

Elmwood School

Hamp Avenue, Bridgwater, TA6 6AP

Inspection dates 13–14 June 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Teaching is not consistently good enough to make sure that all students make rapid and sustained progress over time.
- There are often too few opportunities for students to be actively involved in their learning. Not all students know the next steps they need to take in order to be successful.
- Not all teachers make skilful use of the information they have on students to make sure that lesson activities are not too easy or too hard.
- Some teaching assistants are not effectively deployed throughout the lesson.
- Subject leaders do not check up on the quality of teaching in their own subjects to discover what needs improving.

The school has the following strengths

- The headteacher and the leadership team have gained and maintained the confidence of staff as they have rapidly brought about changes for the better.
- The governors' and leaders' high expectations of the staff mean that inadequate teaching has been removed and progress is much faster this year.
- The new leadership team has accurately and quickly identified aspects of the teaching that require improvement.
- Students' behaviour and attitudes to learning are excellent and they feel very secure and cared for.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed nine lessons, all jointly with members of the school's senior leadership team.
- Meetings were held with members of the governing body, senior leaders, school staff and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors talked to students in lessons about their work, looked at books and coursework, listened to students read and talked to representatives from the school council.
- Inspectors spoke to a number of parents and carers, and took account of 32 questionnaires returned by members of staff.
- There were insufficient responses to the online Parent View survey for these to be examined.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at progress data, performance management information and records relating to behaviour and attendance, as well as safeguarding documents.

Inspection team

Mick Megee, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Bob Arnold

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- All students have a statement of special educational needs.
- All students have either moderate or severe learning difficulties.
- The proportion of students who are supported by the pupil premium is above average. The pupil premium is additional government funding for those students who are known to be eligible for free school meals, children from service families and those that are looked after by the local authority.
- The school moved into a new building in November 2012 on the same site as the neighbouring mainstream comprehensive school.
- In April 2012, the school became part of a federation with Penrose school, and a new executive headteacher was appointed in June 2012 to cover both schools. The federation has a single governing body.
- Students attend alternative provision in the neighbouring school, Robert Blake, and a small number of Year 11 students attend part-time courses, such as in building and construction, in Bridgwater and Cannington Further Education Colleges.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that all students make at least good progress by:
 - ensuring all students know their individual targets and the next steps they need to take in their learning
 - using information on students' progress in order to match activities more consistently to students' needs and abilities
 - deploying teaching assistants more effectively so that they provide effective support throughout the entire lesson
 - ensuring all pupils are given opportunities to find out things for themselves and are actively engaged throughout lessons.
- Improve the skills of subject leaders so they can take a more active role in checking on the progress that students make, and in reviewing the quality of teaching and learning within their areas of responsibility.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Students enter the school with low attainment because of their moderate or severe learning difficulties.
- Although many students make progress at expected levels, weaknesses in teaching have meant that they have not achieved well enough over the past few years.
- The progress that they have made from their starting points in both English and mathematics has not been good enough over time, although the latest figures show that this situation has improved significantly during the last year.
- Students' literacy and communication skills are not well developed when they join the school, but they make steady progress in speaking, listening, reading and writing through regular guidance and one-to-one support.
- In mathematics, although there are early signs of improvement, progress remains less strong than in English, particularly in Key Stage 4, where the subject has been less well taught in the past.
- Progress in the creative arts and in physical education is stronger than in other areas because of the expert, specialist teaching that the students receive.
- The school's records and observations during the inspection show that there is little difference in the attainment and academic progress shown by the different groups within the school, such as girls and boys, by students who are eligible for the pupil premium and by those who learn off-site.
- The school uses the pupil premium money to support families, help develop students' personal and social skills, and to give them a wider experience of life, such as through residential programmes. This support boosts their self-esteem and confidence. They are better able to communicate their feelings and ideas, and this improves their learning in the classroom.
- The new senior leaders have recognised the need for rapid improvement, and the rise in the quality of teaching and assessment means that students are now beginning to reach their target levels and most achieve some form of qualification.
- The qualifications and very strong gains in their personal development mean that all students go on to further education, training and employment.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- The quality of teaching requires improvement because it has, over time, not enabled students to make fast enough progress. Currently, there is still some variability in teaching, although it is improving strongly and no inadequate teaching was seen during the inspection.
- In the best lessons, teachers provide a suitable structure and level of challenge for students of different abilities. They group students carefully to help them to learn.
- In some lessons, though, there are too few opportunities for students to learn independently of the teacher and students have to sit and listen for too long before they can become actively engaged in learning.
- Some teachers do not use their assessment information well to pitch lesson activities at just the right level for all the students. As a result, tasks are too easy for some and too difficult for others, so the progress they make in lessons is slower than it could be.
- Teaching assistants generally provide effective, confident support in the classroom and bring a wide range of skills to their work. They take management responsibilities willingly and enthusiastically, such as organising the new target books, which set out these targets in the student's own language. However, in some lessons they are underused and are not proactive enough in supporting progress.
- The school makes increasingly effective use of individual targets in literacy and numeracy in order to rapidly improve students' basic skills, and the target books help students to learn more quickly. However, not many students know what their targets are when asked, and do not know what they specifically have to do to move on.

- The school teaches reading reasonably well. There are regular sessions on phonics (letters and the sounds they make) in small groups. For students who are not yet ready to read, and for those who need additional support in communication, staff make good use of signing and symbols. This helps students to understand and express themselves more easily.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

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- Students are always friendly, courteous and polite to visitors, staff and to each other. Older students provide excellent role models for younger students in school. The behaviour that was observed in the lessons, at break and lunchtime was exemplary.
- Students' attitudes to learning are excellent. They listen to each other's comments, help each other out and speak to each other in a kind and very good-humoured way. Students respond exceptionally well to any challenge they are given, show resilience if they falter and try their best in all circumstances.
- Students', and parents' and carers', views, as well as the school's meticulous records, show that there is very little disruption to lessons and that behaviour is typically excellent.
- The safety and well-being of students is at the very heart of the school's work. The Head of the Family Team works tirelessly to ensure that the students are looked after at all times and that relationships with families are very strong.
- One parent, reflecting the views of others, said, 'The school massively helps us and always has a big ear for you to talk to if you need it.'
- The school has ensured that staff are well trained in de-escalation procedures. Consequently, on the rare occasions that students find learning difficult and are beginning to become upset, staff take quick and effective action. Individual plans and support strategies that also involve parents and carers are in place for those students who need them.
- The school's rewards are individualised through a points systems that is fair and meaningful to the students and they work hard to achieve these points. All students have the opportunity to assess their own behaviour at the end of each day during the reflection times.
- Attendance is improving every year and is high compared with the national average. Any unexplained absence is followed up quickly by staff. Students arrive punctually to their lessons.
- Students have a very good understanding about how to keep themselves and others safe. One student took great pains to suggest to the inspector how the door closers could be improved to minimise the risk to wheelchair users, because they are too heavy to close. Another student showed very good understanding of staying safe when he said jokingly, 'We're safe provided my teacher doesn't leave the cooker on.'
- Students know about all types of bullying, and say that there is very little bullying within the school.
- The parents and carers who met with the inspector say their children like coming to school and feel safe at all times. The students agree.
- Parents and carers say that initially they had some fears about their children being picked on when they heard that they would be on the same site as a large comprehensive. However, these fears proved groundless because of the great work of a very vigilant and caring staff team, and the added bonus of their children being able to mingle with 'ordinary' children of the same age.

The leadership and management are good

- In previous successive inspections, the school's performance has been judged as satisfactory rather than good. Although it still requires improvement, there is strong evidence to show that the robust, decisive actions of the new executive headteacher and senior leadership team have now placed the school firmly on an upward trajectory.
- The senior leaders have helped to breathe new life into the school, inspiring staff with passion,

commitment and determination to achieve the very best outcomes for the students.

- They recognise that there is a lot to do and that urgency is required to identify and tackle underachievement. To this end, they have set very strong foundation stones for future success through their rigorous new approach to monitoring, reviewing and planning.
 - Senior leaders are realistic about the current quality of education and have already brought about significant improvement in achievement and the quality of teaching. They have ensured that students' personal development is excellent. The school now demonstrates a strong capacity to continue improving.
 - The senior leaders regularly check the quality of teaching in lessons and over time, and have ensured that a greater proportion of teaching is now consistently good and no teaching is inadequate. Subject leaders do not currently take an active enough role in this process, although the school plans this for next term.
 - The school places a strong emphasis on training, particularly through encouraging staff to take responsibility for their own development, in order to promote the development of an ever-widening range of skills and understanding for the students.
 - The senior leaders have established a comprehensive process to manage and improve staff performance. There is now a regular cycle of meetings to check on students' progress so that each teacher has to account for the achievement of every student in their own class.
 - While the key focus within the curriculum is to improve the students' basic skills, the leaders have also ensured that the creative arts and physical education are given prominence. Students have opportunities to become sports leaders or to receive individual music lessons. Students who find learning alongside others difficult are given customised individual programmes. The curriculum is enhanced by many visitors and visits, such as overnight forest camps.
 - The local authority provides effective, proportionate support, principally through the very committed work of the improvement officer. This support is being reduced as the school grows more and more effective.
 - The school has excellent relationships with parents and carers, all of whom, particularly those who are hard to reach, are offered workshops and support, especially through the skilful efforts of the family support worker.
 - Parents and carers receive regular updates on their children's progress through texts, emails, newsletters, telephone calls, meetings and home visits.
 - The senior leadership team has introduced new systems for collecting and checking information on students' progress so that the school is able to identify where additional help and support is required. Not all staff are skilled in using this information to set work that is at the right level.
 - The senior leadership team has gone to some lengths to develop and sustain positive partnerships with local schools, especially on its own site and with external agencies, in order to smooth the transition for students on to the next stage of their lives.
 - The executive headteacher has done very well in ensuring that both schools in the federation gain maximum benefit from their partnership, through sharing of specialist staff and a joint senior leadership team. This is having a significant positive impact on the work of Elmwood, resulting in an ever-widening range of experiences for all the students.
 - Where students attend education off-site, in the neighbouring school or local further education colleges, the senior leaders diligently check up on the progress that these students make to ensure that they are well taught and achieve well.
 - The new robust arrangements for managing teachers' performance means that teachers only move up the salary scale if they meet the required high standards. Senior leaders have not ducked out of thorny discussions with teachers about weaknesses in their teaching or about what could happen if these weaknesses are not resolved.
 - All safeguarding procedures are securely in place, meet statutory requirements and are rigorously applied. Leaders make sure that all students are treated equally and there is no discrimination of any kind.
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■ The governance of the school:

- The governing body challenges and supports the school well. Governors are well informed about the school's performance, including how well students are achieving, and bring a good range of experience to their work. In order to keep themselves updated with the work of the school, a governor is linked to each member of the senior leadership team and meets regularly with them. Governors have attended specific training in order to gain a good understanding of the quality of teaching and the use of the performance management systems. They know how good teachers are rewarded and what is done to overcome identified weaknesses in teaching. Governors know about the resources that are required to fund the school's priority activities. They are fully involved in the decision making about how pupil premium funds are used and are developing their skills to check up on the impact of the measures the school has put in place.
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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 student's needs. This ensures that students 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 student's needs. Students 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	<p>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.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its students 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.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	123938
Local authority	Somerset
Inspection number	402208

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of students	7–16
Gender of students	Mixed
Number of students on the school roll	60
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Helen Walker
Headteacher	Elizabeth Hayward
Date of previous school inspection	7–8 October 2009
Telephone number	01278 456243
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