

Elm Tree Community Primary School

Elmers Wood Road, Tanhouse, Skelmersdale, Lancashire WN8 6SA

Inspection dates

26–27 September 2017

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- The headteacher’s outstanding leadership ensures that pupils are at the heart of all that the school does.
- Believing in children is the watchword of leaders and staff. As a result, pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs thrive.
- Governors are passionate about the school and make a valuable contribution to school improvement.
- Pupils who attend Elm Tree have often struggled in their previous schools. Now all pupils are successful learners and the vast majority make outstanding progress from their starting points.
- Assessment is used well by teachers in lessons to match activities precisely to pupils’ learning needs. This, together with strong, positive relationships and lots of praise and encouragement, ensures that pupils have an excellent attitude to learning.
- Pupils are offered a rich, broad and balanced curriculum. Physical education is particularly well taught. Pupils love this subject.
- The exceptional enrichment curriculum provides pupils with opportunities to participate in activities that they may not otherwise be able to experience. It is instrumental in building pupils’ confidence, self-belief and social skills.
- The school is often innovative in its approach to working with pupils who have social, emotional and mental health needs. For example, assessing pupils’ speech and language abilities and then building their skills up in this area has been instrumental in ensuring that pupils are ready to learn.
- Behaviour is outstanding. Pupils conduct themselves well around school and work hard to manage their own behaviour.
- Pupils’ successful personal development and good welfare are central to the work of the school. Pupils benefit from a range of therapeutic support strategies such as play therapy, massage and counselling.
- Pupils feel very safe in school and parents agree.
- The school’s outreach service has been instrumental in reducing the numbers of primary pupils excluded in the local authority.
- Sometimes the most able pupils are not challenged enough. At times they miss out on opportunities to think through mathematical problems and find answers for themselves.
- Occasionally, the end-of-year targets set for pupils are too aspirational and so it wrongly appears that some pupils do less well than they should.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve further the quality of teaching and learning in mathematics, by ensuring that teachers extend and challenge the most able pupils by maximising opportunities for pupils to think through problems and work out how to solve them by themselves.
- Review pupils' targets to ensure that they are aspirational but also realistic.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- The dynamic leadership of the headteacher and his resolve to provide the very best for all pupils has led Elm Tree Community Primary School to being an outstanding place to learn. Leaders are passionate and determined to make a positive difference to pupils' lives. Together with the whole staff team they remove barriers to learning and create a nurturing environment where pupils feel secure and can thrive.
- The school motto 'Believe to Achieve' captures the school's uncompromising belief in each individual pupil. The school fosters values of equality and diversity which in turn ensure that pupils develop the capacity to be caring, considerate, respectful and tolerant of each other and of others in the wider community.
- Leaders have gained the respect of all. They have secured the commitment of staff, parents and pupils. This contributes to the positive motivation of all staff and the determination for continual improvement. The school benefits from a happy and dedicated team of staff and relationships are very strong. Staff are unanimous in saying that they feel proud to work at Elm Tree. They feel very well supported and consider the school to be extremely well led and managed.
- Senior leaders' knowledge of the school is thorough. The strengths and areas for improvement are identified accurately and are reflected in a comprehensive school development plan. There is a schedule of regular checks on the quality of teaching and learning. Staff are encouraged to contribute to developing the school. Many are involved in innovative approaches that further their understanding and ability to support pupils. For example, staff are enthusiastic about an initiative designed to rebuild some of the aspects of social and emotional development that pupils have missed out on or are underdeveloped in. As a member of staff explained, 'restoring these building blocks is life-changing for some of our children'.
- Curriculum leaders are enthusiastic and hard-working. They monitor pupils' progress across the school and are strong contributors to ongoing school improvement. They are given regular opportunities to develop their areas of responsibility by going into classrooms, talking to staff and looking at pupils' workbooks.
- The school has a very robust system in place to collect assessment information. It is used very effectively to assess all aspects of each individual learner's needs, including their speech and language acquisition. The information gathered allows leaders to analyse pupils' learning very precisely. Leaders and staff use the assessment information they collect constantly and methodically to update their knowledge of pupils' progress and to plan the next steps in pupils' learning. As a result, staff know pupils extremely well and use this information to deliver pertinent learning opportunities for each individual pupil.
- The school has high expectations of pupils and targets are set and reviewed regularly to check that pupils are on track. Occasionally these targets are too aspirational and so it appears some pupils have not done as well as they should. Inspection evidence confirms that these pupils, despite not reaching the target set, do make exceptional progress from their individual starting points.

- The school offers an exciting, broad and balanced curriculum that is fun and engaging for pupils. Physical education (PE) is a particular strength. Pupils benefit from the skilful teaching of a variety of sports that also emphasises the development of a range of other skills such as listening, communicating, personal space, cooperation and teamwork. Pupils thoroughly enjoy these sessions. Pupils exclaiming, 'PE is the best thing ever' is a typical sentiment.
- The school's enrichment curriculum is exceptional. It is rightly seen as making a significant contribution to developing pupils' self-belief, confidence, personal development and life skills. All pupils have the opportunity to experience outdoor residential experiences every year, older pupils visit London and attend the theatre. At other times, pupils walk, rock climb, cycle, kayak, gorge walk and abseil. Pupils also benefit from the school's own woodland area, where pupils have the opportunity to experience outdoor crafts. One pupil commented, 'It's fantastic, we make toast and melt marshmallows on a fire that we built.'
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is threaded through all the school's activities. Consequently the school provides a calm, considerate and thoughtful environment where pupils mix together happily. Pupils are actively involved in the school community, which contributes to developing and promoting the school's own core values alongside British values. For example, pupils are proud to be elected as members of the school council or as prefects. Through assemblies and the curriculum, including the teaching of life skills, pupils learn about the wider community, raise funds for charities and learn about tolerance of and respect for differences and the rule of law.
- Pupil premium funding is used very effectively to reduce any barriers to learning that may be experienced by disadvantaged pupils. It is particularly well used to ensure that pupils are able to benefit from activities and areas of the curriculum that they might not otherwise be able to access. The progress of pupils supported by this funding is monitored rigorously. The impact of pupil premium funding is evaluated carefully by the headteacher and governors. This enables disadvantaged pupils to be successful and to be part of everything the school has to offer.
- The primary school PE and sport funding is used creatively to provide pupils with a range of sporting and physical activities and in particular the full range of excellent enrichment activities that are available to pupils.
- Leaders use additional funding for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities extremely effectively to provide additional staffing and resources to successfully support pupils' individual needs. For example, the curriculum is further enhanced by a suite of therapies that all pupils engage in, such as speech and language therapy, play therapy and massage. These activities range in purpose from building up pupils' communication skills to helping pupils develop healthy social interactions and trust. The therapy team make an invaluable contribution not only to pupils' social and emotional development but also to pupils' readiness to learn.
- The school and local authority have a positive and mutually supportive relationship. The school's excellent practice in working with pupils with social, emotional and mental health issues is highly valued by the local authority and has been influential in determining local strategies. The school runs a highly successful outreach service to support and advise mainstream schools on social, emotional and mental health issues.

They currently successfully work with 53 schools. As a result of this work, exclusions in the West Lancashire area have reduced to zero. The school plays a full part within a network of local mainstream and special schools and a larger regional group of special schools for pupils who have social, emotional and mental health needs.

Governance of the school

- Governors are effective and make an important contribution to raising standards in the school.
- Governors know their school extremely well. They have the skills and confidence to ask challenging questions. Governors are confident to be involved in all aspects of the school's development and in the monitoring of improvement.
- Governors have a good understanding of performance management procedures and, as well as holding teachers and leaders to account, they ensure that the management of teachers' pay is effective.
- Governors are conscientious and take part in relevant training on good governance practice and understanding school assessment. As a result, governors have good levels of understanding about the progress that pupils are making. They also make sure that any additional funding is spent effectively and makes a difference to pupils.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Safeguarding is a high priority in school. Leaders have ensured that pupils have a very safe and secure environment by effectively promoting the message that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. Safeguarding arrangements and security checks on staff are meticulous, and records are robust and secure. Staff and governors undertake regular and appropriate training, including that related to keeping pupils safe from radicalisation and extremism.
- A dedicated team of staff including a pupil and family support manager oversee the care and welfare of vulnerable pupils and families. They offer excellent support and are highly valued.
- Leaders are persistent in cases where the school is concerned for a pupil's welfare. Highly effective relationships with other agencies, and with parents, ensure that pupils are kept safe and their welfare needs are met.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- Teaching and learning at Elm Tree is outstanding because adults very effectively ensure that barriers to learning are broken down. This enables pupils to learn and achieve their best. The combination of teachers' thorough knowledge of pupils, the regular, detailed use of assessment information and the ability to deliver relevant and exciting learning experiences for pupils is a recipe for success.
- The teaching at Elm Tree is characterised by exceptionally friendly, warm relationships between staff and pupils. Teachers' subject knowledge is strong, both in terms of their

understanding of the new national curriculum and the specialist knowledge they have of working with pupils whose needs are often complex. Resources are thoughtfully prepared and always to hand so that no time is wasted. The extremely well-organised lessons balance the needs of the different ages and abilities of pupils within each class very effectively. For example, in a mixed Year 2 and Year 3 class, some pupils were enjoying recognising the first letter sound in a simple word and posting the letter in the correct pot, while others in the same class could write independent sentences using nouns and adjectives.

- Teachers and teaching assistants work extremely well together, bringing a consistency of approach and expectation to pupils. Their deep knowledge of pupils' next steps in learning, coupled with the strong trusting relationships they develop with pupils, makes sure that pupils feel secure enough to learn and to get the most out of learning experiences and activities.
- Teachers and teaching assistants' behaviour management strategies are a strength. They skilfully use regular praise and encouragement to engender a positive sense of self-worth and a 'can-do' attitude to work in pupils. Where needed, they deftly use distraction to nip off-task behaviour in the bud and quickly get pupils back on track. For example, adults' 'banter' with pupils is used effectively to divert pupils if they are initially finding a task difficult. This friendly approach soon puts pupils at their ease and then swiftly re-engages them back to the activity in hand.
- Teachers check on pupils' learning regularly. The whole staff team are very confident in using the school's assessment system. They do so with great effect. Adults' constant check of individual pupils' understanding makes an important contribution to the strong progress that pupils make because it is focused very precisely on what individual pupils need and their next steps in learning. Pupils are encouraged to talk through their learning in lessons and at points in the year they sit down with an adult and talk through their achievements and successes.
- Developing pupils' reading, writing, and mathematical skills is a high priority in school. Pupils are helped to read through very good phonics teaching and opportunities to access an intensive phonics programme if they need to catch up. Pupils say that they enjoy reading and that they are encouraged to read by their teacher. All pupils are expected to learn to join up their handwriting and they are supported according to their wide range of abilities to develop their writing skills. Many pupils struggle with developing imaginative ideas for story-writing, but helpful resources provide pupils with useful ideas to get them started. Mathematics lessons are popular with pupils and are well resourced so that pupils have plenty of opportunity to learn mathematical concepts such as addition and subtraction in a practical way.
- However, occasionally the most able pupils are not challenged enough in mathematics. This is because sometimes teachers miss opportunities to deepen pupils' learning. For example, if pupils are clearly able to answer questions correctly within a lesson, they are not immediately encouraged to move on to ones that are more difficult. Also, occasionally, in problem-solving activities adults support the most able pupils too much. This does not encourage pupils to think through problems and work out what they need to do to solve them by themselves.
- Most parents who responded to Parent View or spoke to the inspector felt that their children were taught well. A large majority of parents felt that the quality of

information given to them about their children's learning was valuable and of a good quality. Leaders are aware that some parents would like more opportunities to find out about their children's learning. Leaders have already planned to double the number of parents' evenings and coffee mornings available to parents this academic year.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. This is because pupils' personal development, welfare and life skills are considered the key to unlocking pupils' potential. Teachers' and other adults' deep knowledge of pupils and the strong relationships that they build ensure that the school provides a safe, nurturing environment in which pupils can thrive and succeed.
- Staff treat pupils with the utmost consideration and ensure that the school makes everyone feel welcome and valued. Staff also radiate a sense of fun and energy. Adults constantly model respectful and caring behaviour in the way they engage with pupils. As a result, pupils are happy, calm and behave with a similar enjoyment for life.
- Every aspect of pupils' welfare is considered and every opportunity is taken to ensure that pupils are provided with a calm environment that promotes pupils' readiness to learn. This extends to the journey into school. Leaders have taken over the responsibility of transporting pupils to and from school from the local authority. Teaching assistants act as escorts so that there is a familiar and friendly face receiving pupils and families every morning. Parents are able to share any overnight issues with staff in the knowledge that this will be accurately and quickly reported to school staff. Consequently, pupils are more likely to have a stress-free, positive start to their day.
- Most parents spoken to by inspectors and those that responded to Parent View expressed praise for the school and the work of the staff. Parents felt that their children were safe, happy and well looked after. A number of parents were keen to say that their children were thriving. They put this down to the staff's skills at nurturing and building confidence, but say that this is also because staff are dedicated to do the best for all of the pupils. 'My child has gone from being a misunderstood, angry, hater of school to a bubbly, happy child who can't wait to go to school and learn' is a typical sentiment.
- The vast majority of pupils are confident, enthusiastic learners. Pupils told inspectors that they liked their school very much. As a pupil said, 'I like this school in more ways than I can say.' They feel that they are very well looked after by adults who are 'kind' and 'always help you learn'. Pupils were unanimous in their view that they felt safe in school and described it as an 'amazing', 'positive' and 'happy' place to be.
- Good-quality transition is considered an essential element of ensuring that pupils and families feel well prepared for the next steps in education. Time is spent ensuring that each individual pupil, and family, has a positive experience and feels welcomed when they join the school. Pupils are confident and self-assured when moving on to secondary education.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. The vast majority of pupils conduct themselves extremely well around school and consequently it is a calm, relaxed place to be. Pupils who need it are taught how to regulate their own behaviour. Many of them do this very well. For example, when pupils are starting to get anxious within a lesson and cannot settle, they can indicate to an adult that they need a 'sensory break'. In a short time, the pupils rejoin the class calmer and eager to learn. This exemplifies the school's central belief that pupils can learn to take control of their behaviour and so break down barriers to learning.
- Many pupils are aware of how to behave and cannot wait to collect rewards for good behaviour such as making appropriate choices, hard work and 'good listening'. The school's records show that incidents of inappropriate behaviour do occur, but are infrequent. This, in part, is due to the expertise of adults to support pupils with their behaviour and to get pupils back on task quickly and without incident.
- Pupils' attitude to learning is of a high standard. Pupils try their utmost to engage in lessons. Their attention and interest is skilfully captured by the adults supporting them. Around school, in the dining area and outside in the playground, pupils respond extremely well to the consistent, well-established routines that are upheld by all adults. The open spaces inside and outside of school have been thoughtfully designed to ensure that pupils do not feel anxious. For example, each day pupils sign up to the activity that they would like to do at lunchtime. This might be football, exploring the woodland area, games or going on a walk. Every pupil is allocated to an activity that is supported by an adult. In this way, pupils that sometimes find it difficult to play independently or with purpose are supported to make the most of their playtimes. As activities are spread out around the school grounds, pupils have more space and flashpoints for inappropriate behaviour or clashes of personality are avoided.
- Attendance is currently above that of other pupils nationally in special schools. The systems for monitoring absence are meticulous and robust. The pupil and family support manager provides excellent liaison between families, the school and professionals that can offer support to those that need it. Good attendance is rewarded and has a high profile in school. Persistent absence is well below that of other pupils nationally in special schools. These figures have greatly improved since the school has managed the transportation of pupils to school each morning. On the odd occasion when assistance is needed to persuade a pupil to get out of bed, teaching assistants, in their role as escorts, are experts at cajoling a pupil into school. Occasionally some pupils and families struggle with attendance. These are picked up quickly by leaders, who work hard with this group of pupils and their parents to get them back on track.

Outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

- From starting points that are often well below average, outcomes are outstanding for the vast majority of pupils. Leaders have comprehensive systems to measure pupils' progress and outcomes. This includes academic progress, their social and emotional development and also their language and communication skills. These assessments are

used extremely well to create a detailed, highly effective learning plan for each individual pupil.

- The school's tracking and end-of-year outcomes show that all groups of pupils made at least good progress and that the vast majority, regardless of their specific need, made outstanding progress over time. This includes the separate groups of pupils who have social, emotional and mental health needs and those who have autistic spectrum conditions. This is confirmed by evidence in pupils' workbooks.
- The most able pupils make at least good progress in English and mathematics. Evidence in their writing and mathematics books indicates that they access and are expected to work toward the same expectations as their non-special school peers. In mathematics depending on their abilities they might work out perimeters or angles and multiply and divide numbers. Nonetheless, leaders recognise that there is more work that could be done to ensure that the most able pupils are challenged further in this subject. In writing, pupils are expected to join up their handwriting, plan their writing and write increasingly complex sentences. For example, Year 4 and Year 5 pupils were asked to think of their own imaginative sentences with time connectives such as 'meanwhile' and 'suddenly'. Pupils are well supported to develop their phonic knowledge and to practise their reading skills. They are encouraged to read at regular opportunities.
- From their individual starting points, disadvantaged pupils make similar progress to their peers because of the quality of support they receive.
- Outcomes are assessed in all subjects, indicating that pupils make strong progress across the curriculum, including, for example, in science, history, PE and personal development. Pupils' outcomes in social, emotional development and speaking, language and communication are also meticulously recorded. This contributes to a holistic understanding of each pupil and enables teachers to track every aspect of pupils' learning in detail. This strategy ensures that most pupils benefit from a highly personalised approach which helps them to achieve to the best of their ability.
- Assessment information feeds into a review of pupils' targets and individual education plans each half term. This ensures that plans are responsive to every indication of progress and the next steps in learning can be planned for promptly. At the end of the year, this information culminates in a school report that covers every aspect of each pupil's achievement.

School details

Unique reference number	135457
Local authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	10001128

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	5 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	69
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Elizabeth Hodgson
Headteacher	David Lamb
Telephone number	01695 50924
Website	www.elmtree.lancs.sch.uk
Email address	head@elmtree.lancs.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	7–8 November 2012

Information about this school

- The school provides education for pupils with social, emotional and mental health difficulties, many of whom have additional needs such as autistic spectrum condition.
- The school serves west Lancashire. The school provides its own escorted transport and this is how most pupils arrive and leave school each day.
- The vast majority of pupils have an education, health and care plan or statement of special educational needs.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage and the proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is low.
- Boys considerably outnumber girls.
- The proportion of pupils on roll identified as disadvantaged is well above the national average.

- The school offers an outreach service that supports a large number of local primary schools with advice and guidance around pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in classes. They observed pupils' behaviour in classrooms and assessed the school's promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Inspectors also observed pupils in the playground and during lunchtimes.
- Inspectors looked at the work in pupils' books and in their assessment files.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, assistant headteacher, curriculum leaders and the person responsible for safeguarding checks. They also spoke to the school's speech and language therapist, pupil and family support manager and school councillor.
- An inspector met with representatives of the governing body, including the chair. She also met with a representative from the local authority.
- A small group of pupils discussed their opinions about the school and their learning with an inspector, and inspectors also spoke informally with pupils in the playground and around school.
- Inspectors took account of the 30 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.
- They also took account of the seven responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. An inspector met briefly with a few parents in school and took into consideration parents' views expressed in a questionnaire collected by the school.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a number of documents, including: minutes from meetings of the governing body; information on pupils' progress; the school's evaluation of its own performance and its development plan. Behaviour and attendance records and information relating to safeguarding were also scrutinised.

Inspection team

Sue Eastwood, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Jon Ashley

Ofsted Inspector

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