

Elm Tree Primary School

Ranworth Avenue, Lowestoft, Suffolk NR33 9HN

Inspection dates

2–3 October 2018

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Early years provision	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Teaching, while improving, is not consistently good. Some staff do not share the high expectations of others. Some class teachers do not plan work which meets pupils' needs.
- Trustees have not acted soon enough to secure improvements. They have been too reliant on information provided to them by previous leaders.
- Pupils in previous years have not achieved well enough and it is only recently that leaders have ensured that pupils have begun to make better progress.
- Disadvantaged pupils make similarly slow progress. Additional funding provided is not having sufficient impact in strengthening progress.
- Pupils do not demonstrate consistently positive attitudes to learning.
- Some middle leaders are still developing their roles. Consequently, they are not playing enough part in securing improvements in teaching and learning.
- Attendance is lower than is found nationally. A significant proportion of pupils are absent too frequently and so do not make good progress.
- Systems for ensuring that pupils make progress across the wider curriculum are new. Consequently, teachers cannot judge the progress pupils make in subjects such as history and geography.
- Provision for children in early years is not sufficiently well tailored to children's needs and stage of development. Inaccurate assessments of children's progress result in tasks that lack challenge.

The school has the following strengths

- Current leaders are rigorous in checking all aspects of the provision and so have a secure knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Improvement planning is beginning to raise the quality of teaching and learning and accelerate pupils' progress.
- The majority of parents and carers have confidence in the school because leaders have worked with them to explain changes that have taken place.
- Leaders have established stability in staffing and created a strong team culture. They are ambitious for pupils.
- The broad and interesting curriculum is enhanced by trips, sporting activities and clubs. Pupils' spiritual, moral social and cultural development is promoted well.
- The inclusion of pupils with specific special educational needs is managed very effectively.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching and learning by ensuring that teachers:
 - have equally high expectations in all classes and across all subjects
 - provide more finely-tuned support and greater challenge for those who need it
 - plan lessons which maintain pupils' interest and engagement
 - follow school systems and procedures designed to improve teaching and learning.
- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - trustees are more rigorous in holding leaders to account for pupils' achievement, including for the use of pupil premium funding
 - middle leaders more consistently play their role in checking the quality of teaching and learning and implementing effective plans for improvement
 - plans for improvement are embedded and so secure better outcomes for pupils, and particularly for disadvantaged pupils.
- Improve pupil outcomes by ensuring that:
 - leaders draw on the expertise which is in school and across the three partner schools to develop teachers' skills further
 - attendance improves, so that pupils can learn and make good progress
 - the curriculum is further developed and refined to ensure that pupils make good progress across all subjects.
- Improve early years by ensuring that:
 - assessment information is accurate and used to plan tasks which more closely match children's needs and abilities
 - tasks are more interesting and enticing for children, both inside and outdoors
 - adults use their knowledge of children's needs to support children in independent play more effectively
 - leadership of early years is strengthened so that provision improves, and children make stronger progress from their starting points.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- The school has experienced many changes in staffing since becoming an academy. Until the appointment of the current executive principal in January 2018, leaders, including trustees, had worked too slowly to improve the school. Since her appointment, the executive principal has significantly accelerated the rate of improvement, but many aspects of the school still require improvement.
- The quality of teaching and learning is too variable across the school. Leaders have made new appointments and provide training and in-school support for teachers. They regularly check on the quality of teaching and provide advice to teachers. However, teaching is not yet consistently good. Leaders have not made enough use of the effective skills of specialist staff based at the school to help improve teaching.
- Leaders have not ensured that pupils make consistently good progress over time and too many pupils leave the school at the end of Year 6 below the standard expected for their age. Progress is improving due to improvements to teaching, but remains inconsistent.
- Some middle leaders do not fulfil their roles well enough. Consequently, they are not playing sufficient part in improving teaching and learning. By contrast, some middle leaders are more effective. For example, the leadership of mathematics has improved teachers' knowledge of how to teach mathematics effectively. This is evident in the work that pupils are doing in lessons and the work in their books.
- Leaders have implemented a curriculum plan to ensure that pupils' learning is broad and covers all areas of the national curriculum. The curriculum is enhanced by trips such as to Framlingham castle and to the sea-side, as well as school clubs such as construction club.
- Pupils enjoy a wide range of sporting activities, which are provided through the good use of the sports premium. These include taking part in activities such as archery and hockey and attending inter-school tournaments. However, systems for ensuring progression through the curriculum are at an early stage and yet to be fully implemented.
- The committed and loyal staff team is determined to continue to improve the school. The executive principal, together with the increasingly effective head of school, have implemented many changes to school systems and set high expectations of all staff.
- Leaders promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Leaders and staff ensure that pupils learn about the wider world and about treating people with respect; they learn about values in assembly and British values such as democracy and justice. Consequently, pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Leaders are firmly committed to including all pupils. Those pupils who are part of the specialist resource units on site for speech and language and hearing impairment are included in classes wherever appropriate to do so. Care is taken to ensure that these pupils develop their social skills by joining other pupils at playtimes and lunchtimes. As a result, these pupils feel included as members of Elm Tree School.

Governance of the school

- Trustees have not worked swiftly enough to address weaknesses identified by the predecessor school's inspection. This is because systems for checking the accuracy of information provided by leaders were not robust enough. Better systems are now in place to ensure that trustees know more accurately where improvements have taken place or are needed, and can hold leaders to account for pupil outcomes. However, it is too soon to judge the effectiveness of these systems.
- Trustees had not held previous leaders to account sufficiently for the use of pupil premium funding. They have only recently identified that this funding has had insufficient impact in improving the progress of disadvantaged pupils. Trustees have now completed a review of pupil premium funding and drawn up plans to improve its use. These are yet to be implemented, and it is too early to judge their effectiveness.
- Trustees are now providing good support for leaders through, for example, regular school improvement visits, providing advisers for English and mathematics, and support for assessment. This is increasing the school's capacity for further improvement.
- Governors are committed and increasingly able to provide the correct balance of challenge and support for leaders. For example, they question leaders about variations in pupils' outcomes and steps taken to address these. Governors have a good range of skills and expertise which are being further developed with support from the trust.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders have established a strong culture of safeguarding across the school. Adults know their responsibilities in terms of spotting and reporting any concerns. Leaders take effective action in response to concerns raised. They are tenacious in following up these concerns to ensure that external agencies take appropriate action. Concerns forms show that staff know what to look for that may indicate a child is at risk of harm. Staff training is carried out regularly to ensure that staff have up-to-date knowledge of the latest safeguarding requirements and advice.
- Pupils know how to keep themselves safe including when online. They know what information they should and should not share, because this is taught as part of computing lessons. Pupils say that school is a safe place. Most parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire agree that their child is safe in school. Pupils say there is always a grown-up to speak to if they are worried or upset.
- All statutory requirements for checking staff appointments are carried out appropriately.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is too variable across the school. While in some classes teaching is strong and pupils make strong progress, in others this is not the case.

- Lesson observations, leaders' checks on teaching over time and pupils' work show that some teachers' expectations are not as high as they should be. Some teachers do not provide work which challenges pupils sufficiently or insist that pupils produce work to the standard that they are capable of.
- In some classes, assessment is not used sharply enough when planning and providing tasks. Some most-able pupils are given work which is too easy for them and not moved onto more challenging tasks when they are ready for this. Some pupils are not given sufficient support to enable them to complete tasks and make progress in their learning.
- In some classes, time is not used well and learning time is lost as pupils wait while others get ready or while teachers provide overly long explanations which pupils do not need to start their tasks. This slows down their progress.
- Some teachers are inconsistent in implementing agreed school procedures and systems which have been devised to improve the quality of teaching and learning. For example, mathematics practice sessions, designed to be sharp and focused, sometimes go on too long and lack a clear purpose.
- Pupil groupings are sometimes not well thought out. In some classes, pupils are grouped together who disturb each other and slow learning. Where pupils are taken out to separate groups, this is sometimes very effective, such as the Year 6 mathematics groups, but not consistently so. Sometimes, pupils are disadvantaged by small group support because they miss the more effective teaching provided by their class teachers.
- The teaching of phonics is effective and pupils are developing their knowledge of sounds. They are able to use these in their early reading. Good links are made between reading of sounds and pupils' writing. However, this good start is not built on as pupils progress through the school. Some pupils in key stage 2 who struggle with reading are not given sufficiently tailored support. Many pupils in key stage 2 misspell common words that they should be able to spell accurately. This is because spelling is not taught effectively as pupils move into key stage 2.
- Subject specific skills such as how to carry out a fair test in science and how to find out about an event in history are taught well in some classes, which enables pupils to make good progress in these aspects of learning.
- Teachers use the wider curriculum effectively in many classes to provide opportunities to practise writing skills. However, currently teachers do not refine curriculum plans well enough to meet pupils' varying needs in subjects such as history and geography.
- Some additional adults provide effective support which helps pupils learn. They ask questions to probe learning and help pupils understand tasks by rephrasing questions and reshaping tasks. However, in some classes additional adults are less effective. Sometimes adults complete tasks for pupils instead of helping pupils to be more independent in their learning.
- Where teaching is effective, pupils are well motivated and keen to do their best. They rise to the high expectations set by their teachers and produce work of a good standard. In these classes, teachers make good links to pupils' prior learning, for

example encouraging them to look back at previous work and use this to help them as they tackle new challenges.

- Effective questioning is used in some classes, challenging pupils to 'prove it' in mathematics or explain how they know about a character in reading lessons.
- The teaching of mathematics is increasingly effective. Teachers are helping pupils to develop their reasoning skills, explaining their methods and are using pictorial representation to help pupils gain a deeper understanding of mathematics. Teaching in the specialist units is effective. Staff know individual pupils' needs exceptionally well and work as teams effectively to plan work which meets their needs. They liaise with teachers when planning for periods when these pupils will be in mainstream classes. However, teachers in mainstream classes do not have opportunities to utilise specialist staff skills to improve provision in their classes for other pupils who have special needs.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning vary according to the quality of teaching they receive. Most pupils are enthusiastic about their learning. However, where teaching is less effective and teachers' expectations are not high enough, some pupils do not show positive attitudes to learning and do not complete work to the standard they are capable of.
- Most pupils in the school are sensible and show respect for adults and each other. A small minority of pupils sometimes forget their manners when speaking to adults or are unkind to others in their class.
- Pupils said that they feel safe in the school. They are confident that adults will help them if they are hurt or upset. Relationships between adults and pupils are strong; adults and pupils enjoy talking together in lessons and around the school. The school's pastoral support workers provide effective support for individuals and their parents.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral social and cultural development is promoted well. Pupils told inspectors that they enjoy working together in lessons and outside. They are given opportunities to take on responsibility, such as being part of school council. Pupils take part in community and fund-raising events for charities and participate in sports competitions with local schools. As a result, most pupils develop into well-rounded individuals who are responsible and care for each other.
- Pupils know what bullying is and is not. They say that, when bullying occasionally occurs, staff are quick to deal with it and do so effectively. Despite this, some parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire remain concerned about bullying in school. Inspectors did not find evidence to support this view.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.

- Pupils generally conduct themselves well in lessons and around the school, occasionally pupils lose interest in lessons and misbehave, disturbing their own learning and the learning of others.
- Attendance at the school is lower than is found nationally and the proportion of pupils persistently absent higher than nationally. Leaders have begun to work with parents to address absence, and improvements are beginning to be evident. However too many pupils are still absent too frequently, including a large proportion of disadvantaged pupils.
- The school is a calm and orderly place and teachers celebrate pupils' work by displaying this on the many well-presented display boards. Also evident around the school are many reminders about the expectations of pupils to try their best and show resilience when learning is tricky. Pupils start the school day sensibly, quickly settling to the morning work provided by their teachers. As a result, pupils start lessons ready to learn.
- Pupils know the systems for addressing poor behaviour through warnings and sanctions and say these are helping to improve behaviour at the school further.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- From exceptionally low outcomes in 2016, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 6 in 2018 has increased. However, it remains below national averages and a sizable number of pupils left the school in 2018 below the standard expected for their age. Current Year 6 pupils are, however, making good progress in reading, writing and mathematics due to effective teaching.
- At the end of Year 2 in 2018, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in reading and mathematics was lower than national averages. In writing, the proportion was closer to national averages than in reading or mathematics. Consequently, a number of pupils started Year 3 without the necessary skills, knowledge and understanding to equip them for the key stage 2 curriculum.
- In other year groups, pupils' outcomes at the end of 2018 were mixed. The gaps in pupils' knowledge resulting from previous weak teaching has meant that many pupils are working below the standard expected for their age.
- Current pupils in the school are making variable progress in reading, writing and mathematics, in line with the quality of teaching they are receiving. This is also the case for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. In some classes, progress is strong and work in books already shows this.
- Progress in mathematics is stronger than in writing in most classes. However, not all teachers have high expectations and, in some classes, teachers' use of assessment is not sufficiently sharp to enable them to move pupils' learning on appropriately. As a result, progress is uneven.
- The most able pupils are often not challenged sufficiently, because teachers do not swiftly identify when they are ready to move on in their learning. Some teachers do not

expect enough of less able pupils. They are given tasks that are too basic, rather than support to enable them to take on greater challenges.

- In subjects other than English and mathematics, pupils also make variable progress. In some classes and subjects, progress is slowed because work does not meet the varying needs of pupils. Teachers are not able to check pupils' progress through the curriculum because systems for this are only just being implemented.
- The proportion of pupils who reached the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics assessment in 2018 increased to match the national average. This is because the teaching of phonics is now well planned and carefully structured.
- Pupils in the specialist units make good progress in relation to their individual needs, because teaching is well matched to these needs.

Early years provision

Requires improvement

- Most children start early years with skills typical for their age. However, leaders underestimate children's capabilities and so do not plan tasks which challenge children and ensure that they make the progress they are capable of making.
- The proportion of children who reached a good level of development at the end of 2018 was only slightly lower than that found nationally. However, for some of these children, progress was not as strong as it should have been given their starting points. This was also the case for disadvantaged pupils.
- The early years environment lacks inspiration, particularly the outside area. While there are a range of activities provided for children, few of these are really enticing to draw them in. As a result, some children flit from task to task and do not persevere in their learning. A new outside area is being developed, but is not yet ready.
- Staff do not use assessment well enough to plan for children's needs. They focus on the provision, planning for the areas of the classroom rather than for the children.
- Leadership of the early years is not sufficiently robust to ensure that improvements are identified and addressed swiftly to improve provision. A new early years leader is in place and additional support is being provided to support leadership. There are signs that this is beginning to improve the provision.
- The early years provision is safe, and appropriately qualified adults take good care of children's needs. They establish some routines quickly. However, some adults do not remind children about their expectations, such as tidying up equipment they have used, or taking care not to step on equipment when playing outside.
- Some adults support children's learning well. They model language and ask questions which make children think. However, sometimes adults are too focused on individual pupils with whom they are working and opportunities to intervene in children's play to move learning on are not taken.
- Parents spoken to during the inspection said that their child settled well into the Reception classes. Transition is managed well, with opportunities for children to come into school prior to starting.

- Children are sociable and have settled well into the Reception classes. Children are keen to speak with adults and many already show good skills in speaking and listening and in counting.
- Children develop their writing skills well in early years. They develop increasing pencil control and fluency in letter formation. They begin to use their knowledge of sounds in their writing.

School details

Unique reference number	142580
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	10056472

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	356
Appropriate authority	The board of trustees
Chair	Mark Jeffries
Executive principal	Lynsey Holzer
Telephone number	01502 562930
Website	www.elmtreeprimaryacademy.co.uk
Email address	office@elmtreeprimary.suffolk.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Elm Tree Primary School converted to academy status in January 2016 and became part of the Evolution Trust multi-academy trust. When its predecessor school Elm Tree Community Primary School was last inspected by Ofsted in March 2015, it was judged to be inadequate.
- The executive principal joined the school in January 2018. The school shares its executive principal with two other schools within the trust.
- The school is larger than the average found nationally.
- The majority of pupils are of White British background.
- The proportion of pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals is similar to that found nationally.

- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is lower than average. The proportion who are supported by an education, health and care plan is above average.
- The school hosts two specialist resource units managed and staffed by Suffolk local authority: a speech and language unit and a unit for pupils with hearing impairment. The pupils at the unit are all on the school roll, so are part of Elm Tree Primary School.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed lessons in all classes, some with senior leaders.
- Inspectors looked at pupils' books, school assessment information, leaders' evaluation of teaching and learning, and a range of school documents.
- Inspectors spoke with a small number of parents, took account of 43 responses to the Ofsted questionnaire Parent View, and met with some pupils from Years 4, 5 and 6.
- Inspectors listened to a small number of pupils read.
- Inspectors spoke with three members of the governing body and two members of the academy trust, with senior leaders and with some middle leaders.
- Policies and procedures for the safeguarding of pupils were examined, including mandatory checks made during the recruitment of new staff.

Inspection team

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