

Elmwood School

Hamp Avenue, Bridgwater, TA6 6AP

Inspection dates

28–29 April 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Sixth form provision		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Students at the school achieve well. From their individual starting points, nearly all students make good progress.
- Staff take great care to ensure the learning needs of every student are well provided for. The subjects taught in school are carefully planned to capture students' interests.
- Students' behaviour is good. They enjoy coming to school and are keen to learn. Students help and support each other in lessons and around the school.
- Teaching is good because teachers are highly skilled at meeting students' individual learning needs. Adults check students' learning continually and use this information to help students make good progress.
- The sixth form provision is good. It provides a balanced programme of independent living skills and work-related courses.
- The school's work to keep students safe is good. All staff are regularly trained and updated in safeguarding students. Effective systems are in place to ensure the safety of students in and out of school at all times.
- Good communication channels are well established between the school and parents. Parents are very supportive of the school, saying they are confident their children are safe and well provided for. The school works closely with the wider community, other schools and local employers to provide for the learning needs of students.
- Governors and senior leaders have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. They are effective in managing the professional development of all staff to ensure teaching and learning continue to improve. They take prompt and effective action to tackle weaker teaching.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The development of students' literacy and numeracy skills is not checked by leaders closely enough through the range of subjects taught.
- Few more able Key Stage 4 students access higher level courses when they leave school and move on to the next stage of their education.
- Behaviour incidents are not analysed sufficiently well to inform leaders in how to better manage inappropriate behaviour.
- The school's safeguarding policy does not reference the most up-to-date statutory guidance for schools.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed students’ learning across the school, including four lessons which were observed jointly with members of the senior leadership team. In addition, inspectors heard students read and observed them at break and lunchtimes and when receiving individual support.
- Inspectors held discussions with the executive headteacher, senior leaders, middle leaders, teaching assistants, staff, governors and parent representatives. They also gained students’ views by meeting them informally and in discussing their work when they visited classrooms.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documents, including information on students’ progress, teachers’ planning, safeguarding policies and procedures, and the school’s self-evaluation and improvement plans.
- The views of 12 parents and carers expressed through the online questionnaire (Parent View) were analysed.
- The views of 50 staff who responded to the staff questionnaire were also considered.

Inspection team

David Edwards, Lead inspector	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Andrew Redpath	Her Majesty’s Inspector

Full report

Information about the school

- In September 2014, Elmwood became a secondary school with a sixth form.
- Elmwood shares a campus with a mainstream secondary school.
- All students have a statement of special educational needs.
- Most students are of White British heritage.
- 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 and those that are looked after by the local authority.
- Since the previous inspection, Elmwood has broadened the range of disabilities it can cater for. As well as providing for students with severe learning difficulties and profound and complex needs, the school has a growing number of students with social, emotional and mental health needs.
- The sixth form is located on a separate campus a few minutes drive away from the main school.
- Elmwood School is part of the Bridgwater Education Trust (BET) which has a focus on finding appropriate work-related learning for older students.
- The school does not make use of any alternative provision.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by ensuring:
 - middle leaders check in more detail the progress students make in developing their literacy and numeracy skills
 - senior leaders use the information gathered on students' achievements to ensure work provided for more able Key Stage 4 students will enable them to access higher level courses when they move on to the next stage of their education
 - incidents of inappropriate behaviour are regularly analysed in order to reduce further incidents and provide students with more effective support
 - the school's safeguarding policy includes the most up-to-date statutory guidance for schools.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management

are good

- Leaders and managers have secured the necessary improvements to teaching and learning that were identified at the previous inspection. The executive headteacher has successfully embedded a clear vision for improvement. The school provides an engaging and purposeful learning experience for all students that will eventually lead to them living independently and purposefully in the wider community.
 - The executive headteacher is ably supported by a dedicated team of senior and middle leaders in driving forward school improvements. Senior leaders make sure teaching and learning are consistently good by carrying out regular checks on teachers which include formal lesson observations, reviewing teachers' planning and record keeping and checking students' work in their folders.
 - Senior leaders have established an effective system to check the learning and progress students make. They ensure teachers are responsible for monitoring the progress of their students. This information is gathered regularly by senior leaders and analysed to identify successful learning and to set further targets for improvement.
 - Professional development for all staff is well planned as a result of the regular checks on staff performance and includes one-to-one coaching. This allows the school to focus on developing individual teachers' skills and provide increased support where necessary.
 - School leaders have very recently reviewed and changed the way subjects are taught in order to better provide for the wide ranging needs of students. A themed approach to learning is developing well across the school. For example, a Key Stage 4 class has adopted a Second World War theme to learning, while in class the theme is based on time travel. As a result, learning is set within a clear context and is becoming more meaningful to students. These changes allow teachers greater flexibility in the timing of lessons, which has also secured a calmer learning atmosphere throughout the school.
 - Middle leaders are new to their leadership roles. They possess secure subject knowledge and are working well together to ensure all students are provided with meaningful and engaging learning experiences. They have not had time to introduce regular checks on how well students are developing their literacy and numeracy skills across the subjects taught. Leaders acknowledge this is now a priority.
 - The school is an inclusive and harmonious community where all students are accepting of each other's differences and needs. Staff help students to show an understanding of democracy and what their rights and responsibilities in the wider society are. Students are taught about different ethnic groups and faiths and understand the need to be tolerant of other people's differences.
 - Students in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form benefit from careers guidance that is effective in helping them to make informed choices about what options are available to them as they prepare to enter the world of work or plan their next steps in education. However, the more able students in Key Stage 4 are not always provided with challenging enough programmes of work that will enable them to access higher level courses when they move on to the next stage of their education. Guidance for students includes visits and carefully chosen 'taster sessions' in a range of work-related placements.
 - Pupil premium funding is used carefully to support students' personal development. It is also used to access after-school opportunities for students that enhance their confidence and self-esteem.
 - Staff and governors have undertaken safer recruitment training. The school ensures all staff are appropriately vetted prior to their appointment to make sure they are suitable to work with students.
 - Parents speak very positively of the good communication channels established through 'key workers'. As a result, a parent who spoke with an inspector following her child's recent annual review said the transition from the primary school to Elmwood had been 'seamless'.
 - The local authority provides good support to the school. For example, local authority representatives work with teachers and senior leaders to ensure the standards of work achieved by students are challenging enough and in line with those of other special schools in the authority.
- **The governance of the school:**
- Governors have worked closely with the executive headteacher during the past two years to oversee the significant change brought about by the reorganisation of the school. Throughout this period, governors have remained focused on securing good welfare and provision for students. The number of governors has been reduced, following a review of governance. The governing body is now more efficient and effective in its work.
 - Governors are fully involved in strategic and financial planning and their decisions demonstrate expertise. They ensure the pupil premium and other funding are used effectively.
 - Communication channels with the school are well established. Governors meet regularly with senior and

middle leaders to analyse data gathered on students' learning and progress. This analysis keeps governors well informed about the quality of teaching and how this is linked to students' overall achievement.

- Governors have worked successfully with the executive headteacher to improve teaching. Governors have set clear targets for managing the performance of the executive headteacher and staff. They ensure that any pay increases are linked to competence.
- Governors are continually seeking ways to strengthen their leadership skills. Governors challenge senior leaders in order to hold the school rigorously to account; however, this is not recorded in sufficient detail in the minutes of their meetings.
- Governors participate in regular training. For example, they have recently completed training in safeguarding, including internet safety, and in promoting British values and equal opportunities.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good.
- In lessons, when moving around the school and at break times, students are polite and pleased to talk about their work and life in school with visitors.
- In lessons, students show good attitudes to learning. Most students are keen to work hard and sustain concentration. This is because teachers ensure the lessons and activities provided for students are carefully tailored to meet their individual learning needs. For example, in a Key Stage 4 English lesson where students were practising their reading skills, the teaching assistant effectively managed an incident of anxious behaviour which allowed the remaining students to continue with their learning.
- Older students are successfully supported in developing their self-confidence through independent travel training and carefully chosen work experience programmes. They also have the regular opportunity to run mini-enterprises and raise money for charities. For example, a Key Stage 3 pupil who was in charge of a break-time tuck shop was able to demonstrate his good practical mathematics skills in counting money and giving change.
- The school's work to support families, especially in managing students' behaviour, and attendance are well established. Close links with families are maintained through regular communications times with the school. Any concerns are quickly noted by staff and followed through by senior leaders.
- The school rigorously checks on the attendance of students. Any unexplained absence is always followed up. Some students' prolonged absence is for medical reasons but the overall attendance of students is in line with national expectations.
- All parents and carers who completed the online survey or spoke directly to inspectors reported that the school makes sure that students are well supported in managing their behaviour. Students also agree that behaviour is good and that 'unwanted' behaviour is rare. One pupil who spoke to an inspector summed up the views of all when he said, 'Teachers sort things out quickly.'

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good.
- Students are supported by staff to keep safe at all times.
- The school works closely with other professionals in education, health and social services and with families to make sure the school supports and meets the individual needs of all students.
- A recognised programme to help students' personal development has been successfully embedded. This is helping a small number of students who have social, emotional and mental health needs to develop and maintain good attitudes to learning.
- All students are helped to understand there are different kinds of bullying. The few students who require a highly personalised approach in order to managing their behaviour are well provided for.
- Parents are confident their children are happy to come to school and that the school is effective at keeping their children safe at all times.
- Staff and governors carry out regular checks to make sure the school is safe for all staff and students.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teachers use their good subject and specialist knowledge to provide students with learning plans that provide well for their individual needs.
- Teachers set high expectations for what students will learn in lessons and make these continually clear to them. They question students carefully to check their understanding in lessons and use students' responses effectively to support or consolidate learning. Teachers use questioning effectively to challenge the more able students.
- Learning is organised to provide students with a good balance between working in a group or individually. Teachers use modern technology expertly to enhance their teaching and sustain students' good engagement with learning. Students' work and achievements are celebrated in lively and engaging displays throughout the school.
- An example of effective support and challenge was seen in a Key Stage 3 mathematics lesson on time. In this lesson, students were learning how to estimate the time it would take to make some popcorn. Students maintained good concentration throughout this practical activity and, as a result, made good progress. Their language skills were effectively developed in this lesson as the teacher checked students' understanding of 'more' and 'less.'
- Teaching assistants are well trained and work closely with teachers to provide effective support to groups in class or individual students. Together they ensure lessons have the right amount of challenge for students. Teachers take every opportunity to celebrate the progress students make. Individualised literacy intervention is provided for students as the need is identified. Regular home learning activities are provided by teachers, which allows parents to support their children's learning. Students who read to inspectors did so with confidence.
- Teachers mark students' work regularly and provide verbal feedback on completed work. Written work is carefully recorded in students' individual folders. Teachers write supportive comments for students in line with the school's policy on marking. The information teachers gather from marking students' work is used effectively to create next steps in learning for students.

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students' social and emotional needs, as well as their academic needs, are met effectively. As a result, nearly all students make good progress in learning, including progress in developing English and mathematics skills, throughout the school.
- Leaders closely monitor the progress of those students eligible for the pupil premium. The most recent assessment data indicates these students' achievement compares favourably with that of all other students.
- Students who have profound and complex learning difficulties make particularly good progress because their teachers plan lessons carefully to provide for the exact learning needs of individual students. Teachers use the well-equipped learning environment to support students' effective learning. Adults work closely together and utilise a wide range of strategies, including sensory and physical programmes of work to ensure the progress students make, however small, is noticed, recorded and celebrated.
- The good progress of more able students is carefully monitored. Teachers plan lessons that provide opportunities for students to demonstrate higher levels of learning. Each teacher ensures any barriers that may inhibit students' learning are either reduced or removed.
- Some students transfer to a local college at the end of their time in school. Senior leaders are working closely with the college to develop and re-design courses for students in Years 10 and 11 so that they will be better prepared for their next stage of education.
- The majority of students move to the recently established sixth form provision after Year 11.

The sixth form provision is good

- The words 'Inspiring Aspirational Futures' effectively sum up the ethos and vision of the sixth form. A well-presented prospectus for the sixth form emphasises to students that they are moving onto a new more adult learning experience.
- All staff ensure a positive and safe learning environment in which students' good achievement is recognised and celebrated. The learning needs of students are wide ranging and quite complex. Many possess very low levels of attainment for their age and some have additional anxieties which can sometimes lead to

challenging behaviour.

- All staff are skilled in managing students' needs well, due to the good training they have received and the very clear policies and procedures in place within the provision.
- Any inappropriate behaviour incidents that do occur are documented, although senior leaders do not analyse information on behaviour incidents rigorously. Standards of safety are well maintained. A designated member of staff risk-assesses all community activities to ensure students are safe and well provided for. For example, information cards are carried when students are out in the community to show members of the public if any anxious behaviour occurs, which helps to allay any fears or misunderstandings.
- The post-16 curriculum supports students well. It is very appropriately planned, with its focus on developing students' independence skills and work in the community. Lessons include work-related courses such as horticulture, preparing and selling items in the community and work experience placements in local businesses.
- Staff record students' progress diligently and monitor their learning carefully. Senior leaders are working to involve students more in evaluating their own achievements through the use of information technology. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well in the sixth form. As a result, students are tolerant and inclusive of all.
- The leadership of the sixth form is good and ensures students benefit from consistently good teaching and learning. The sixth form leader has high expectations for all students. She is fully committed to securing students' independence and their personal autonomy as young adults. She ensures students and their families know the opportunities available to them when they leave school.

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	123938
Local authority	Somerset
Inspection number	462465

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Foundation special
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	87
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	19
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Purcell
Headteacher	Elizabeth Hayward
Date of previous school inspection	13–14 June 2013
Telephone number	01278456243
Fax number	01278445157
Email address	EHayward@educ.somerset.gov.uk

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