

Elmhurst School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110286
Local Authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	342343
Inspection dates	9–10 July 2009
Reporting inspector	Selwyn Ward

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	315
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Anne Frearson
Headteacher	Mrs Diane De Wolf
Date of previous school inspection	11 October 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Dunsham Lane Aylesbury HP20 2DB
Telephone number	01296 481380
Fax number	01296 481380

Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Originally a junior school catering for Years 3 to 6, the school expanded in September 2007 to take pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage (Nursery and Reception Years) and Key Stage 1 (Years 1 and 2). Nursery children attend part time. Across the school, the largest group of pupils are from Pakistani backgrounds. Two thirds of the pupils are learning English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is very high, at around twice the national average. The school incorporates a specialist Additional Resourced Provision for up to 12 pupils with social and communication difficulties, and the proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational need is very high. Mobility is high, with an above-average proportion of pupils joining and leaving the school part-way through the junior years. The school is part of the Improving Schools Programme (ISP), which is a government initiative aimed at raising standards. The headteacher was appointed in September 2008. The school shares its site with other educational institutions, including a children's centre.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement.

Standards at Elmhurst have remained exceptionally low for many years. In part, this is because teachers have not expected enough of their pupils. The school has had some success in accelerating the progress of many less able pupils and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those in the Additional Resourced Provision. As one very satisfied parent commented on the provision for their child with special educational needs, 'This school has been brilliant with my daughter.' Standards remain stubbornly low, however, because middle-ability and more able pupils do much less well than they should. In lessons, not enough opportunities are taken to challenge and extend these pupils. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make good progress, and there has been an improvement in the rate of progress in Key Stage 1 (Years 1 and 2). However, in Key Stage 2 (Years 3 to 6), there is marked underachievement, especially in mathematics and science.

School leaders can certainly point to some key successes. Provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 compares favourably with that inherited by the school when it expanded in 2007. Leaders have succeeded in creating a positive climate for learning, where pupils from different backgrounds mix, work, play and get on well with each other, where behaviour is good and, importantly, where pupils increasingly listen well and are eager to learn. Where they have been less successful is in capitalising fully on older pupils' enthusiasm. Though school leaders are certainly aware of the need to accelerate progress, their efforts have not succeeded in raising standards in Key Stage 2 and there are still too many pupils making much slower progress than they should be. Despite the school's realistic view of its strengths and of the areas that need improving, and despite notable improvements in some aspects, Elmhurst has not demonstrated the capacity for sustained improvement in standards and achievement in Key Stage 2.

The feedback that leaders have given teachers, following their monitoring of lessons, has begun to raise the quality of teaching and has contributed to improvement in the quality of marking. However, leaders' monitoring has focused more on the features of teaching rather than on the progress that all pupils are making. This has given some leaders an overly positive picture of the effectiveness of lessons. Similarly, leaders are not always rigorous enough when they analyse performance data and when looking at pupils' work, because they sometimes accentuate the positive rather than homing in on where improvements could be made.

Pastoral care is strong and contributes to the pupils' good personal development. Recent changes to the curriculum have also helped to motivate pupils by bringing learning to life. One parent remarked, 'My son enjoys the way the topic work is made particularly relevant and interesting', while another praised the way in which 'The trips children are taken on show them the reality of what they are learning about.' Marking is now giving pupils clearer guidance on how they can improve their work, especially in English, but pupils are not generally aware of the targets that they have in this and other subjects. Although teachers routinely set out 'learning objectives' at the start of lessons, too often these are merely the tasks to be carried

out, and so they do not readily enable pupils to assess for themselves, or with the teacher, how the lesson has moved their learning on.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children join the school with skills that are well below those expected for their age, especially in communication, language and literacy. They make good progress so that, by the end of the Reception Year, they are working within the expected early learning goals. This represents a significant improvement in the provision for the Early Years Foundation Stage. In the school's well-run, well-equipped facilities, children are helped to grow in confidence and self-esteem because staff look after them well and give the children helpful guidance. A parent commented of her daughter, 'I feel she is learning a lot through play.' That aptly sums up the approach taken by staff, as children are helped to discover and develop their understanding through varied activities, both indoors and out. Sometimes, however, opportunities are missed to accelerate the pace of learning during outdoor learning activities and when children practise their letters and sounds (phonics). Children greatly enjoy taking part in practical activities and visits, which enrich their learning. For instance, as part of a theme on growth, children visited the local garden centre and grew their own plants, as well as observing the life cycle of a butterfly.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve and ensure that middle-ability and more able pupils are set work that challenges and extends them.
- Focus leaders' monitoring on the progress that pupils make in lessons and over time, on rigorously analysing performance and on identifying where provision can be improved.
- Ensure that in all lessons pupils have a clear understanding of what they are expected to learn and that they all know their targets for improvement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Standards are exceptionally low and pupils' slow progress in their key literacy and numeracy skills leaves them inadequately prepared for the next stage of their education. In 2008, the Year 6 tests showed that standards were the equivalent of almost two years behind the national average. Results fell further in 2009, and are particularly low in mathematics and science. Although there are pupils who make satisfactory and even good progress, especially those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, too many pupils are progressing at too slow a rate. Instead of the gap with past underachievement being narrowed, the gap with national averages has actually widened. The school has concentrated on trying to reach its floor targets for the minimum percentage of pupils attaining Level 4 in the national tests, which has meant focusing on lower-ability pupils, but there has been less emphasis by teachers on extending middle-ability and more able pupils. Initiatives, including the Improving Schools Programme (ISP), have not proven effective in raising attainment and rates of progress in Key Stage 2, and there have been setbacks that have delayed the introduction of other initiatives, including Reading Recovery. There are better signs of improvement in the younger classes. Children now get off to a good start in the Early Years Foundation Stage. More pupils are now making the progress that should be expected through Key Stage 1 but standards are still low because relatively few pupils attain higher levels in the Year 2 assessments. Nevertheless, an increasing proportion

of pupils have attained at least the lower Level 2C in reading, writing and mathematics. The progress of pupils who are new to learning English, including those who join the school part way through their primary education, is similar to that of their peers.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

'I like the school because it is multicultural and you learn a lot from each other.' This comment from a pupil illustrates the school's success in creating a happy, harmonious community where pupils from different backgrounds get on well together. Pupils treat each other with respect, and the good relationships, and the good behaviour in lessons and around the school, mean that pupils feel safe. They have a good understanding of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle, and look forward to their break-times when they can snack on fruit or vegetables. They take part with gusto in the 'Wake and Shake' exercises that start the day, and are particularly keen to participate in after-school sporting competitions. Pupils enjoy the opportunities they have to take on responsibility, for example as school councillors and as 'eco warriors' to help improve the local environment. Their enthusiasm is as evident in class as it is in the playground. Pupils listen well to their teachers and to each other and are increasingly eager to learn. Their attendance, however, is below average. In the main, this is because several pupils are taken out of school for extended holidays in term time.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 4

Teachers are effective in motivating the pupils but they have not succeeded in translating pupils' increased enthusiasm into brisk enough learning for pupils of all abilities. They have had greater success in pushing forward the progress of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with autism, but they do not all expect enough of middle-ability and more able pupils. Work is not always matched carefully enough to pupils' widely different capabilities, and so, for many pupils, it does not challenge or extend them. As a result, the school's tracking of rates of progress over the course of the past year shows that fewer than half of the pupils in Key Stage 2 made adequate or better progress from their already low starting points at the beginning of the year. Teachers adopt a range of strategies to improve the effectiveness of lessons, but the way they implement them shows that they have not always fully thought through their purpose. For example, teachers routinely set out at the start of each lesson what are identified as 'learning objectives'. Too often, however, these are merely a statement of the task to be carried out and so do not help pupils to evaluate for themselves, and with the teacher, the progress they are making and what they have learned. Teachers ask pupils to discuss ideas with their 'talk partner' but then require pupils to repeat only what they have said themselves, rather than using the exercise to develop pupils' speaking and listening skills by asking them to explain what their partners have said. Where pupils have individual targets, they are not always written in language that the pupils can readily understand. Naturally, that limits their impact and effectiveness in helping to direct pupils' learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school has achieved the Artsmark silver award. Work on art projects and the school's participation in the Creative Partnership initiative have helped to stimulate pupils' interest and enthusiasm. Pupils' writing has been inspired by the recent emphasis on 'Big Writing' and the development of linking subjects together. For instance, this was seen in written work by Year 3 and Year 4 on 'The Wind in the Willows'. In Year 5, pupils put on a performance as part of their Ancient Greece history project and linked their artwork to this theme. Although such activities are having a positive impact on pupils' enjoyment of learning, they have not contributed as much as they could to the development of pupils' basic skills, particularly when pupils with widely different capabilities are given similar written work to do. The school is still at an early stage of identifying and focusing on skills progression in information and communication technology. Scientific enquiry skills are underdeveloped across the school and this contributes to the very low standards in this subject.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Pupils are very well cared for in this welcoming, cheerful school and both pupils and parents greatly value this. Child protection, safety and safeguarding systems are rigorous and contribute to the school's safe and supportive learning environment. Well-developed links with outside agencies ensure that all pupils, including the most vulnerable, receive effective support. Past attendance figures have given a misleading picture because they did not correctly record the absences of pupils taken out of school on extended holidays. This has now been corrected. Parents are usually telephoned on the first day of any unexplained absence, but this does not always happen. Pupils' academic guidance is satisfactory. Marking has improved this year and is now giving pupils clearer guidance on how to improve, especially in English, although a recent survey by school leaders spotted examples of unmarked work, which showed the need for vigilance in checking this. Even where pupils have individual targets, they are not always aware of what these are, especially when they are written in language that is difficult for them to understand.

Leadership and management

Grade: 4

The headteacher, leadership team and governors have a realistic and accurate picture of the school's strengths and areas for development. They can rightly point to some key successes, particularly in the school's expansion to incorporate the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. Improvements are also apparent in pupils' attitudes and behaviour, so that, throughout the school, pupils want to learn. The school makes a positive contribution to community cohesion, both in raising pupils' awareness of different cultures and beliefs in Britain and around the world, and in the way it works with parents and families, including those who are new to the country. The shortcomings in leadership and management are evident in the impact of measures to raise achievement and standards in Key Stage 2. The school is well aware of this and has high hopes for the new management structure that has been put in place for the coming year, which they believe will prove more effective. To date, the feedback from leaders' monitoring has helped to improve aspects of teaching, but progress remains too slow because leaders have

not sharpened the focus of their lesson observations on the learning of pupils of all abilities. Leaders' analysis of data and scrutiny of pupils' books sometimes concentrate too much on highlighting the positive rather than pinpointing where things are not good enough. There are examples, however, of some very sharp evaluations. For example, a report by the headteacher of her findings during a recent 'learning walk' through the school, which included short observations in each class, contained a hard-hitting critique of where things had slipped. Under the leadership of the recently appointed chair, governors have now developed a clearer awareness of their roles and responsibilities. They realise that they were not as effective as they should have been in the past but have now begun to challenge the school and hold it to account.

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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?	4
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	4

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	3

¹Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	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	4

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	4
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	4
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	4
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	4
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	Yes
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

22 September 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Elmhurst School, Aylesbury, HP20 2DB

Thank you for making us so welcome when we came to visit your school. We could see how much you enjoy school, and your good behaviour and the way you all get on so well with each other help to make Elmhurst a friendly, happy place to be. You are looked after well, and the way the school is linking art and drama to your learning in different subjects is helping to make lessons interesting and fun. Like the rest of the school, I was impressed by Year 2's assembly, when they proudly showed off all the topics they had looked at this year.

Your headteacher and staff have had much success in forging your new school out of the previously separate infant and junior schools. The children in the Nursery and Reception Years are now getting off to a really good start, and those of you in Years 1 and 2 are now beginning to make better progress than some of you did in the past in these younger classes. We are concerned, however, that standards remain very low at Elmhurst and you are not all making as much progress as you should be. For that reason, we have decided that the school needs 'special measures'. This means that the school will get some extra help over the next two years to help to raise standards and achievement, particularly in Years 3 to 6. Those of you who need extra help with your learning are making better progress than others. For some of you, the work is too easy and you are not pushed enough to do as well as you can and to reach your full potential. We have asked your teachers to challenge you more. We have also asked them to make sure that you all know what you should be learning so that you can be involved more in identifying what you have learnt in each lesson, not just what you have done. We would also like to see you focusing more on the next steps you each need to move your learning on, by making sure that you all know and refer to your targets.

We have asked school leaders to look particularly carefully at how well each of you is doing, to help pinpoint where improvements are needed. When staff come to visit each other's lessons, we have asked them to look especially closely at how much you are each learning.

Our very best wishes for the future.

Yours faithfully

Selwyn Ward

Lead Inspector