

Elmley Castle CofE First School

Main Street, Elmley Castle, Pershore, WR10 3HS

Inspection dates 9–10 October 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage achieve well so that most attain above the levels expected for their age by the time they enter Year 1.
- Pupils of all abilities make good progress during their time at the school. By the time they leave, standards are well above average in reading, and above average in writing.
- Teaching is almost always good, and occasionally outstanding. Pupils are usually stretched by the work set, particularly in literacy lessons.
- Pupils behave well. They take responsibility for helping those younger than themselves, regularly and enthusiastically helping out at the 'forest school', for example.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school and are eager to take part in all that the school offers, so their attendance is improving.
- Good quality leadership and management ensures that the school runs smoothly and has brought about improvements in teaching.
- The headteacher, ably supported by staff and governors, has created a safe and caring school in which all pupils flourish.
- The school provides some exciting opportunities that promote pupils' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- There are good relationships with parents and carers, and strong links with local schools and the church.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Achievement in mathematics is not as strong as in reading and writing. In a few lessons teachers do not plan mathematical tasks at just the right level of difficulty to match pupils' ability.
- Pupils' listening skills are not as well developed as their speaking skills, and as a result some pupils do not listen carefully to questions or hear what they need to do next.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed 10 lessons, some jointly with the headteacher. In addition the inspector made a number of other short visits to different lessons and listened to some pupils read.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior teachers and the Chair of the Governing Body. The inspector also spoke to a local authority representative, a few parents and a number of pupils.
- The inspector observed the school's work, and looked at a variety of documents, including the school's own data on pupils' progress, planning and monitoring documents, safeguarding information and pupils' books.
- The inspector took account of the 22 responses to the online survey (Parent View) and questionnaires from staff members.

Inspection team

Denise Morris, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a smaller-than-average first school, situated in a small rural village.
- All pupils are White British.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, including pupils supported at school action, at school action plus or through a statement of special educational needs, is very low.
- No pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals and none receive pupil premium funding.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the impact of teaching in mathematics so that pupils' achievement in the subject matches that in reading and writing by:
 - ensuring that all mathematical tasks are clearly focused on meeting the individual needs and abilities of each pupil in the class
 - providing challenging activities, particularly for more-able pupils so that they regularly solve problems, work at a fast pace and move on to more difficult work as soon as they are ready
 - monitoring the impact of teaching in mathematics to ensure that it fully meets pupils' needs.
- Improve pupils' listening skills so that they routinely listen carefully to questions in class and to the views of others.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- All groups of pupils achieve well from their individual starting points. As a result standards are improving, and by Year 2 they are well above average in reading and above average in writing. The very few pupils who are disabled or have special educational needs achieve well.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage achieve particularly well in their communication and literacy skills, and in their personal development.
- Progress in reading has improved over the past two years. This is because of the very effective teaching of phonics (linking letters and sounds) for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and pupils in Years 1 and 2. This helps them to read unknown or new words.
- Reading skills across the school are very good. Pupils benefit from good new library facilities. Older pupils in Years 3 to 5 read fluently. All pupils regularly take their reading books home, and there is a productive partnership with parents through the home-school reading diaries.
- Younger pupils regularly write for a range of purposes, for example writing their own versions of stories they have heard or recording their own experiences. Pupils use their writing skills very well in different subjects. In history, pupils in Years 4 and 5 wrote lengthy accounts of the Queen's Jubilee celebrations.
- Pupils' progress in mathematics is not quite as strong, and standards at the end of Year 2 are average. There is a similar picture across Years 3 to 5 because some pupils find the tasks set too easy, while others find them too difficult. More-able pupils are not always helped to extend their skills through problem-solving activities, or by moving on to harder work as soon as they are ready.
- Pupils succeed well in many other subject areas. In music, for example, pupils really enjoy learning to read scales, play xylophones in tune, join in with enthusiasm in singing, and working together to compose their own tunes. Pupils achieve well in swimming due to the regular visits to the local pool.
- Younger children enjoy playing outside in the very spacious outdoor area. They were observed enjoying the 'forest school' where they made dens, drank hot chocolate, gathered twigs for the fire and learned to be resilient. They responded well to questions, so improving their speaking skills.

The quality of teaching

is good

- The vast majority of lessons are well managed so that behaviour is good. Most lessons feature good pace, high expectations and well-established routines.
- Pupils throughout the school benefit from mostly good and sometimes outstanding teaching which engages all groups in well-planned, exciting activities to promote their good progress.
- In the very best lessons, particularly in literacy, teachers provide tasks that closely match each pupil's individual needs. This was very evident in a literacy lesson in Years 2 and 3, where different tasks for different age and ability groups enabled all pupils to make gains in learning about how to use a thesaurus to find synonyms. Because of effective planning by the teacher

and the demanding work set, all groups achieved very well.

- Teachers work collaboratively with each other and with other local schools. Observing colleagues at work is a key factor in helping to improve the quality of teaching across the school, and in improving teachers' own skills.
- Teaching typically enables pupils to make good progress because relationships are strong and pupils have confidence in their teachers and other staff. In one such lesson younger pupils made very good gains in learning about speech in stories as they shared *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* with their teacher. They had fun and were keen to try out their reading skills, secure in the knowledge that the teacher would support them.
- Regular daily links with parents and carers promote effective collaboration. In discussion, a few parents commented on the good quality of information that teachers provide on a regular basis. This secures a good partnership that benefits pupils.
- Planning is mostly good, although in a few mathematics lessons it is not linked closely enough to pupils' individual needs and abilities and the more-able pupils in particular are not challenged by the work set. As a result progress in mathematics is not quite as strong as it is in literacy.
- Regular and accurate marking and assessment of pupils' work help them to improve it. Pupils know their targets.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils' enjoyment of school is evident in their above-average attendance. All of the parents and carers who responded to the online questionnaire feel that their children are safe at school.
- Parents and carers who spoke to the inspector commented on pupils' good behaviour and how much their children love coming to school. Evidence from the inspection supports this view.
- Pupils themselves say that they feel safe at school. Safe risk-taking, such as in the 'forest school' where they regularly cook food on a fire, ensures that pupils learn how to judge what is safe and what is not.
- All groups of pupils behave well. They have positive attitudes to learning, and to their classmates and teachers. They say that there is absolutely no bullying of any kind at the school. An incident reported by parents last year was quickly and effectively dealt with. Behaviour is not outstanding, however, because a few pupils find it really hard to listen carefully in lessons, calling out answers and not waiting for their turn.
- Pupils have a good sense of responsibility, as shown by the way older pupils take care of younger ones in the playground and regularly offer to help at the 'forest school' where young children are playing.
- The members of the effective school council have improved aspects of the school through their diligence, and are proud of their contribution. They raised money to put lights in the 'boot room' because they felt that younger children would feel safer if there were lights in the dark winter days. They have also raised money through holding cake sales and worked hard to reach their goals.
- The positive, calm atmosphere at the school promotes good relationships, turn-taking, sharing and effective spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The way in which pupils are

enthusiastic about raising money for charities such as the 'Operation Christmas Child' appeal shows that they have a good awareness of their social responsibility.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher, staff and governors have successfully improved the school over the past two years. They have improved the curriculum so that it now meets pupils' needs and prepares them well for the next stage of their education, and have developed the exciting and spacious outdoor area in which pupils learn resilience, thrive and feel valued.
- School leaders have focused securely on raising achievement and have successfully improved standards, particularly in reading and writing, through the effective daily phonics activities that engage younger pupils well.
- Leaders have improved their capacity by working together to develop their own observation skills and promoting peer observations between teachers. This has led to good improvements in teaching and learning. They have rightly identified the need to improve planning for individual needs in mathematics to raise achievement in the subject.
- Leaders have helped individual pupils to overcome barriers to learning. For example, teaching assistants in each class play a valuable role in supporting disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs to make good progress.
- Very effective links with the church and local schools promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. They regularly visit the local church and perform there at Christmas. Older pupils have visited different places of worship, developing their understanding of other faiths and cultures.
- Pupils really enjoy the links with local schools, regularly playing sports matches against them. They talk excitedly about their local festivals and how they join in with the rest of the village to celebrate 'Oak Apple Day' and dance around the maypole.
- Older pupils say that they benefit from their residential experience to North Wales, learning to look after themselves and cook their own food.
- The school manages teachers' performance well. Effective use of the 'Teachers Standards' in regular whole-school training activities enables staff to improve their skills.
- Parents and carers value the partnership they have with staff and the vast majority support the school's leadership. 'Communication with the school is very good and extremely helpful,' commented one parent.
- The school has been designated an improving school by the local authority, which has successfully supported improvements in teaching and learning since the last inspection.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - is supportive and rigorous in taking action to bring about improvements
 - shows clear strategic direction, promoting an ethos in which pupils flourish
 - is fully involved in evaluating the school's strengths and areas for improvement
 - holds leaders to account for maintaining high-quality standards by making thorough, regularly checks
 - ensures that the school's financial resources are managed effectively
 - ensures that safeguarding procedures and practices fully meet current requirements.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors. A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.

School details

Unique reference number	116808
Local authority	Worcestershire
Inspection number	405667

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

Type of school	First
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–10
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	59
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jenny Newbury
Headteacher	Megan Thomas
Date of previous school inspection	21 September 2010
Telephone number	01386 710279
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