

Elmwood School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	135461
Local authority	Walsall
Inspection number	381888
Inspection dates	12–13 March 2012
Lead inspector	Frank Price

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	34
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Christine Grainger
Headteacher	Simon Hubbard
Date of previous school inspection	May 2009
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Age group	11–16
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Introduction

Inspection team

Frank Price

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Approximately five hours were spent observing nine lessons taught by eight teachers. Discussions took place with a range of students, members of staff and the Chair of the Governing Body. The inspector took account of the responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at its self-evaluation documentation and improvement plans. The inspector took account of eight parental questionnaires returned during the inspection, as well as questionnaires completed by staff and students.

Information about the school

Elmwood School is a smaller-than-average-sized special school for students who have severe complex behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. All students have a statement of special educational needs and an increasing number have additional special needs including autistic spectrum disorders, moderate learning difficulties, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and speech and language disorders. The majority of students are of White British origin. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is higher than average. A small number of students are looked after by the local authority. Nearly all students are boys. Students start at the school at a variety of times during Key Stages 3 and 4 and many have had previously disrupted education experiences. A new headteacher was appointed in January 2012.

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	3
Achievement of pupils	3
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	3
Leadership and management	3

Key findings

- Elmwood School is a satisfactory school. It is satisfactory rather than good because of numerous staffing changes in the past at a senior level, which have limited improvements. However, these have now been resolved, and the school is on an upward trajectory of improvement. Teaching remains satisfactory rather than consistently good. Although the accommodation is acceptable overall, some aspects do not promote a positive learning environment and some areas are not used to their maximum potential.
- Students' achievement is satisfactory from their various starting points. Their progress is best in Year 7, because of the nurturing environment and the modified primary-based curriculum offered. Lessons are usually calm and productive, although older students' progress is occasionally affected by poor behaviour.
- Teachers and support staff have good relationships with students and this does much to coax them into learning. They plan to meet the learning needs of every student as an individual. Teaching, though satisfactory, is not often better. The pace of some parts of lessons and the range of strategies to fully enthuse students is sometimes too limited and students' independent learning skills are not always encouraged.
- Students' behaviour and safety are satisfactory. Behaviour in lessons is often good and most students demonstrate positive attitudes to learning and one another. However, there are some students who have more challenging behaviours and on occasions are not able to manage their behaviour in a mature fashion.
- The leadership and management of the school are satisfactory, but improving. The new leadership team is building on the firm strengths of the school and the stability of the senior leadership team is now established. The leadership of teaching and the management of performance have rightly been priorities; external reviews have highlighted strengths and areas for improvement and suitable actions to address weaknesses have been identified.

Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring

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visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate students' progress by:
 - extending the current nurture provision from Year 7 to older year groups
 - improving the accommodation to provide more attractive places for students to learn and to help with the management of students' transition in corridors
 - maximising the use of the on-site vocational centre for older students.
- Improve the quality of teaching by:
 - ensuring there are regular opportunities in lessons for practical activities to reinforce learning and increase students' motivation
 - ensuring a quicker pace to some parts of lessons
 - maximising students' independent learning skills.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

All groups of students make satisfactory progress relative to their low starting points and time spent at the school. For most students, by the time they leave, gaps in performance are narrowing but their attainment remains below average by the time they leave school. Students who start at the school early in Key Stage 3 and who attend regularly often make good progress. Some students make good progress, particularly those in Year 7, because of the well-focused nurture structure and primary-style curriculum, which gives students stability, confidence and opportunities to form trusting relationships. However, there is some occasional disruption to the progress of some older students in lessons. The school has taken action to address this situation, by providing more suitable vocational courses. Over the last few years, more students have gained an increased range of qualifications, particularly in vocational awards such as construction and outdoor pursuits, than in the past. These features have been important in transforming the attitudes to learning of some students. For example, one student who was initially reluctant to engage in classes was inspired by a residential trip where he learned about the importance of cooperation and developed positive attitudes. He left the school with accredited awards in both vocational and education qualifications.

Students make satisfactory progress in lessons. They are usually attentive and most are willing to work. Where students are reluctant, staff can usually encourage them to get back on track. Occasionally in the lessons observed, staff were over-helpful so that the student did not have a chance to achieve independence in learning. Some

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aspects of the accommodation limit students' learning opportunities, such as the courtyard areas, which are bleak. In literacy, students' attainment is improving as a result of the effective intervention programmes that have targeted reluctant readers and writers. As a result of this work, students' reading and spelling ages have improved. Students are beginning to demonstrate increased enjoyment and confidence in reading across different subjects.

Students have a wide range of special educational needs. The school adopts a highly personalised approach, through the use of learning passports. These set out clear learning targets for students, which are regularly reviewed with their mentors, and this ensures that students achieve in line with their abilities. Most parents and carers have positive views of the progress their children make. The inspection evidence indicates, however, that progress is satisfactory overall.

Quality of teaching

Teaching is satisfactory over time and helps students make satisfactory progress. Positive and supportive relationships permeate lessons and this does much to persuade most students to engage in learning. The most imaginative lessons help students to develop an enjoyment of learning. For example, in a mathematics lesson, students enjoyed a rapid re-cap of learning by using playing cards and developing their mental calculation skills. However, the examples of good and outstanding teaching are too isolated. In some lessons, there are too few opportunities for students to be active participants in learning and on occasions the pace of some parts of lessons are not brisk enough to maintain students' flagging attention. Occasionally staff can be too quick to provide help for students because they fear they will lose interest in the activity. The school has improved the use of assessment effectively and typically lessons start with clear learning objectives, which are well explained to students and effective questioning to test students' understanding at the end of lessons. Some teachers make good use of peer evaluation, with some students able to make perceptive comments about each other's work. Teachers promote students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development by providing ample opportunities for them to work together in pairs or groups constructively.

Lessons for the most part are calm and productive. Teachers' subject knowledge supports careful planning to ensure that work is relevant and on the whole engages the students. Many students think teaching helps them to improve and the work given is about right. One student commented, 'They give me work at my right skill level.' Changes to the curriculum have included increased options for practical-based subjects to enable more students to gain better understanding. The school has recognised the need to adapt the curriculum effectively for younger students entering the school with more complex learning needs, and that this approach would benefit some older groups of students. Parents and carers rightly feel their children are taught satisfactorily.

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Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students' behaviour and safety are satisfactory. Many make substantial improvements in their attendance, which has improved over time, with some students becoming regular attenders. However, a few students do not attend frequently enough, despite good follow-up by the school. Students enjoy lunchtime activities and the student council has been vocal in making suggestions for improvements to the school. For example, they have suggested setting up an anti-bullying committee. Students stated they felt safe at school and that bullying, racial or prejudicial incidents are relatively scarce. They fill in slips with any concerns and are confident that staff are quick to deal with issues, and students have access to a counsellor. Cyber-bullying was not seen as an issue and students and parents have received training on staying safe online. Outdoor activities effectively develop students' self-esteem and promote positive attitudes. While almost all parents and carers believe that their children are safe at school, a few feel that behaviour could be improved. The school is addressing this issue with vigour. The school has recently introduced a tighter discipline code and a few students are finding this difficult to adhere to. In the short term this has resulted in a slight rise in fixed-term exclusions. Some aspects of the school accommodation make students' behaviour harder to supervise, including the long corridors, which make transitions from one activity to another difficult.

Leadership and management

The new headteacher has rapidly identified correct priorities for improvement and has set out a valuable improvement plan to tackle weaknesses, particularly to improve the quality of teaching and teachers' professional development. The headteacher has started to build on the existing strengths of the school. A new deputy headteacher has been appointed and this has considerably strengthened the capacity of the senior leadership team. The school is demonstrating the capacity to improve further as students' achievement, behaviour and safety and teaching are secure and improving strongly. The governing body are committed and undertake regular visits to the school. They have a good understanding of its strengths and areas for improvement. They have helped to guide the school through a difficult period of change and have provided effective strategic leadership in appointing senior leaders.

The school does not tolerate discrimination of any kind. The progress and behaviour of all groups of students is scrutinised in behaviour to ensure that all, whatever their background or needs, have equal opportunity to make progress and achieve in a wider range of nationally recognised qualifications.

The school offers a broad and balanced curriculum supplemented by vocational courses. The strength of these courses is the way they engage students effectively and provide enjoyment of learning. However, the level of challenge of some courses is not always sufficiently high. School leaders are reviewing this provision to see if better challenge and rigour can be achieved using the on-site vocational facilities.

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The curriculum contributes well to the students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, for example through sporting visits and the recently introduced weekly whole-school assemblies.

The school works well in partnership with parents through its parent support adviser and training has been provided in anti-bullying, homework support and dealing with concerns of parents and carers. The school is vigilant to ensure any forms of inequality or discrimination are dealt with quickly. The school's arrangements for safeguarding are secure, including checking the welfare arrangements for those students accessing off-site activities.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all 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	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and 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 governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons, and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.

14 March 2012

Dear Students



Inspection of Elmwood School, Walsall WS4 1EG

I enjoyed my visit to your school and talking with many of you. Thank you for contributing to the inspection through the returned questionnaires and discussions with me.

I found that your school provides you with a satisfactory education. Most of you make satisfactory progress during your time at school. More of you are able to study a wider range of academic and vocational courses. Those of you who attend regularly have seen big improvements in your behaviour and work. Many of you enjoy the outdoor activities you can participate in. The teaching you receive is satisfactory. Staff know how to encourage you and you are set clear targets through your learning passports. The new headteacher and staff are working hard to improve your school. I have asked those people leading your school to do the following things:

- extend the provision in Year 7 to other year groups
- improve the accommodation, including the corridor areas and the use of the on-site vocational centre
- ensure you have more practical activities in lessons
- make sure that there is a quicker pace to some parts of lessons and that your independent learning skills are extended.

You can help to improve your school by continuing to attend regularly.

Yours sincerely

Frank Price
Lead inspector

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