuing with a work placement to help mentor other students. Years 10 and 11 students value a weekly visit to a local college and most students prepare satisfactorily for their future training or employment. Because of their familiarity with such opportunities, most continue on to the college for post-16 courses.

The majority of students appreciate the school's efforts on their behalf and gain self-confidence in taking part in public occasions such as visiting parliament, through participation in assemblies and through the awards they receive for effort and success. Students behave well, many making rapid progress in learning socially acceptable behaviour. This helps students to make the most of lessons and enjoy learning. Most understand the importance of being on time for school otherwise they 'will miss their mark' and they respond well to the school's expectations about punctuality to lessons. Many attend regularly although sometimes hampered by medical conditions. There are still some students, however, who do not respond to the school's best efforts to help them attend.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

The school has striven successfully to maintain a good quality of teaching since the last inspection in spite of the turbulence caused by building works and the move to the new premises. Students' particular learning needs are supported very effectively because teachers' planning takes account of each individual, because teaching assistants are well deployed, and because students have very positive attitudes to trying new approaches. In a Year 10 French lesson, students were engrossed in the video episodes because the visual materials helped them understand what was happening. The lesson also contributed well to the students' personal, moral and social education because of the careful choice of content. Despite many strong features, however, some teaching does not plan well enough for practical ways to help students understand how to improve their work. There is really good practice in marking in some classes but still a few teachers do not mark all students' work regularly enough.

The extended school day has had a very positive impact in supporting the students' spiritual, moral, cultural and social development. Other strong features of the curriculum are the varied and stimulating range of sports and clubs, the opportunities to develop work-place skills and the very flexible pathways towards gaining worthwhile accreditation, particularly in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology. Nevertheless, senior managers recognise that the current good curriculum does not include enough applied learning, practical opportunities or craft skills. With the excellent facilities of the new building, the school is in a strong position to make these amendments.

Elm Court's vulnerable students benefit greatly from the school's strong links with

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external agencies and the excellent care, guidance and support they receive. These enable the school to act quickly on the students' behalf as well as making sure that individual students have a say in making decisions about their futures. The school has made significant strides since the last inspection in involving parents and carers in the social and academic aspects of school life through the extra activities outside of, and within, the timetabled day. Arrangements for inducting students into the school at all stages are carefully thought out so that they settle quickly at whatever time of the year they join the school. Those who are absent are supported considerately to help them catch up not only with work but also to merge comfortably with their social groups. Staff, well known to the students, are always on hand at key transition points, reassuring them that they can manage new situations.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Senior leaders have engendered a genuine commitment among staff at all levels to the school's aims of 'Caring, Sharing, Valuing and Improving Achievement'. As a result, staff strive to ensure that students make up as much lost ground as possible in their learning and develop into responsible citizens, not least through making the next step into college and training. Staff development is a high priority and there is well-planned training to equip those working at all levels to cater for the changing and more complex needs of the students. There is an ongoing, effective programme to improve practice in and out of the classroom. Drivers and escorts, for example, have recently been trained in how to manage should a student have an epileptic attack between home and school. Systems for tracking students' progress provide very useful information on how well they are doing. Self-evaluation is generally accurate and relevant development priorities are identified accurately. While acknowledging the challenges facing many of the students, quietly astute senior leaders do their level best to cater equally well for all. In this diverse school community, conflicts along social or racial lines are rare and where they occur they are dealt with very effectively. The school understands its place in the neighbourhood well. Although, in practice, it does much to promote students' awareness of their relationship to national and global communities, it has yet to fully analyse the impact of its actions and activities.

There is a carefully orchestrated approach to managing the safety of students both on the school site and on the routine after-school journeys to bus stops. Systems to assure

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safeguarding and assess risk are outstanding at the time of the inspection. Collaborative working with external agencies to support students and families is excellent. Staff at all levels draw on all possible links to help the students. For example, prison inmates refurbished a range of gardening tools for the students to use in the school garden. The school has been successful in persuading a number of parents and carers to attend adult-learning sessions in the school day and is gradually managing to involve those who are hard-to-reach. The governing body is committed to supporting the school and has been hugely effective in managing the new building programme and the move to the new site.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Views of parents and carers

Elm Court clearly enjoys the confidence and the support of those parents and carers who returned questionnaires. All respondents were very positive about the school and felt that it keeps students safe and helps them to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Some individual comments were particularly positive about the support and guidance given to the students. These were summed up in one parent's comment, 'From the office to the headteacher, all staff are efficient and welcoming.' Inspectors agree with this view.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Elm Court School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspector received 15 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 96 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	8	53	6	40	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	9	60	5	33	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	8	53	4	27	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	3	20	8	53	0	0	1	7
The teaching is good at this school	7	47	7	47	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	8	53	6	40	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	8	53	6	40	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	6	40	4	27	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	6	40	8	53	0	0	1	7
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	7	47	6	40	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	5	33	7	47	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	7	47	6	40	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	9	60	4	27	0	0	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



7 October 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Elm Court School, London SW2 2EF

This letter is to thank you for welcoming us to your school and for taking the time from your breaks to talk to the inspectors. We really enjoyed meeting you and seeing you at work. We came to find out as much as we could about your school and now we would like to tell you what we said in the report we have written.

- We found that you go to a good school. You clearly enjoy it and do well in your lessons. Staff teach you well and provide you with many exciting opportunities to learn both in lessons and before and after school.
- All staff care for you exceptionally well and do their best to make sure you are safe. They use links with others excellently to give you interesting experiences.
- We were particularly impressed by the way you all get on together. We could see that you and your teachers share a culture of mutual respect.
- It was good to know that you take seriously the importance of a healthy lifestyle. We noticed how you enjoyed the well-cooked meals and were keen on sports.
- Some of you, however, really do not attend well enough and there are also some of you who seem to find it difficult to get to school on time. Remember that if you are not in school or 'miss your mark' you are not learning!
- Your headteacher and staff are determined to help you succeed. So we have asked them to work even more on your attendance. We have also asked them to make sure you have really practical opportunities to understand how to improve work in lessons.
- We have also asked them to look at how you understand your links with other parts of the country and the rest of the world.

You are very lucky students to have such a beautiful new school. We hope you will continue to look after it as well as you do now. We wish all of you at Elm Court a very happy future.

Yours faithfully

Sheila Nolan

Lead Inspector

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