

Elmtree Infant and Nursery School

Elmtree Hill, Chesham, Buckinghamshire HP5 2PA

Inspection dates

14–15 November 2017

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| 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 | Requires improvement |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher's commitment, hard work and vision have been effective in stabilising and securing improvement to a school that had been in decline.
- As a result of good teaching, pupils are now making good progress. Teachers plan tasks that interest pupils and help them to learn well.
- From starting points that are below those typical for their age, pupils make good progress. The proportion of pupils who meet the expected standard at the end of key stage 1 is similar to the national average.
- Pupils' behaviour is good. Pupils are polite and respectful and have positive attitudes to learning. Relationships are positive, and the school is a happy and purposeful environment for learning.
- Pupils are very well cared for and there is a strong culture of safeguarding. Leaders ensure that safeguarding procedures are robust.
- Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. The excellent partnership with parents is a strength of the school.
- Although attendance remains below the national average, this is improving. Leaders are, rightly, giving this aspect of their work even greater attention.
- Children in the early years get off to a good start. Well-planned, interesting activities harness children's natural curiosity.
- In 2017, the proportion of pupils who achieved the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check was below the national average. Current pupils are making good progress in phonics.
- Disadvantaged pupils are making good progress. The gap between these pupils' achievement and that of other pupils is beginning to close, although currently these pupils do not attain as well as others.
- Due to relatively recent changes in leadership, senior leaders hold too many individual responsibilities. As a result, some aspects of the school's work, such as evaluation and plans for improvement, have received less attention than they should. These areas currently lack rigour.
- Teachers sometimes do not move learning on quickly enough for middle-attaining pupils, or pose questions which sufficiently challenge all pupils.
- Until recently the school's assessment system did not provide accurate information to enable teachers and leaders to have a clear enough understanding of pupils' progress. This has now improved.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen teaching and learning by ensuring that teachers ask questions and set tasks that challenge all pupils, especially middle-attaining pupils.
- Improve outcomes for pupils by ensuring that:
 - disadvantaged pupils make rapid progress so that more of them achieve the expected standards and reach a greater depth of learning
 - pupils continue to make good progress in phonics so that the proportion who achieve the expected standard is at least in line with the national average.
- Strengthen the leadership and management of the school by:
 - implementing governors' plans to increase leadership capacity to ensure that there is no loss of momentum and that improvements are sustained
 - continuing to embed the school's new assessment system so that leaders and teachers have a sharper oversight of how well pupils are learning
 - improving leaders' evaluations and improvement plans so that governors and leaders can evaluate the impact of their actions and have clear, measurable milestones and targets for further improvement.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Since her appointment, the headteacher has brought stability and improved many aspects of the school's work. As a result, teaching and outcomes for pupils have improved. There is now a strong sense of teamwork. Staff, governors and leaders have a shared vision and commitment for the school to continue on its journey of improvement.
- Subject leaders contribute well to the school. They are knowledgeable about their subjects and provide good guidance to other staff, for example by leading training and staff development. Their good-quality action plans set out how they plan to secure further improvement.
- The tracking of pupils' progress has improved. The headteacher's half-termly progress reviews provide for leaders meeting regularly with teachers to check if pupils are on track to achieve their targets. In addition, there are now closer checks on how well pupils are acquiring their phonics knowledge. Gaps in pupils' understanding are now quickly identified and addressed. Through measures such as these, together with an improved assessment system, leaders are holding teachers to account for pupils' progress.
- The headteacher has an accurate understanding of the strengths of the school and where further improvements are needed. She has acted swiftly to put plans in place to improve the lower-than-expected outcomes in the Year 1 phonics screening check in 2017. However, while the headteacher has identified the right priorities, improvement plans are not sufficiently rigorous. For example, these do not include clear milestones and targets so that leaders and governors can check the progress and impact of their plans.
- The curriculum is appropriately broad and balanced and enables pupils to learn about interesting topics across many different subjects. For example, topics such as 'space' capture pupils' interest and help them to learn about the different planets and historical events such as the first moon landing. Pupils' learning is enhanced by attending lunchtime and after-school activities such as art, singing and the 'eco' club. Visits to places of interest, for instance pupils' recent visit to Windsor Castle, contribute to their learning and enjoyment.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is suitably catered for. The school's values are woven through many aspects of the school's work so that pupils learn about respect and tolerance. The curriculum also prepares pupils appropriately for life in modern Britain by giving them opportunities to learn about other faiths and cultural traditions. Pupils learn that other people may have different opinions and that everyone is unique. As one pupil explained, 'Being different makes you special.'
- Leaders make effective use of the additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils. Most of this funding is used to provide extra support for pupils during lessons. However, while funding is being used appropriately and helping pupils to make good progress, leaders acknowledge that their evaluations of the impact of this funding lack rigour.

- The inclusion leader ensures that funding for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities is used wisely. She works effectively with pupils, parents and a wide range of external agencies to make sure that pupils receive the right support to meet their needs. All pupils, including those in the additional resourced provision, are supported effectively in class.
- Leaders make good use of sports funding, the majority of which is used for membership of the local 'sports partnership'. This allows pupils to benefit from taking part in many sports festivals and competitions, developing both their physical skills and teamwork. Additional training is helping leaders and other staff to develop their skills and increase opportunities for pupils to be more active during lunchtimes. Leaders are, rightly, very proud of the award of their recent Silver Youth Sports Trust Mark in recognition of the quality of the school's provision for physical education.
- The good support from the local authority and consultant headteacher has helped the headteacher manage the many changes that needed to be made at the school. Incisive, good-quality, external reviews of the school's work have kept governors well informed of the school's performance.
- The school's strong partnership with parents is a notable strength. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. They appreciate the good communication and the way their children are treated as individuals. As one parent commented, 'Staff make my child seem special.'

Governance of the school

- Governance has improved since the school was last inspected. There are now clearer roles and a new committee structure so that governors can fulfil their responsibilities effectively. Governors' planned programme of visits to the school helps them to have a good understanding of leaders' work and pupils' learning. Governors also actively seek parents' and pupils' views and take these into account when making decisions.
- Information from the school's new assessment system has given governors a better understanding of pupils' learning. This means that they can now provide greater challenge and hold leaders to account more fully for pupils' progress. In previous years performance management arrangements were not sufficiently robust. Governors recognised this shortcoming and have taken steps to remedy this situation. They now have more reliable information to inform their decisions regarding teachers' pay awards.
- Governors are currently reviewing the leadership structure of the school as they recognise that the headteacher and other senior leaders are currently 'carrying' multiple responsibilities. Their plans to increase leadership capacity will ensure that responsibilities can be spread more widely so that the hard-earned improvements to the school are sustained.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Pupils' well-being and safety are at the centre of the school's work. Staff know pupils and their families very well. They are alert to any concerns and enlist early help to support pupils and their families. When

appropriate, concerns are referred on to outside agencies. The school works tirelessly with families to make sure that they receive all the support they need to keep their children safe. Parents are unanimous in their views that their children feel safe at school.

- Through their regular training, staff and leaders have a very good knowledge of safeguarding procedures. Leaders maintain good-quality records and continually seek to improve their practice, for example by adjusting the start-of-day arrangements.
- Governors visit the school regularly to check safeguarding arrangements. They meet with pupils to find out how safe they feel in school, and to verify the recruitment checks for new staff along with other school policies.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching has improved since the last inspection and is now good. Teachers have established a very positive climate for learning. They value and care for all pupils and encourage them to do their best. Established classroom routines mean that transitions between activities are swift and seamless.
- Teachers plan lessons which interest and engage pupils. For example, during the week of the inspection, pupils were inspired to write after watching a short video clip about the first moon landing. Pupils enjoyed writing an application letter for the job of an astronaut, and some of them wrote a profile of Neil Armstrong's life.
- A strong feature of teaching is the extent to which they follow the school's marking policy, providing good-quality feedback to pupils. Teachers tell pupils how well they have tackled their tasks and let them know how to improve their work. The consistency of this practice is evident in pupils' good understanding of their teachers' comments. As one pupil explained, 'Teachers tell us the good bits we did, mistakes we made and what to do next.'
- Good phonics teaching enables pupils to make good progress in their early reading. Teachers regularly check pupils' phonic knowledge and adapt their plans to address any gaps in their learning. Regular opportunities to read in class mean that pupils can practise and apply their skills.
- Teachers explain things carefully to pupils and generally pitch learning activities at the right level for most pupils. However, sometimes middle-attaining pupils are not moved on as quickly as they could be, and at times teachers' questions do not deepen pupils' learning sufficiently.
- Teachers provide plenty of opportunities for pupils to write for different purposes. They set out a range of different writing tools to support pupils when they are writing, including word banks, key phrases and other prompts. Adults encourage pupils to develop good learning habits, such as making sure that they read back their writing to check that it makes sense. Teachers and support staff routinely help pupils to rephrase their responses in order to extend their sentences and vocabulary.
- Teachers give appropriate focus and opportunity for pupils to develop their understanding of number and calculation skills. Typically, pupils learn and practise their skills, such as addition, and then apply these skills to solve problems. Teachers also provide a higher level of challenge for the most able pupils so that they can extend

their learning.

- Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are supported well and benefit from additional help from teaching assistants. Teachers and other adults break tasks into smaller, manageable steps to help pupils learn and build their confidence.
- Teachers keep parents well informed about their children's day-to-day activities and learning. Parents appreciate this good communication and value the way teachers are always there to welcome them in the morning. Teachers' good-quality end-of-year reports give parents a very good overview of their children's achievements.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Staff provide good-quality care and support for all pupils, and attend well to their social and emotional needs. Parents greatly value this aspect of the school's work.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school, and try their best. The school's emphasis on promoting equality develops pupils' understanding of and respect for each other, regardless of their differences. Pupils enjoy representing their class and having the chance to share their views about the school by being on the school council.
- Pupils learn about the qualities needed to be a good friend, and reflect on their own feelings. They learn the importance of helping others through their involvement in charitable events. Recently, pupils donated food and enjoyed helping to deliver harvest hampers to residents in the local community.
- Pupils feel safe and well supported at school. They are completely confident that if they ever have a worry, they can speak to an adult in school. Pupils have a good understanding of how to stay safe online, for example by not sharing photographs or other personal information. The school's website sets out good-quality guidance for parents about internet safety and other aspects of safeguarding, including materials from the NSPCC.
- A good range of equipment and organised activities during playtimes enable pupils to be physically active and to keep fit. They learn about healthy eating and the importance of keeping their teeth clean.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils have very positive attitudes to learning and take pride in their achievements. They show respect, courtesy and consideration for each other, and the school is a happy, purposeful and calm environment for learning. Pupils respond promptly to instructions, for example by lining up beautifully when the whistle is sounded for the end of lunchtime. Pupils' hard work, positive behaviour and good achievements are celebrated in the 'well done' assemblies.
- Pupils show resilience and adaptability. For example, during the week of the inspection a number of classes were being taught in different parts of the school, due to recent flood damage. The transition to these new arrangements was seamless, and pupils

settled with ease and confidence into their new routines.

- In the previous year, pupils' attendance was below the national average, and absence was higher for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. School leaders are working hard to reduce this, and the impact of their good work can be seen in improved attendance rates for this school year. Pupils' punctuality has also improved through leaders' and governors' good work with members of the local community. Nevertheless, leaders are right to be giving this aspect of their work even greater attention.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Over the past two years pupils' achievement has improved and outcomes are now good. In 2017, the proportion of pupils who achieved the expected standards at the end of key stage 1 was close to the national average. A greater proportion of the most able pupils achieved the higher standard, and outcomes for these pupils were similar to the national average. Ambitious targets and milestones have been agreed for pupils' outcomes to ensure that there is no loss of momentum.
- Current pupils are making good progress. Improved teaching and greater consistency of approach are leading to better outcomes for pupils in reading, writing and mathematics. While overall progress is good, sometimes middle-attaining pupils do not make as much progress as they could because their learning is not moved on quickly enough. In addition, at times, pupils' work and responses to tasks are not as full or considered as they could be because teachers' questions are not sufficiently challenging.
- Good phonics teaching is ensuring that pupils are acquiring the skills they need to become fluent, confident readers. Although the proportion of pupils who met the expected standard in the 2017 phonics screening check was below the national average, current pupils are achieving well. The school's improved close tracking of pupils' skills means that any gaps in pupils' knowledge are quickly identified and addressed.
- Pupils develop their writing through the plentiful opportunities they have to write for different purposes. They write at greater length, use more varied sentences and acquire a wider range of vocabulary. Some of the most able pupils' work shows a great sense of the reader they are writing for. In a piece of imaginative and persuasive writing one pupil wrote: 'Mars is full of wonderful creatures like beautiful butterflies. You will never forget this adventure.' In mathematics, pupils develop their fluency of calculation and knowledge of number facts and apply these skills when solving mathematical problems.
- Disadvantaged pupils are making good progress. However, many do not attain as well as other pupils, and very few are working at the higher standard. Although the gap between these pupils' attainment and that of other pupils is beginning to close, the gap is not yet closing quickly enough. Leaders acknowledge that in order for this gap in achievement to diminish further, disadvantaged pupils need to make rapid progress.
- In 2017 a much higher proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) achieved the expected standard at the end of key stage 1. However

none of these pupils achieved the higher standard. Current EAL pupils in key stage 1 are making good progress.

- Good support for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is enabling them to make good progress. Individual plans and targeted support help these pupils to make steady gains in their learning.
- Pupils make good progress in science through a wide variety of topics such as living things, materials and the human body. In history they learn about historical and meaningful events such as Remembrance Day and about important people in history such as Guy Fawkes. Pupils sing with enthusiasm and enjoyment. In music they develop their listening and oral skills, accurately repeating rhythms and vocal patterns.
- Leaders work closely with colleagues from the junior school so that when pupils leave Elmtree, they are well prepared to make a confident, happy start at their new school.

Early years provision

Good

- Children in the early years get off to a happy and successful start to school. Excellent nurture and care enable these very young children to settle confidently into the day-to-day life of nursery and school.
- The proportion of children who achieve the expected 'good level of development' has risen significantly from the very low standards in 2014. In 2017 the proportion of children who achieved a 'good level of development' was just below the national average. Leaders are continuing to focus on raising standards, and have improved provision for children's writing as last year this aspect of children's learning was relatively weaker.
- From starting points below those typical for their age, children make good progress and achieve well. Disadvantaged children are making the same progress as others with similar starting points. Children who have SEN and/or disabilities also make good progress, as do children whose first language is not English. The most able children achieve well, and the proportion of pupils who exceed the early learning goals is rising.
- Teaching is good and teachers plan activities which capture children's interest and spark their imagination. During the week of the inspection children were inspired to become builders, enjoying wearing their safety helmets and busily pretending to paint the walls and hammer things together.
- The early years environment is attractive and inviting and encourages children's independence. Teachers' careful planning makes sure that all areas of learning are covered and there is a suitable balance of adult-led and child-initiated learning. Good phonics teaching enables children to get off to a good start with their early reading skills.
- Adults are responsive and intuitive and listen carefully to children. Most adults are adept at extending children's learning through timely prompts and questions. However, at times, some adults do not question or move on children's learning quite so well. Leaders are aware of this and have training in place to strengthen adults' skills.
- Adults often join in as enthusiastic participants in children's pretend play, enriching their play and language. For example, in the nursery, an adult helped children to add

adjectives such as 'crunchy' to describe their pretend food.

- Children behave sensibly and play happily together. Most sustain attention and quickly become engrossed in their play. They confidently speak to visitors, explaining what they are doing and sharing their achievements. One child delighted in telling visitors how wonderfully he had helped to tidy up the outside area, exclaiming, 'I've tidied up all of the leaves.' Other children showed great concentration in their experiment to see how long it took for their sponge balls to descend the 'giant run' into the bucket.
- Leadership of the early years is good. The headteacher has led many improvements to this part of the school. Very good transition arrangements, including home visits and visits to pre-schools, mean that children make a confident start in nursery and school.
- Children's learning is suitably tracked through the school's 'learning journeys'. Parents make a good contribution to children's learning journeys by completing 'wow moments' which capture children's achievements out of school. Partnership with parents is very strong and parents are delighted with their children's experiences in the early years. As one parent commented, 'My children are thriving, happy and love coming to school.'
- Children's settled and positive start in the early years, coupled with good transition arrangements, means that they are well prepared for Year 1.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 110309 |
| Local authority | Buckinghamshire |
| Inspection number | 10024503 |

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

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| Type of school | Infant |
| School category | Community |
| Age range of pupils | 3 to 7 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 212 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Sue Gotley |
| Headteacher | Nicola Kent |
| Telephone number | 01494 771474 |
| Website | www.elmtreeschoolandnursery.co.uk |
| Email address | office@elmtree.bucks.sch.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 3–4 March 2015 |

Information about this school

- Elmtree is a larger than average-sized infant school. There are two classes in each year group. The early years consists of two Reception classes and a Nursery class. Most children in the Nursery attend either mornings or afternoons, although some children attend full time.
- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is above the national average. The school has an additional resourced provision for up to eight pupils who have speech, language and communication difficulties.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is below the national average.
- Approximately half of the pupils are of White British heritage. The remaining pupils are from diverse ethnic backgrounds, with the largest proportion being of Pakistani heritage. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is well above the national average.
- The headteacher was appointed to the school as the deputy headteacher in September

2015. When the previous headteacher left the school in February 2016 she became acting headteacher for half of the week and an interim executive headteacher from Chestnut Lane School was appointed to the school for the other half of the week. This school-to-school support arrangement was in place until September 2017, when the acting headteacher was appointed to the full-time substantive post.

- Since the previous inspection there have been some changes of staff and changes to the governing body, including a new chair of governors.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in all classes, mostly accompanied by a senior leader.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher and other leaders. Meetings were also held with a representative from the local authority and the headteacher from the support school.
- The lead inspector held meetings with the chair of governors and three other members of the governing body.
- Inspectors listened to pupils read, looked at pupils' work in books and discussed pupils' progress and learning with leaders.
- Inspectors held meetings with pupils in Years 1 and 2 and spoke to them in classes and on the playground during lunchtime and breaktime.
- Inspectors took account of the views of parents through discussions before school and the 82 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and the 82 free-text responses.
- The views of staff were gathered through discussions with them and 30 responses to the staff survey.
- Inspectors checked a wide range of records and documents relating to safeguarding, behaviour and attendance, and the recruitment checks made on the suitability of staff to work with children. Inspectors also reviewed other school documents, including governors' minutes and visits to the school, policies, improvement plans, performance management information, and leaders' evaluations of teaching and learning.

Inspection team

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Her Majesty's Inspector

Susannah Rolfe

Ofsted Inspector

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