

26 March 2019

Mrs Helen Farnell  
Executive Headteacher  
Elmwood School  
Hamp Avenue  
Bridgwater  
Somerset  
TA6 6AP

Dear Mrs Farnell

### **Short inspection of Elmwood School**

Following my visit to the school on 14 March 2019 with Kath Powell, Ofsted Inspector, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in April 2015.

### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. Since your appointment in September 2016, you have overseen significant changes to improve the quality of education that Elmwood School provides.

The number of pupils on roll has continued to grow. There are now 88 pupils on roll, with more waiting to join. Many new members of staff have joined the school, including three new senior leaders and several teaching assistants. Shortly after starting at the school, you reorganised the middle leadership roles, defining their roles and responsibilities clearly and appointing staff to these posts. Appointing leaders for English and mathematics has allowed a greater focus on the quality of teaching in these areas and monitoring pupils' progress. This was an area identified at the previous inspection as needing further work.

Pupils continue to benefit from individualised programmes which ensure that they make strong progress in their personal, social and emotional development alongside their academic studies. As a staff team, you have overhauled the curriculum to create clear pathways for pupils. In part, this addressed another of the areas for improvement from the inspection in 2015. Consequently, pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are very strong. They are keen to work independently whenever possible.

## **Safeguarding is effective.**

The school's work to keep pupils safe is a strength of the school. Leaders provide a comprehensive package of training on specific risks that pupils may face which supports staff well in carrying out their duties to protect pupils and students in the sixth form. Staff are vigilant to the indicators of harm and follow the school's procedures when they spot any signs, no matter how small. This allows leaders to identify trends and patterns and engage other agencies at an early opportunity. When leaders are not satisfied with the response from the local authority or other agencies, leaders are timely in escalating their concerns to managers and senior officials.

Leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Staff responsible for the recruitment of staff ensure that the required checks are completed in good time for potential new members of staff. Consequently, leaders and governors have confidence that applicants are suitable to work with pupils.

## **Inspection findings**

- The overhaul of the curriculum in the last few years has resulted in clear pathways that encompass the needs of pupils and match their specific needs well. You have also broadened the extent of pupils' studies and improved the quality of the teaching of computing, online safety, relationships and sex education, and personal, social and health education. Pupils and students in the sixth form are industrious, especially when they are involved in enterprise projects, including running a pop-up shop in Bridgwater from time to time. The multi-sensory curriculum is having a marked impact on improving the skills of pupils with the most severe and complex special educational needs. You have ensured that there is sufficient flexibility in the pathways so that pupils can make good progress or receive additional support as is necessary in their individual cases.
- Leaders have ensured that the 16 to 19 study programme requirements are met for students in the sixth form. These students benefit from a wide range of activities that prepare them well for independent living. For example, several are involved in preparing lunches daily for other students. Work experience is used effectively to develop students' understanding of the world of work and many students make meaningful contributions to their workplace and are valued members of staff.
- Although the school is a hive of activity and pupils and sixth-form students develop emotionally and socially well, their understanding of much of their learning is shallow. Across the curriculum, there is a lack of cohesion between the activities that pupils complete and the development of their understanding. This is limiting the progress that they make in some of their academic learning.
- A few parents, who responded to Ofsted's questionnaire, commented that they do not receive enough information about their child's progress. Consequently, parents are not always well informed about what their children know, understand

and can do when making decisions for their children.

- Teaching staff show a consistent approach to the teaching of mathematics in key stage 3, which is building pupils' mathematical skills well, especially for those with low starting points. However, for the most able there are too few opportunities for pupils to apply their learning and solve problems. This is stronger in key stage 4 and for some students in the sixth form. In English, pupils who are not following the multi-sensory curriculum, are able to talk confidently about their work. Their written work is not as strong. It is, however, presented well and feedback given by teaching staff is used by pupils to improve their work. In the sixth form, planning gives too little attention to developing students' literacy and numeracy skills.
- Disadvantaged pupils make progress in line with, and sometimes better than, their classmates. For the majority, this represents good progress. Additional funding is used to ensure that disadvantaged pupils are well prepared to face the day, for example through the provision of a breakfast. Governors ensure that funding is carefully tracked and receive information about pupils' progress from leaders and external advisers which gives them confidence that funding is used appropriately and is improving outcomes. Disadvantaged pupils' behaviour is improving, incidents are reducing and the severity decreasing. Leaders actively monitor a wide range of information about trends and patterns in behaviour. This leads to training for staff.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teaching across the curriculum develops pupils' understanding in English and mathematics
- the level of challenge for the most able pupils is suitably demanding
- the quality of pupils' writing improves, particularly in key stage 3
- parents have a clear understanding about their child's learning, abilities and aptitudes.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Somerset. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Iain Freeland  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, we observed learning in classrooms, reviewed pupils' work and spoke with pupils about their learning at both of the school's sites. We were accompanied by leaders in these activities. Meetings were held with you, senior leaders, middle leaders and two governors. I also met with a senior officer of the local authority.

We scrutinised a wide range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plan, pupil premium plans, behaviour and attendance analyses and safeguarding records. I considered the views of nine parents who responded to Parent View and the responses to Ofsted's online questionnaires of three pupils and 31 members of staff.