

Elmwood School

King George Crescent, Walsall, West Midlands, WS4 1EG

Inspection dates		18–19 March 2014	
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.

- Students achieve well. They make good progress from their individual starting points. There are high expectations that students will become fully engaged in learning, do their best and ultimately be successful.
- Teaching is good throughout the school and teachers use the increasingly detailed information they have on students' progress effectively. In a school where there is a very wide range of ability, the needs of each student are understood and addressed.
- Staff show a positive commitment to supporting the social and emotional needs of students as well as stretching their learning.
- The effective behaviour policy promotes good behaviour and is well implemented by all staff and, over time, students are encouraged to take responsibility for managing their own behaviour. Students and their parents believe that school is a safe place where students are well cared for.
- The headteacher and his deputy were both newly arrived at the previous inspection. They have introduced many positive developments, such as the outdoor education programme, which are improving behaviour and progress.
- Older students can see for themselves the changes for the better over time and know that standards have risen throughout the school.
- Leaders have a clear vision of a successful school and have improved the school significantly since the previous inspection. Staff fully support this and show a strong commitment to the school and its students. They have been given good opportunities to develop their professional skills, so standards of teaching and learning have risen.
- Governors bring a range of appropriate skills, including education and finance, which support their ability to carry out their role effectively. They are committed to the school and hold leaders to account in bringing about effective change and raising standards.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Standards in English, especially in the higher level skills in speaking and listening, and in writing, are not yet as high as they are in mathematics and science.
- The marking policy is currently under review and at the moment there is too much variation in the way in which different teachers mark students' work, so students are not always clear about how to improve their work.

Information about this inspection

- A total of eight lessons were observed, four of these being undertaken jointly with the acting headteacher.
- Students' books and other work were looked at during lesson observations and a more detailed analysis of written work undertaken by some students was made. Some students were listened to reading by the inspector.
- Meetings were held with the acting headteacher and other school leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and other governors, and representatives from the local authority.
- There were not enough responses to Ofsted's online Parent View questionnaire to trigger an analysis of parents' views. These views were therefore gathered from a letter and a telephone call from parents received by the inspector, and from parents' comments noted during annual reviews of students' statements of special educational needs.
- The views of students were gathered from conversations held throughout the inspection and from a meeting held with representative students.
- Staff views were gathered from the responses to the staff questionnaire and from conversations held throughout the inspection.
- A range of written evidence was looked at, including information on the progress of students, teachers' planning, the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning, as well as a range of policies and procedures, including those for safeguarding.

Inspection team

Martyn Groucutt, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Elmwood is a special school for students, all of whom have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.
- Every student has a statement of special educational needs. In addition to their primary need, they have additional, frequently complex, needs that include autistic spectrum disorder and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.
- The proportion who qualify for the pupil premium (additional government funding for specific students, including those known to be eligible for free school meals, or who are in the care of the local authority) is well above average. There are no students for service families in the school.
- A large majority of the students are from White British backgrounds and none are in the process of learning English.
- The school does not receive the specific Year 7 catch-up funding made available to mainstream schools to support those students who did not reach the expected standards at the end of Year 6.
- During the extended absence of the headteacher, due to illness, and pending his return, the deputy headteacher has been appointed as acting headteacher of the school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the standards in English to match those in mathematics and science by:
 - ensuring that the most able students are fully stretched in developing their skills in speaking and listening
 - encouraging opportunities in lessons for more writing by students based around their own ideas
 - creating more opportunities for producing pieces of extended writing.
- Complete the review of the marking policy and then ensure that all marking helps students to improve their work and includes:
 - advice at the end of a piece of work on how it might be further developed or improved
 - evidence that time was allocated to allow for corrections or improvements to be made.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- The learning difficulties faced by students mean that typically they start at the school with levels of attainment well below those generally found. As a result of high expectations they quickly begin to make good progress across all areas of learning. Many of the students make progress in English and mathematics that is at least as good, if not better, as that usually found in schools, bearing in mind their starting points.
- When they first join the school, students complete a series of assessments to work out the levels at which they are working. Individual plans are then created to try and ensure that each is challenged fully and given individual targets. These are maintained throughout the school.
- Termly meetings plot the progress being made by every student, and if they are not making the expected progress additional help or support is quickly put into place. If progress is accelerating, targets are revised upwards.
- There is a wide variety of ability in the school, but there is an expectation that all students will produce the very best work of which they are capable, and go on to achieve success in examinations before they leave. Wherever possible, students are entered for GCSE, although none are entered early; success rates have risen steadily since the previous inspection, currently being higher than ever.
- In order to help students focus on doing their very best during Year 11, each student has a termly one-to-one meeting with the acting headteacher to discuss their progress. This has a strong impact in focusing the minds of the students on getting positive outcomes.
- Preparations for moving on after Year 11 are equally effective, reflected in the very positive links with the Connexions service. Last year only one leaver did not successfully transfer to college or to a work placement.
- Sometimes the most able are not fully challenged. In English, for example, the ways in which the subject was taught did not encourage them to fully develop the social language and vocabulary found in students reaching the highest levels at GCSE. The recently appointed head of English has taken immediate steps to seek to address this and other weaknesses, such as the need for more extended writing, so that the subject does not lag behind other core subjects. Current assessments are already showing positive progress.
- There are also too few opportunities in lessons for students to undertake writing tasks based around their own ideas, or for extended writing.
- Reading is a major focus and each day there is social reading time. For students who have fallen behind in their reading there is a strong reading recovery programme in place. Part of the pupil premium funding was used to train a teacher to support younger students who lack confidence in reading through a programme of phonics (understanding letters and the sounds they make).
- The pupil premium spending is closely monitored to ensure that it is supporting rising achievement in English and mathematics. However, while students demonstrate good progress, it is not easy to measure this in terms of 'narrowing the gap' with other students, since a large majority of the small numbers in each year group qualify for this additional funding.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching in all subjects, including English, communication and mathematics, is good and sustains the good progress being made by students. Teachers and teaching assistants get on well with the students, whilst also having high expectations. These positive relationships are vital in helping students develop a stronger sense of self-worth and create strong teams in all classrooms. It reflects a positive commitment to promoting equality of opportunity for all.
- This positive rapport gives students the confidence to express their thoughts and opinions. Over the past year teachers have undertaken professional development work in raising the quality of their questioning in lessons. This has paid off because their questions provoke thinking and

discussion among students, as well as providing evidence that they understand something.

- Information on student progress is used well to stretch and challenge students effectively.
- The older students have an appreciation of the fact that teachers who have been appointed since the new headteacher and deputy arrived have improved the quality of provision. They particularly like new elements such as the outdoor education programme where a wide variety of opportunities encourage the weighing-up of risks and challenges, in which all participate weekly.
- The school has taken care to ensure that courses leading to qualifications meet the needs of students. This has led to changes, such as the new science programme that is based firmly on the study of the living world, which students find more engaging. Teachers work hard to bring their subjects to life. The GCSE English group studying *A Kestrel for a Knave*, for example, met a falconer who brought one of his birds to school for the students to see at close quarters.
- Similarly, the expanding theme and topic based approach to learning during the afternoon sessions has enhanced students' enjoyment of learning. They were keen to share some of the things they had learned, such as a recent Year 7 topic 'How to train your dragon', which they really enjoyed. However, the skills in writing, speaking and listening being learned in English lessons are not fully developed and expanded during this topic based work.
- Students' work is marked regularly and there are always positive comments. The school is currently reviewing its marking policy and at the moment there is too much inconsistency in practice. Sometimes it is hard to tell marking from the original work when both are done in pencil, and opportunities are not always taken to suggest how work might be further improved, or time allowed for improvements to be made.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of students is good. When they first join the school their behaviour is so bad that they can no longer be taught in mainstream schools. The school's clear behaviour policy, based firmly on helping students to take increasing responsibility for their own actions, is very effective. They make great improvements at Elmwood and little time is lost in lessons as a result of poor behaviour.
- When there are behavioural incidents, which often occur when a student has only recently joined the school, staff are well trained in ensuring that incidents are dealt with in a way that ensures that students remain safe. The school's 'zero tolerance' policy towards unacceptable behaviour and actions, such as smoking, creates clearly defined boundaries beyond which students rarely go, helping to create a calm and purposeful atmosphere around school.
- In every lesson and social setting, students earn points based on a range of positive actions that contribute to participation in popular Friday afternoon activities; without these points, students cannot participate and miss out, being separated from their friends. An important element in the awarding of these points is that students think about their own behaviour and performance and, over time, become increasingly reflective.
- As the very consistent approach to improving behaviour supports engagement with learning and the development of enhanced social skills, students develop much more positive attitudes. A parent, whose child could not cope in a mainstream school, wrote, 'If it were not for the dedicated and caring staff that have provided a consistent, understanding approach for my son's well-being he wouldn't be the happy boy that he is now.'
- The school's work to keep students safe is good. Students say they feel safe and there is a positive ethos around the school, reflected in the interest they showed in the inspection process. Many showed real pride in their school.
- Students are aware of bullying in its different forms, including the risks of cyber bullying and the misuse of the internet. However, they equally stress that if any incidents of bullying or aggression do take place they know exactly what to do in referring it to an adult. They are confident that firm and effective action will result.
- A large majority of students attend very regularly, saying they enjoy coming to school very much. The school has appointed a family support worker who undertakes a range of supportive

roles, one of which is to work very effectively with the small number of parents who do not ensure the regular attendance of their children. As a result, attendance has improved over time.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher and his deputy, who is the acting headteacher, work in close and effective partnership in a rapidly improving school. Their vision is of a school where, while their wider social and emotional needs are well supported, students attend primarily to learn and to gain the qualifications that will support their entry to the adult world as effective citizens.
- The senior leaders have introduced a range of reforms that have raised the quality of teaching and learning, and increased the enjoyment and participation of students. They have overseen significant changes to staffing and it is clear that they have the strong support of staff and parents. As a member of staff put it, 'This is a school on a journey. I know and like the direction it is taking.'
- Regular checking of teaching and planning helps to inform the detailed and supportive process of measuring the effectiveness of all staff. Challenging annual objectives are set that address the school's priorities whilst also supporting the professional and career development of staff.
- Teachers are well aware of the direct link between their pay and performance, and how this is measured. Those teachers on the upper pay spine willingly undertake additional responsibilities.
- The school analyses its performance effectively and uses the information to set priorities for improvement. For example, it is currently looking into the possibilities of expanding into Post-16 education for its students to meet identified needs.
- The range of subjects and themes ensures that the needs of all students are being met. There are increased opportunities for older students to choose between academic or vocational pathways, in much the same way as they would in a mainstream school.
- The promotion of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong. In particular, the development of social skills in supporting students' abilities to get on with other people is a key aspect of their development.
- Arrangements for safeguarding students and staff are effective and meet all requirements.
- Links with parents are good and have been enhanced by the appointment of an effective family support worker. Similarly, links with other professionals are positive, the school being an active partner in the wider network of support to meet the learning and wider social and emotional needs of the students. The school also works hard to ensure that any discrimination is tackled.
- The local authority and the school work closely together in a variety of ways and the school is appreciative of the support it has received. An example would be the provision of a headteacher mentor to work alongside, and support, the acting headteacher.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body contains a range of professional expertise and skills that enables it to carry out its duties effectively and to meet all its legal duties. Governors link with individual subject teachers, coming into school to find things out for themselves so they have a clear picture of the performance of the school, the quality of teaching and what goes on in classrooms. They have a full grasp of the ways in which the performance of the school has improved since the previous inspection and they hold senior leaders to account for its performance. Funding arrangements are monitored closely and there is effective liaison between the finance governor and the school's administrator. Governors are very aware of how the pupil premium is allocated and the impact it has had in raising standards in English and mathematics. They set challenging performance targets for the headteacher, and currently for the acting headteacher, and have a clear oversight of the arrangements for basing any increasing pay for teachers firmly on their classroom performance. They also are aware of the ways in which inadequate teaching is dealt with. They are very well trained and supported by the local authority, which, for example, enables them to ensure that all safeguarding requirements are met.

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	<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 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.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	135461
Local authority	Walsall
Inspection number	431153

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	44
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Chrissie Grainger
Headteacher	Lee Cross (acting headteacher)
Date of previous school inspection	13 March 2012
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