

Elm Hall Primary School

Inspection report

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|--------------------------------|-----------------|
| Unique Reference Number | 114983 |
| Local Authority | Essex |
| Inspection number | 338488 |
| Inspection dates | 19–20 May 2010 |
| Reporting inspector | Cheryl Thompson |

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

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|--|----------------------------------|
| Type of school | Primary |
| School category | Community |
| Age range of pupils | 4–11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 103 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Carol Almond |
| Headteacher | Rosie Mirecki |
| Date of previous school inspection | 14 December 2006 |
| School address | Conrad Road Witham CM8 2SD |
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors, one of whom was in school for half a day. Eight lessons were observed. All teachers were seen and additional time was spent looking at pupils' books. Inspectors also held meetings with governors, groups of pupils and staff. They observed the school's work and looked at the school's progress tracking system, policies, safeguarding documentation and improvement plans and analysed 44 parental questionnaires and 70 pupil questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- why the school appears to be so successful in ensuring boys do well
- why attainment in writing at the end of Year 2 is consistently below average
- what the school does to promote good attendance.

Information about the school

This is a smaller than average school serving the local area. It is popular and oversubscribed. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are taught in the Reception class.

Almost all pupils are from White British backgrounds. A very small number of pupils are learning to speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is twice that found nationally with the proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs six times the national average. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. The school has twice as many boys than girls on roll. A much higher than usual number of pupils joins or leaves the school during their primary school career. The school has attained national 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?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

Elm Hall Primary is an outstanding school. The headteacher and staff ensure their uncompromising vision of a school community where all are encouraged and helped to 'be the best you can be' is met exceptionally well. Management is outstanding, consequently staff morale is high and all contribute to the ambitious aims for the school's future. Parents have many good things to say about the school such as, 'it breeds creativity and independence' and 'my child feels valued by classmates and staff'. Everyone, including pupils, staff, governors and parents, is rightly proud of their school. The outstanding capacity to sustain and build on what the school has already achieved is based on very rigorous monitoring and self-evaluation coupled with extremely high aspirations for providing a high-class education for each individual.

The list of school strengths is long and there are no real weaknesses.

Attainment and personal development on entry to Reception are well below what is expected, Pupils make outstanding progress so attainment at the end of Year 2 is broadly average and at Year 6 it is above average. Achievement is therefore outstanding.

Behaviour is good, especially when pupils work independently. They are kind, considerate and supportive, proud of their achievements and those of their many friends.

At the heart of the school's success is its outstanding, innovative curriculum. Whilst ensuring pupils acquire skills in basic subjects such as English and mathematics at a good rate, pupils also learn and practise key life skills such as thinking round problems and working together. Pupils show perseverance and are exceptionally well prepared for the future.

Pupils' enjoyment of school is outstanding. They say they love school and demonstrate this with their above average attendance. They say that 'everyone is friendly and helpful', and that 'teachers are nice'. Pupils contribute a great deal to the caring ethos of the school and take pride in being prefects or buddies to the youngest children and being members of the school or class councils.

Teaching is outstanding because it is based on precise assessment of individuals not only of their academic ability but of how they learn best and what support they will need. Lessons are fun, interesting and packed with activity, which is particularly beneficial to boys. Teachers deploy teaching assistants, who are highly proficient, most effectively to make sure that the work is challenging for all groups in the class.

Pupils' awareness of how to keep themselves safe is outstanding. They have a good understanding of what constitutes a healthy diet. A high number of pupils involve

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themselves in the good range of sporting activities on offer.

Children in Reception make outstanding progress, particularly in their independence and enthusiasm for learning.

Parents are impressed with the exceptional care, guidance and support for their children. Pupils are taught and supported as individuals and their work is highly personalised.

There is one area where staff and governors recognise that further improvements can be made.

The school does not have a systematic method of teaching handwriting. Consequently, pupils' work is not always as legible as it needs to be and often does not reflect pupils' abilities.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise standards of handwriting by:
 - introducing a whole-school method of teaching handwriting and making sure very basic skills such as pencil grip are taught and reinforced.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Pupils of all abilities make outstanding progress from the time they start at Elm Hall, whether they arrive in Reception or later in their school careers. Significant strengths are the way they develop very positive attitudes towards learning and personal qualities such as how to work together and respect for others' opinions.

On entry to Reception attainment varies widely from year to year depending on the proportion of children needing extra support to learn. Within a 'broadly well below' picture of attainment there are small groups of children whose attainment is above that typically found and small groups who have complex difficulties. Importantly, all groups make outstanding progress from their starting points. Attainment in the current Reception and Year 1 is, overall, below that typically found in the age groups, but improvement continues in Year 2. In writing, standards have risen and are closer to average this year at the end of Year 2 because the school has taught phonics (the sounds that letters make) more rigorously.

Over time, data show that pupils make significantly better progress from Year 2 to the end of Year 6 than in most primary schools in the country. They make steady and secure progress in all areas until, approximately, the middle of Year 3. At this point, pupils', particularly boys', attitudes and basic skills provide a platform from which progress in learning accelerates rapidly. Consequently, pupils attain above average standards at the end of Year 6.

Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make outstanding progress like their peers. Staff are very knowledgeable and quickly spot pupils' difficulties and put excellent strategies in place to help individuals. This prompt attention is particularly beneficial for pupils joining from other schools or specialist provision units. The more

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able, or pupils who are talented or gifted in a particular area, make excellent progress because they have many opportunities to set themselves challenges and have expert help from staff who encourage them to extend their abilities further.

Pupils' good understanding of how to stay healthy is reflected in the school's Healthy School Status, but they do not always apply this understanding in their choice of drinks. Their personal development is demonstrated very clearly in lessons when they are encouraged to 'pair share' or work together as a team. Enthusiasm and perseverance are key features of pupils' learning, together with their ability to apply skills learned in many subjects to problem solving activities. For example, pupils in Years 3 and 4 assessed the problem, planned and collected resources to build an air raid shelter to withstand a 'bomb' of a range of weights. Year 5 and 6 pupils worked very well together to decide what should be included in their political party leaflets and used their well developed information and communication technology (ICT) skills to produce high quality work.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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

How effective is the provision?

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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Outstanding teaching is underpinned by excellent relationships and high expectations for pupils to behave well, listen and learn. Lessons are planned meticulously to ensure pupils succeed, consolidate learning and build self-confidence. A key strength is the strong teamwork between teachers and teaching assistants. This teamwork is of immense benefit to pupils needing extra help with their learning and ensures they make rapid progress. Teaching appeals to boys because the pace is brisk, with plenty of activity and good level of challenge and competition, but teachers are also careful that the smaller number of girls are involved and able to 'have their say'. Marking is exemplary. Pupils know exactly what they can do to improve their work and are given time to follow up on their teachers' comments. The outstanding curriculum is organised to meet pupils' needs and interests extremely well. Links are made between subjects to make lessons both in and out of the classroom relevant and exciting. Excellent organisation for teaching basic literacy and numeracy skills, particularly in short intensive sessions, means that pupils have expert teaching in small groups and lots of opportunities to practise newly-learned skills. Each pupil chooses a key adult staff member to whom they can turn should they be unhappy or concerned. Pupils are totally confident that they are safe and have someone to help them if necessary. The school ensures that pupils whose medical needs prevent them attending school regularly have sensitive support. Excellent partnerships with outside groups much enhance curriculum and care.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher provides inspirational leadership to ensure the best possible education tailored to individual needs. She has encouraged and enabled excellent leadership and management at all levels: the school's four teachers are the senior leadership team. They provide excellent role models through their own teaching, so they are well equipped to monitor teaching throughout the school and support each other and teaching assistants if improvement or help is needed. A key feature of the senior team is their efficient evaluation of data and their monitoring of the views of pupils and staff. Consequently they have a very clear picture of where improvements are needed and look for creative ways in which they can do this. New initiatives are exceptionally well researched in order to promote optimum progress in pupils' academic and personal growth. For example, a new reading initiative aimed at encouraging boys to read has

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been extremely successful because it includes ICT based quizzes to ascertain comprehension. There is a very strong commitment to making sure teachers and teaching assistants have good opportunities to extend their skills and knowledge. Consequently, they are confident and always seeking to improve their practice.

The governing body shares the headteacher's high aspirations for the school but governors have yet to develop their skills in analysing the data provided about the school. They are very supportive and ensure the school meets statutory requirements. They are very aware of their safeguarding responsibilities. Risk assessments are well-developed and safeguarding systems adopt recommended good practice. Community cohesion is good, very strong within the school and locally, with further global links developing as the school works in towards attaining the Rights Respecting School award from United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Links with parents to support them as co-educators of their children are very profitable although the school recognises that they have yet to establish strong links with just a small number of parents.

Equal opportunities are promoted exceptionally well through very close monitoring of the progress of different groups and excellent support where needed. For example, pupils transferring to Elm Hall from specialist provision are given expert help to moderate their behaviour and take advantage of all the school can offer them.

These are the grades for leadership and management

| | |
|--|----------|
| The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement | 1 |
| Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning | 1 |
| 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 | 1 |
| The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures | 2 |
| The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion | 2 |
| The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money | 1 |

Early Years Foundation Stage

The Reception class is a secure and challenging environment so children settle quickly

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and happily into school. Staff look after children with utmost care and attention and children feel safe. The development of language skills and extending vocabulary is a high priority and children benefit from a high level of proficient adult support. Through excellent links with other schools, the school has regular support from a speech and language therapist, which has a good impact not only on children's progress but in adults' knowledge of how to support children with difficulties in this area.

Children's skills are significantly lower than those typically found when they enter the school, particularly in communication, language and literacy and personal and social development. From these low starting points, children make excellent progress. Whilst standards are generally below average at the end of Reception, importantly, children develop very positive attitudes and good behaviour. These qualities, together with the secure progress they make in learning letter sounds, prepare them very well for their start in Year 1.

Teaching is outstanding and children love learning because they are provided with a wide range of exciting opportunities to explore and discover for themselves. An excellent feature is the carefully planned outdoor learning experiences that children thoroughly enjoy; for example, planning and making dens to keep them safe from 'predators'. Adults make careful observations of what children can do and plan work matched closely to their interests and learning needs. There is a very good balance between activities directed by adults and those chosen by children. The accomplished teaching of letter sounds and how to use these to read and spell is leading to particularly good progress in these areas. Good links are established with parents through home visits prior to children starting school. Parents are welcomed warmly into school. They are helped and encouraged to contribute to their children's learning.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

| | |
|--|----------|
| Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage | 1 |
| Taking into account: | |
| Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage | 1 |
| The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage | 1 |
| The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage | 1 |

Views of parents and carers

Parents and carers hold very positive views about the school. Very few parents were in disagreement with the 13 aspects included in the questionnaire. A very small number of parents and carers had reservations about two areas of the school's work: dealing with unacceptable behaviour and taking account of their concerns and suggestions. Inspection evidence indicates that the links with parents and carers are good and that there are many ways for them to put forward their concerns and suggestions, although parents have not taken advantage of the suggestion box available to them. Staff greet

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parents and carers on the playground every morning and always make themselves available to talk. No unacceptable behaviour was observed during the inspection. Inspectors spoke with many pupils and all were totally confident that any behaviour issues would be dealt with swiftly by the school and to their satisfaction.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Elm Hall Primary 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 inspection team received 44 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 103 pupils registered at the school.

| Statements | Strongly Agree | | Agree | | Disagree | | Strongly disagree | |
|---|----------------|----|-------|----|----------|---|-------------------|---|
| | Total | % | Total | % | Total | % | Total | % |
| My child enjoys school | 31 | 70 | 12 | 27 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| The school keeps my child safe | 32 | 73 | 11 | 25 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| The school informs me about my child's progress | 29 | 66 | 13 | 30 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| My child is making enough progress at this school | 32 | 73 | 8 | 18 | 3 | 7 | 1 | 2 |
| The teaching is good at this school | 32 | 73 | 10 | 23 | 2 | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| The school helps me to support my child's learning | 28 | 64 | 12 | 27 | 2 | 5 | 1 | 2 |
| The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle | 26 | 59 | 18 | 41 | 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) | 27 | 61 | 14 | 32 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| The school meets my child's particular needs | 31 | 70 | 10 | 23 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 5 |
| The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour | 25 | 57 | 12 | 27 | 3 | 7 | 3 | 7 |
| The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns | 28 | 64 | 11 | 25 | 4 | 9 | 1 | 2 |
| The school is led and managed effectively | 29 | 66 | 12 | 27 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school | 32 | 73 | 10 | 23 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 |

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

| Type of school | Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools) | | | |
|----------------------|---|------|--------------|------------|
| | Outstanding | Good | Satisfactory | Inadequate |
| Nursery schools | 51 | 45 | 0 | 4 |
| Primary schools | 6 | 41 | 42 | 10 |
| Secondary schools | 8 | 34 | 44 | 14 |
| Sixth forms | 10 | 37 | 50 | 3 |
| Special schools | 32 | 38 | 25 | 5 |
| Pupil referral units | 12 | 43 | 31 | 14 |
| All schools | 9 | 40 | 40 | 10 |

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 is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

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.



21 May 2010

Dear Children

Inspection of Elm Hall Primary School, Witham, CM8 2SD

Thank you so much for welcoming us to your school. Like you, I think it is a very friendly place to be and you get on well together. My particular thanks to those of you who kindly gave up part of your lunchtime to talk to me. I found what you had to say very helpful. In return, I now want to share with you my findings.

This is an outstanding school. You told me that you like school and I could see why, particularly when I saw the interesting lessons you have and the exciting activities you have outside. You told me that one of the best things in the school are the teachers and you are right! Teaching is excellent and all the adults care about you a great deal and work hard on your behalf. I could see that standards are above average and you make excellent progress because teachers and teaching assistants keep a close eye on how well you are getting on. Your headteacher and teachers provide excellent leadership and are always working hard to make your school such an exciting place to be. I have asked them to do one thing to make your school even better:

- make sure that you learn a good style of handwriting.

This is an outstanding school, not only because of what the adults bring to it, but also because of your contributions. I am sure you will all help now by working hard on your writing. You are very positive about learning and I was very impressed with how welcoming and polite you are to visitors.

Thank you again for your help and I hope you have a wonderful day at Frinton.

Yours sincerely

Cheryl Thompson

Lead inspector

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