

High Elms Manor School

High Elms Lane, High Elms Manor, Watford, Hertfordshire WD25 0JX

Inspection dates

6–8 December 2016

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Pupils make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. An above-average proportion reach standards that are better than expected for their age.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are good. Staff ensure that pupils have the resources they need to learn well. The curriculum is designed to enable pupils to learn at their own pace, developing as mature learners.
- Pupils' personal development and behaviour are good. Relationships are positive between pupils and between pupils and their teachers.
- The leaders of the school are fostering a nurturing culture that enables pupils to thrive socially and emotionally. Parents are positive about the family feel of the school.
- The youngest children are well cared for. They adapt quickly to the school's routines and are eager to learn.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress because staff carefully support their learning. Staff skilfully help those who are experiencing emotional difficulties.
- The school is not yet outstanding because, in some areas of learning, staff's expectations of what pupils can achieve are too low. Staff do not direct the most able pupils promptly enough towards more challenging work. The way staff check pupils' work is not consistently effective.
- Some aspects of leadership are not developed enough. The evaluation of the quality of teaching to check its impact on pupils' progress is limited and leadership roles lack clarity.
- Parents are very positive about the school but a few gave examples of ineffective communication. Pupils and parents are not as fully involved in the life of the school as they could be.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve leadership and management by:
 - clarifying the roles and responsibilities of school leaders
 - improving the evaluation of teaching to maximise its impact on pupils' learning
 - giving pupils more opportunities to voice their opinion and contribute to improvement at the school
 - improving communication with parents and seeking their engagement in the life of the school.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by:
 - raising staff expectation of what pupils can achieve
 - ensuring that staff guide pupils promptly towards challenging work that is matched to their ability
 - making sure that pupils understand the areas in which they are not achieving well, and then helping them to improve their work.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The proprietors ensure that all the independent school standards and safety requirements are met. After the previous inspection, they improved assessment procedures and developed a better programme of personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education. Teaching and outcomes are good. The assessment and testing processes are used effectively, particularly in English and mathematics. These provide an accurate picture of pupils' progress and the standards they reach.
- Leaders have created a team of committed professionals who are positive about working at the school. Their work is centred on nurturing pupils' academic, social and emotional skills. Parents trust and admire the staff for their dedication.
- The curriculum allows pupils to develop their language, mathematical and scientific knowledge. Pupils learn about a broad range of topics and make good progress. The focus on English and mathematics, supplemented by the cultural curriculum, enables pupils to develop their personal as well as academic skills. The annual science fair brings the learning to life, although leaders acknowledge that more outings to places of interest would make the curriculum more vibrant.
- Several parents said that they had chosen this school because of its effective provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. This aspect of the school's work is well managed. Teaching assistants are deployed well to ensure that pupils access all areas of the curriculum.
- Currently, the roles of each partner in leading aspects of the school's work are unclear. The monitoring of the quality of teaching and its impact on learning are not done with sufficient depth. Appraisal meetings identify training needs but formal performance reviews do not focus enough on improving the quality of teaching, raising expectations and ensuring that all pupils reach the high standards of which they are capable across all subjects.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted effectively. The PSHE education programme enables pupils to consider the society within which they live and understand its institutions, values and rules. There are some enrichment opportunities for pupils to take part in artistic and musical events. During this inspection, pupils enjoyed the rehearsal of their end-of-year play 'Magic Box'. The youngest children were preparing their nativity play. Some aspects of the curriculum focus on exploring different faiths. This helps pupils understand how faiths differ and how they are also similar.
- Pupils come from many different cultural backgrounds and a significant number speak different languages. Pupils have a secure understanding of the different cultures in modern Britain. The school does not draw sufficiently on pupils' own knowledge and experiences to enrich the curriculum. Consequently pupils are not sufficiently encouraged to contribute to the further improvement of the school.
- Almost all parents are positive about the ethos and leadership of the school. However, the school does not communicate well with some families, and few parents are involved in the life of the school.
- The good leadership of early years means that children settle very quickly at school. The

leader in charge is knowledgeable about the requirements of the early years foundation stage. Her communication with parents is prompt and reassuring. The outdoor areas are of high quality, particularly the park and the surrounding wood. However, not enough is made of the potential offered by these attractive surroundings to improve children's learning further.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Staff demonstrate very clearly that it is everyone's responsibility to create a safe culture in the school. A comprehensive safeguarding policy is published on the school's website and meets current government requirements.
- All staff have received training relating to keeping children safe, including online safety. Staff have a clear understanding of what actions they must take where they have safeguarding concerns about a pupil. Where concerns do arise, the school works closely with the local authority and relevant agencies to support the pupils concerned.
- The designated safeguarding lead has undertaken all relevant training and has ensured that staff are aware of the signs of extremism and radicalisation. Staff understand how to report any concerns they may have should any pupil express extremist or radicalised points of view.
- The school reminds parents of their responsibilities regarding keeping their children safe. The destination of pupils who leave within the year or at the end of an academic year is checked. During this inspection procedures were refined further to ensure that pupils' destinations are tracked even when parents do not wish to inform the school, for example because of non-payment of fees. The school knows that it must contact the local authority promptly where parents appear not to have enrolled their child at a new school.
- Thorough risk assessments are conducted prior to visits and practical activities.

Governance

- The partnership, which takes the place of a governing body, is responsible for reviewing the strengths and weaknesses of the school's provision. Partners motivate staff and identify where training is required. They do this well, and day-to-day support to staff is effective.
- The use of robust and objective reviews to improve the quality of teaching and to evaluate the performance of staff is underdeveloped.
- Partners are firmly aware of their statutory obligations with regard to keeping pupils safe.
- All know the actions they must take where individuals raise safeguarding concerns.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching, including in the early years, is good. Pupils' good behaviour, their positive attitudes to learning and the constructive relationships between pupils and the adults lead to good achievement in the classroom. In English and mathematics, pupils complete their work carefully. Older pupils, in particular, concentrate on the work in hand, leading to their rapid progress.
- Teachers manage the mixed-age classes effectively and take advantage of the small class

sizes. They use questions well to probe pupils' understanding. Younger pupils learn from older ones. Pupils listen carefully to the ideas of others and work well together.

- Teachers provide materials and one-to-one support that enable pupils to develop their understanding across the full range of subjects of the curriculum. Pupils diligently choose their activities from their weekly plan. Staff supervise pupils and help them to catch up if they fall behind or if they encounter particular difficulties.
- The school is using its weekly, termly and end-of-year assessments successfully. Leaders are currently checking that assessment procedures are aligned to those of the national curriculum. Systems are being put in place to inform parents of whether their children meet or exceed national expectations. End-of-year reports to parents are comprehensive.
- In the early years, assessment of children's learning is frequent and used to plan the next steps. Speaking and listening skills are taught well. Staff guide children skilfully when they use equipment, such as a puzzle, to learn shapes, or a felt calendar to recognise days of the week, months of the year, and seasons. Often the resources lead to great excitement, discovery of new vocabulary and discovery of interesting stories, such as, in a child's own words, 'This Octonauts book is fascinating; I want to borrow it and take it home.'
- Pupils are given sufficient time to complete their research and are skilled at finding things out for themselves. For example, they were seen to be using the computers well during this inspection to devise their own games for younger children. The practical resources, used in mathematics deepen pupils' understanding and enable the most able mathematicians to solve increasingly complex problems.
- Reading and writing are strengths of the school. Teachers regularly encourage pupils to read, either from their own work or from their reading books. Those pupils who read to the inspector did so fluently, with excellent diction and tone. They demonstrated secure comprehension of what they had read. The most able readers read for pleasure frequently at school and at home. Pupils are well equipped to select the information they need from complex sources such as reference materials and the internet.
- Teachers and teaching assistants provide effective support to pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Several parents said that, since moving to this school, their children's specific needs had been identified promptly. One mother said that the school had changed her son's life for the better. The individual support for weaker readers and the immediate attention they get from an adult help them gain in confidence.
- Pupils usually make full use of learning time. In the classroom, they move without fuss from one activity to the next, although they are not doing this so well in the mixed Years 1 to 3 class. In some sessions, teachers do not sufficiently exploit the enthusiasm and ability of pupils. Although they still do well because they are self-motivated, some are not progressing when activities are not matched to their level of knowledge. In art and French, for example, the tasks given to older pupils, such as making a Christmas card or doing word searches, were well below their capability.
- The way teaching is organised suits most-able pupils well because they can proceed at a quick pace through the tasks. However, the balance between pupils' self-selection of activities and staff supervision is not quite right. At times, pupils choose tasks that are too easy for them and, in these cases, they underachieve. Staff do not intervene promptly enough to redirect pupils' choice, and expectations are too low.
- The school does not have a clear marking policy and there are inconsistencies in the way

staff check pupils' work. This means that pupils who have misconceptions do not know how to correct their errors and do better.

- The reading and spelling homework enables close partnership with parents and contributes to the good progress of less-confident readers and writers. Some parents are not happy about the homework that is set. Inspectors agree that the use of homework to extend learning could be better. Considering the above-average knowledge of most pupils, homework is not as fulfilling as it could be. Older pupils said they could do more-challenging work than that given to them.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils who spoke to the inspectors know about tolerance and acceptance of everyone, including people from different backgrounds and faiths, and those who have a disability. Pupils develop as very mature young people and their understanding of discrimination and fairness is good.
- Children in the early years are encouraged to choose their resources and activities, and to put things away when finished. As pupils progress through the school they continue to choose their activities from a broad and carefully chosen selection, and decide in which order they will tackle tasks. This leads to pupils developing into industrious and mature young people. One pupil was heard saying that it would take him a long time to do this difficult task but he would not give up.
- Pupils are very articulate and proud of their school. Their personal development is not outstanding because they have insufficient opportunities to take responsibility, apart from practical jobs, such as organising the lunch. The school is not making full use of pupils' highly reliable and sensible attitudes.
- Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education. Children in Reception are well prepared for Year 1. Older pupils do very well and have the skills they need to settle quickly into their secondary school. Almost all have developed above-average knowledge and skills.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. They are polite and courteous towards adults, for example greeting visitors and being very respectful towards their teachers. Pupils' behaviour is not exemplary because pupils tend to comply and lack the confidence required, and the opportunities, to express their own opinions. Pupils in the mixed Years 1 to 3 class are not always well disciplined. Some fidget and have to be reminded to listen to staff.
- Pupils cooperate well, sharing resources and supporting each other in their learning. At playtimes older and younger pupils play together, enjoying the opportunities that this brings. Younger pupils are not worried about joining older pupils for work or play.
- Pupils say that the school is a safe place and that there is always someone to talk to if they have any concerns. Parents agree that the school is a safe place for their children.

- Pupils say that bullying is extremely rare and that any incidents are dealt with quickly by staff. Parents who responded to Parent View, the Ofsted inspection questionnaire, agreed that this was the case. The weekly PSHE education programme enables pupils to raise any concerns they many have and also to develop strategies for resolving problems themselves.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school. Attendance is currently average and punctuality is mostly good.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Outcomes for pupils are good, especially in English and mathematics. Pupils enter the school with standards that are mostly above those typical for their age. Staff ensure that pupils overcome any barriers to learning. Pupils' good personal development contributes to their good outcomes. Outcomes are not outstanding because, in some subjects, staff do not ensure that pupils make the accelerated progress they are capable of.
- The youngest children make good progress in the early years. By the end of Reception children reach good levels of development. The current children are very settled in school. They know exactly where to find the things they need to learn and play.
- The school's performance information, such as pupils' reading ages and results in tests, indicate that pupils make good progress from their starting points. They quickly progress to levels of understanding that are mostly above, and some well above, expectations for their age in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Pupils are well prepared for further studies. The way pupils decide for themselves how to organise their work develops their study skills. The many pupils who spoke to inspectors had high aspirations. They were very clear about what their future studies might entail and they were not worried about moving to a larger school. The type of homework provided to pupils is not sufficiently reviewed to make sure that pupils are even better prepared for the demands of their secondary school.
- The school's performance information and evidence from pupils' folders, books and past work show that most-able pupils make good progress in their reading, writing and mathematics. In English, pupils use highly sophisticated vocabulary to express feelings and emotions in their imaginative extended writing. In mathematics, they solve increasingly complex problems.
- The school's own magazine, The High Elms Chronicles, shows that pupils produce written work of the highest quality, such as the writing of 'A day in Tudor times' and 'The time I won a trip into outer space'. However, across subjects, particularly in art and French, pupils underachieve. This happens when the work is not pitched at the right level or when the resources limit pupils' creativity, such as when worksheets require just single-word answers.
- Pupils develop their speaking and listening skills well. For example, when rehearsing for the school play, pupils were confident to speak in public. The youngest children clearly explained to the inspectors what they had to do in class. Despite having the ability and maturity to do so, older pupils are not expressing their own opinions or debating topical issues that matter to them often enough. In sport, pupils keep active and are physically fit. They were observed enjoying skipping and other games at lunchtime. The school also

offers a range of clubs, and participation is good. Children in the early years were very proud to say whether they could swim.

- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress in their knowledge and skills as well as in their confidence as learners. This is due to the effective support and high level of care that pupils receive from teachers and teaching assistants. Pupils were proud to read with the inspector, and they showed that they had good techniques to ease comprehension and decipher unknown words.

Early years provision

Good

- The school meets the independent schools standards in relation to early years provision.
- From a very young age, children are guided well towards the school's Montessori ethos and approach to learning. Children enter the early years provision with starting points that are broadly typical of their age. They make good progress in all areas of learning so that the proportion attaining a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year is above the national average. Children are well prepared to move on to Year 1.
- The teacher in charge of early years is taking effective action to maintain the good quality of teaching. Staff know the children well and assess carefully children's starting points in reading, writing and mathematics so that learning can progress swiftly. They then inform parents of their children's progress using the early years foundation stage framework and photographic evidence.
- Activities are interesting, challenging and accessible to all. Pupils are resilient. They do not give up even when tasks are very hard. One child struggled but succeeded in using an antique coffee grinder to make his own coffee powder. He then demonstrated excellent motor skills by carefully placing the powder in a jar. Two pupils worked well as a team to tidy up after their craft work. A strong emphasis on developing children's use of speech means that pupils communicate effectively with their friends and adults.
- The carefully considered activities help children understand how to behave at school. The precise daily routines and safe behaviour contribute to children's good personal development. Children learn how to take turns. They were seen removing their shoes very quickly at the beginning of the day so that learning could start promptly.
- Parents who spoke to the inspectors over the two days were very positive about provision in the early years. They appreciate the way they can approach staff if they have any suggestions or want to raise an issue. They value the information they receive about their children's learning and development. One mother said that the early years provision was 'fabulous'.
- Provision is not outstanding because teaching is not yet outstanding. The excellent outdoor areas, including the wood, are not used frequently enough to exploit children's innate curiosity and provide a more authentic context for them to apply their literacy, numeracy, scientific and creative skills.

School details

Unique reference number	117660
DfE registration number	919/6234
Inspection number	10012937

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Montessori primary
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	55
Number of part-time pupils	20 in the early years
Proprietor	The O'Neill Partnership
Headteacher	Sheila O'Neill
Annual fees (day pupils)	£9,000 – reception £10,500 – Years 1 to 3 £11,400 – Years 4 to 6
Telephone number	01923 681103
Website	www.highelmsmanorschool.com
Email address	admin@highelmsmanorschool.com
Date of previous inspection	17–18 May 2011

Information about this school

- High Elms Manor is a small independent primary school in Watford.
- It provides full-time and part-time education, and before-school and after-school care.
- This is a small family-run school. The headteacher is also the proprietor of the school, which opened in 1991. The school does not have a governing body. The O'Neill partnership, composed of the headteacher and three partners, runs the school.
- The school has four distinct parts:
 - The Nest provides full-time and part-time care for children under the age of three. This setting was inspected separately in November 2015 and judged to be good.

- The early years foundation stage, also known as Little Elms, caters for children aged from 3 to 5 years who attend full time or part time. There are 22 children in this class, and 21 are in government-funded places.
- The lower elementary class (High Elms 1) for pupils in Years 1 to 3.
- The upper elementary class (High Elms 2) is for Years 4 to 6.
- Some pupils have emotional or special educational needs.
- No pupil has a statement of special educational needs.
- There are too few disadvantaged pupils to report on their progress.
- The school was previously inspected in May 2011.
- The school follows the Montessori ethos and teaching methods. Its stated aims are 'to provide each child with an individual learning experience'. The curriculum is designed to nurture independence and self-confidence.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out with a day's notice.
- The inspectors visited all classes and observed staff teaching or supporting pupils.
- The inspectors looked at a wide range of pupils' work, including their journals, their individual achievement folders, and photographic evidence. The inspectors heard many pupils read and observed other pupils being heard reading.
- Meetings were held with partnership members and class teachers.
- Eight staff completed the Ofsted inspection questionnaire.
- Pupils were spoken to throughout the inspection to check on their views.
- The inspectors met parents at the beginning of the school day and took account of the views expressed in 19 responses from parents on Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. The lead inspector received seven additional comments from parents, and two letters.
- The inspector looked at the school's documentation including policy documents, schemes of work, staff training files and records relating to the welfare, health and safety of pupils. The school's compliance with the regulations for independent schools was checked.

Inspection team

Marianick Ellender-Gelé, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Vanessa Love

Ofsted Inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Raising concerns and making a complaint about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-ofsted. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Parent View

You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk, or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/ofsted.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2017