

# Elmwood School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	123938
<b>Local Authority</b>	Somerset
<b>Inspection number</b>	340454
<b>Inspection dates</b>	7–8 October 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Steffi Penny HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	7–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	80
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr David Purcell
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Jacqui Tobin
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	9 October 2006
<b>School address</b>	Hamp Avenue Bridgwater Somerset TA6 6AP
<b>Telephone number</b>	01278 422 866
<b>Fax number</b>	01278 445 157
<b>Email address</b>	jtobin@educ.somerset.gov.uk

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Manchester M2 7LA

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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 16 lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff, groups of students and parents. They observed the school's work, and looked at documentation including students' work, the school's planning, policy documents as well the tracking systems used to monitor students' progress. They also considered 22 questionnaires from parents and carers, 68 from students and 26 from staff.

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

- students' achievement and progress in literacy skills, particularly in Years 10 and 11
- how well the curriculum prepares students for their future lives
- the impact of the work of the school governors to challenge and drive improvement
- how well students know their targets and what they need to do in order to improve their work
- arrangements for safeguarding.

## Information about the school

All students who attend the school full-time have a statement of special educational needs. Those who do not have a statement, but who are working at the School Action Plus level of support, attend for up to a day a week; they are also supported by their mainstream school. Just under half the students attending have complex learning difficulties. A similar proportion has severe learning difficulties, typically involving social, emotional and behavioural difficulties or autistic spectrum disorders. Other students have special educational needs for cerebral palsy, Down Syndrome and Prader-Willi Syndrome. Students join the school at different ages and stages of their school career, most having had previously negative experiences of education.

The current students come from a mix of urban and rural communities within an 800 square kilometre catchment area. A small number are in the care of their local authorities and around a half are eligible for free school meals. All students are of White British heritage.

The school is situated on a campus which includes nursery, infant, junior and secondary schools. The school supports mainstream schools within Sedgemoor that have young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities through outreach work and a learning support centre. The school has received several awards, including national Healthy School status and the re-accreditation for Artsmark Gold in 2009.

**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?****3****The school's capacity for sustained improvement****3**

## Main findings

This is a satisfactory and improving school. Partnerships with other settings and outside agencies are good and the school is outstandingly effective in engaging with parents and carers. The school's friendly and supportive ethos results in good behaviour, confident students and strong relationships throughout the school. Students typically commented: 'I like coming to school, because I like trying my best', 'our school is nice', and 'they look after us'.

Students' achievement is satisfactory. Senior leaders can clearly demonstrate through their records that the longer a student has attended the school, the better the progress they have made. Generally their progress is good and sometimes it is outstanding. However, this is not always the case and during the inspection the quality of lessons varied widely. For example, while some lessons reflected good practice, some Key Stage 4 students were making inadequate progress in the key subject of English. This was because they were not being taught the appropriate literacy skills to be able to improve their attainment.

The outstanding care, guidance and support that students receive put them in a position to be ready to learn. The school celebrates students' accomplishments regularly, but it does not have a structured tracking system to demonstrate the vast journey that many students make in developing their emotional, behaviour and social skills.

Teaching assistants provide excellent value for money and are a major strength of the school. They consistently improve the progress that students make by ensuring that the lesson activities are easy for the student to understand, for example by signing, and they really encourage students to think and work independently wherever possible. In some lessons they are the main reason why students make sufficient progress.

A key reason why teaching and learning are not yet consistently good is that some subject leaders are not taking sufficient responsibility for the progress and attainment that students are making in their subject area. They are not in a position to regularly provide challenging, subject-specific targets for students and staff to use. This is because they do not effectively monitor students' progress, either in the relevant classes or over time. Consequently, in over half the lessons seen, learning targets were not effectively helping to improve students' attainment. Also, although a good variety of activities is used in class, students sometimes do not have enough opportunities to learn independently. This is because they do not always know what their subject-specific targets are.

Senior leaders have a clear understanding of the strengths and areas for development needed to drive improvement. Governors are now regularly involved in evaluating the

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work of the school, providing good challenge and support to develop and improve provision and raise achievement. Whilst formal self-evaluation at all levels is currently being redeveloped, the school has an accurate awareness of what it needs to do to improve further and the capacity to do so.

**What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Increase the number of lessons in which students make good or outstanding progress by:
- ensuring subject leaders regularly provide challenging, subject-specific targets that are clear and used by all concerned, including the students themselves, to increase students' independence and to support learning
- ensuring subject leaders are held more accountable for driving improvement through regular, consistent and accurate monitoring of students' progress
- ensuring that the monitoring and evaluation of teaching are consistent at all levels and include teachers' own evaluation of how well their lessons have had an impact upon students' learning, especially in literacy.
- Put systems in place to accurately track the emotional and social development of students from when they join the school, so that the successes in students' progress in these areas can be clearly celebrated.

**Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils****3**

When they join the school many students have had poor experiences of education and they often have low levels of self-esteem. Over time students' progress is generally good. Current data on students' attainment demonstrates that the school's targets for each individual are suitably challenging. Students take either GCSE, Entry-level or Unit Award accreditation, and their results represent good overall progress.

However, the lessons seen during the inspection did not consistently reflect such a positive picture, and highlighted particular weaknesses in the students' development of key skills.

Good use is made of visual timetables to help students know what they need to do next so that they can be ready to move on when needed, and the use of signing and symbols on worksheets is highly effective in helping students to know what they need to do.

In the weakest lessons students made satisfactory progress in developing their social skills, and they were seen to be engaging cooperatively in activities that will prepare them for their future lives. But teachers had placed too much focus on this aspect of the students' development in their planning, and individual learning objectives were not identified well enough for staff to measure the effectiveness of the lesson, for example in terms of students' achievement in English. Time was also not used well enough, with the last 10 minutes being a wasted learning opportunity. This was in stark contrast to the good lessons seen. In science, for example, Year 10 students were shown effectively how to improve their work, which was closely tailored to their different capabilities. This was because the teacher's careful planning was based on thorough assessment with a

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clear focus on what the students would learn in the lesson, and this was directly related to medium- and longer-term planning. Here a good range of teaching techniques were used so that the lesson retained a good learning pace. For example, students enjoyed taking turns to show the class how the human heart rate changes when doing different activities and, at the end of the lesson, used the interactive whiteboard to make a skeleton dance by placing internal organs in the correct place. Students' independence and assessment were developed through students creating bar charts from the results of their class experiments.

Students enjoy each other's company and show good levels of respect and tolerance for their age and special needs. They are very aware of the importance of a healthy diet and of taking plenty of exercise. They enjoyed their morning walk around the school grounds and sharing the changes they could see with the onset of autumn with staff and inspectors. Students said that there are no bullies in the school and that on the odd occasion when people get cross with something or fall out with each other, the staff help them to make friends again and to feel better very quickly. Because of this, the family ethos of the school and the high levels of communication staff have with their families, the students feel exceptionally safe and well cared for.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

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

<sup>1</sup> 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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## How effective is the provision?

The quality of teaching is inconsistent, and varies from outstanding to inadequate. There are some strong common features. For example, teaching assistants are used extremely well to support the learning of those students who need extra help. They sign, translate and support students using the Somerset Total Communication methods so that students can learn more independently. Staff know students and their individual needs very well. However, sometimes too much reliance is placed upon the individual views of teachers, rather than lesson plans and evaluation, to measure how well students are doing in lessons, particularly for literacy. Other weaknesses include teachers spending too much time talking at the front of the class and taking up allocated curricular time with activities that are not directly relevant to the subject being taught.

Staff work exceedingly hard to provide effectively for the needs of students who are more vulnerable or who find it very difficult to learn in a formal classroom situation. A good example of this is the restructured curriculum which provides a wealth of experiences to prepare the students for life after school, through a wide range of community and work-related learning activities. It is very rare for students to leave the school and not continue with their education at a local college.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

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

## How effective are leadership and management?

The effectiveness of the governing body in supporting and challenging the school has improved significantly since the last inspection. They and the senior leaders now provide a clear vision for the development of the school. This, the consistent drive for improvement, and the capacity for future improvement can be seen in the partnership work and plans undertaken with the schools on the campus for the Building Schools for the Future work due to start in 2010. All members of the school community have been effectively involved with this development. Some of the leaders with subject responsibilities are not sufficiently monitoring and evaluating the progress that students are making in class. Consequently they are not able to help drive forward improvements in their areas of responsibility and they are too reliant on senior leaders to provide them with information and direction.

The school is extremely proactive in involving parents and carers. It regularly seeks and listens to their views, with excellent sharing of information through a variety of different

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media based on individual family choice. Interchanges between staff and families take place for many on a daily basis through the home/school student diary. A typical comment came from one parent who wrote, 'We think Elmwood has a very good relationship with our child and us as parents. We would strongly recommend it to any other family with special needs children.'

The promotion of equal opportunities is the bedrock of the school's ethos and all that it does for developing happy, caring young people. Those students who are on dual school placements seamlessly mix with those who attend full time. The relative weakness that exists in the lack of secure monitoring of teaching and learning, however, means that lessons do not always reflect this ethos. As a result, for example, a few boys in Year 11 are not making the progress in English that they should in all their lessons.

Community cohesion is satisfactory. The school is fully inclusive, and makes a strong contribution within its own and local communities. However, as the school has identified, there are missed opportunities for students to have a better awareness of how children and their families from other backgrounds and heritages contribute to life in Great Britain and some aspects of the global community.

The school's arrangements for safeguarding students meet requirements well. Checks have been made on all adults who work within the school and a single central record is maintained and updated when needed. Health and safety checks and risk assessments are appropriately carried out. Resources are used appropriately to achieve value for money.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

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

**Views of parents and carers**

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Twenty-two parents and carers responded to the questionnaire, with some having more than one child at the school. This represents about a third of the school's families. In their responses to the questionnaires, all parents and carers were unanimously positive about the school and its impact on their children's learning and well-being. They felt that the pastoral care was a particular strength. Many mentioned the emphasis upon developing the 'whole child' and believed the school met individual needs well. Inspection evidence concurs with most of these views, in particular those related to the care, guidance and support provided by the school for students and their families.

## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Elmwood 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 22 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 80 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	14	64	7	32	1	5	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	18	82	4	18	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	15	68	7	32	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	14	64	7	32	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	14	64	8	36	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	13	59	9	41	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	14	64	7	32	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)	13	59	7	32	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	19	86	3	14	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	14	64	7	32	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	13	59	8	36	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	16	73	5	23	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	16	73	6	28	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

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	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"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul>
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.**



9 October 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Elmwood School, Bridgwater TA6 6AP

Thank you for your warm welcome when we came to your school to see how well you are doing. We enjoyed talking to you and seeing you at work and at play. The things you and your parents told us were very helpful in making our judgements on how well the school is doing. We judged that your school is satisfactory, which means it does some things well but also has areas that can be improved.

This is what we think your school does best.

- Many of you make good progress by the time you leave school, and this is helped by the way you work hard and behave well.
- Teaching assistants really help you learn.
- Staff take very good care of you and some of you learn to do many things on your own.
- Staff are extremely good at working with your parents and other people to solve problems.

You have such wonderful adults who are always looking for ways to make your school an even better place to be! We have asked them to do the following three things to ensure that this happens.

- Teachers should give and share learning targets with students for each subject.
- Subject leaders should measure how well students are doing in the subjects they are responsible for, so they can give more help where it is most needed.
- The school should measure how well you improve in feeling happy to be in school and being ready to learn.

You can help by remembering your targets and using them to improve your work.

Thank you for being so polite and helpful during the visit. I hope that you continue to enjoy your learning and do your best. Please thank your parents for the helpful comments they made on the questionnaires.

With my very best wishes for your future. Good luck!

Yours faithfully

Steffi Penny

Her Majesty's Inspector

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