

Inspection of a good school: The Elmgreen School

Elmcourt Road, Tulse Hill, London SE27 9BZ

Inspection dates:

14–15 January 2020

Outcome

The Elmgreen School continues to be a good school.

However, inspectors have some concerns that standards may be declining, as set out below.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils like their school and enjoy coming here. They enthusiastically embrace the 'Elmgreen Way'. This encourages pupils to care for and respect each other. Parents and carers praise how leaders promote a strong sense of community.

Pupils know that staff care about them and want them to do well. However, some pupils have gaps in their knowledge, particularly in science and mathematics. Over time, teaching in these subjects has not enabled pupils to remember what they learn. Pupils do not achieve as well as they should.

Pupils take part in many experiences to support their preparation for life in modern Britain. They learn about the importance of democracy and equality. Pupils also receive lots of helpful advice about what they can do when they leave school. Pupils appreciate this guidance. They also like the rich range of extra-curricular activities, such as clubs for sports and the arts.

Pupils feel safe. Bullying or discrimination are not tolerated. Staff deal quickly with any incidents and make sure that they do not reoccur. Many pupils, particularly older pupils, are committed to their learning and take pride in their achievements. However, not all pupils' attitudes are positive. In some lessons, low-level disruption undermines how well pupils learn.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders and staff want all pupils to succeed. They make sure that pupils enjoy learning a broad range of subjects. However, leaders' work has not ensured that pupils achieve well enough in all subjects. This includes in their GCSE examinations. Leaders have begun to identify and address the reasons for this. They are raising teachers' expectations of what

pupils should know and be able to do. Leaders' actions have had some success. However, more work is needed to ensure that all subjects are planned and taught effectively.

In English, computing and geography, leaders have thought carefully about what pupils need to learn. However, this is not the case in science, where leaders have not thought enough about which content pupils should study. They have also not decided when teaching should introduce pupils to new ideas. Planning overlooks the importance of providing pupils with opportunities to revisit key concepts. Some Year 10 and 11 pupils have gaps in their scientific understanding.

Some teaching focuses on helping pupils to remember what they have been taught. Pupils complete tasks designed to deepen their understanding over time. This is not consistent, particularly in science and mathematics. In some science lessons, for example, resources and activities do not sufficiently match what teachers expect pupils to learn. Sometimes, tasks do not take account of what pupils already know. This hinders pupils from developing their scientific understanding effectively. In mathematics, too, teachers sometimes do not explain ideas and concepts clearly. This leads to pupils developing misconceptions.

Pupils like reading, but many told us that they do not read widely. This limits their vocabulary development, both in English and in other subjects. Sometimes pupils make repeated errors with the spelling of important words and teaching does not always ensure that pupils' mistakes are addressed.

A high proportion of pupils choose to continue their education at the sixth form. They value the care and guidance which teachers provide. Students' learning in the sixth form is planned carefully. Teachers have strong subject knowledge. They use their expertise to plan series of lessons which develop and deepen students' understanding. As a result, pupils learn well and achieve highly. Leaders encourage students to be ambitious about the next stage of their education. Many obtain places at the universities of their choice.

Leaders have high expectations for pupils' behaviour. Sometimes teachers do not apply these expectations consistently. In some classrooms, particularly in Years 7, 8 and 9, pupils distract others and do not settle down to work quickly. Pupils told us that low-level disruption occurs frequently and gets in the way of them learning.

Leaders make sure pupils have many opportunities to support their wider development. Pupils value learning about relevant topics. Examples include healthy relationships and rights and responsibilities. Pupils also like participating in projects designed to develop leadership and self-confidence. Many spoke proudly about achieving the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. They also appreciate how the school council gives them a voice in school life.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are well supported. This includes pupils who attend the resourced provisions. Staff are acutely aware of these pupils' barriers to learning. They make sure that they practise and revisit the knowledge they find particularly difficult. This helps pupils with SEND to approach their learning with confidence.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and governors work closely together to make sure that arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff are well trained. They are fully aware of risks to pupils' well-being and the signs they need to watch out for. Staff know what to do if they have concerns. Leaders work well with external agencies to promote pupils' welfare. Effective systems are in place to deal with pupils who may be at risk of going missing in education.

Pupils learn how to keep safe through a well-planned programme of assemblies and activities during tutor time. Pupils told us that there is always an adult available to talk to about their concerns.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Pupils' learning in some subjects, particularly science, is not sufficiently well planned and sequenced. Teachers lack enough guidance on which knowledge pupils should learn and remember. Pupils do not study important content in sufficient depth. Leaders should make sure that all subject planning includes clear information on the knowledge, understanding and skills pupils should develop. Leaders should also make sure that pupils learn content in a logical order and build well on what they already know or can do.
- Some teachers do not use subject planning effectively, particularly in Years 7 to 9. This means that pupils do not study important content or study it in enough depth. Pupils lack opportunities to revisit concepts they find hard or learn from their mistakes.
- Leaders should develop teachers' expertise in using subject plans so that all pupils achieve well.
- Not enough pupils read widely. This prevents pupils from acquiring and using a wide range of vocabulary to support their learning, both in English and in other subjects.
- Leaders and staff should make developing pupils' reading a priority. They should ensure that pupils read high-quality texts during lessons and encourage pupils to read for pleasure.
- In Years 7 to 9, pupils' attitudes to learning are not always as positive as they should be. Sometimes pupils disrupt lessons and do not focus on the work teachers set. This gets in the way of their learning and that of their classmates. Leaders should ensure that staff understand and follow policies for promoting high standards of behaviour.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good school or non-exempt outstanding school. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find some evidence that the school could now be better than good or that standards may be declining, then the next

inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will convert the section 8 inspection to a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the predecessor school, The Elmgreen School, to be good on 13–14 November 2013.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	144309
Local authority	Lambeth
Inspection number	10121645
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,106
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	200
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Dr Michael Brady
Headteacher	Dominic Bergin
Website	http://www.the-elmgreen-school.org.uk/
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected as an academy

Information about this school

- The Elmgreen School was the first school in England to be set up by parents. The school converted to become an academy school on 1 May 2017. When its predecessor school, The Elmgreen School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good overall. The school is now part of the Great North Wood Education Trust, formed in May 2017.
- The school has two specially resourced provisions for pupils with SEND. One provision caters for up to 15 pupils with hearing impairments. The other provision caters for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs.
- The school uses the following alternative provision: Croydon African Caribbean Family Organisation UK (CACFCO UK) Education Centre.

Information about this inspection

- We held meetings with the headteacher and senior leaders as well as teaching and support staff. We spoke to groups of pupils from all year groups about their learning and the wider life of the school.
- We met with leaders to evaluate safeguarding arrangements. We also looked at records related to safeguarding, including the checks leaders carry out on staff's suitability to work with pupils. We spoke with teachers about their understanding of safeguarding and how to report concerns.
- We did deep dives in English, mathematics, science, geography and computing. We met with leaders and discussed subject planning. We visited lessons, looked at pupils' work and spoke with pupils and teachers. We also looked at the quality of pupils' learning in other subjects, including in history, media and art and design.
- We met with members of the governing body, including the chair of governors. We also met the chief executive officer from the multi-academy trust.
- We considered the views of the 37 staff who responded to Ofsted's online survey.
- We took into account the views of the 131 responses to Ofsted's Parent View survey.
- We talked with pupils informally about the school and took account of 108 responses to Ofsted's survey for pupils. We also observed pupils at break and at lunchtimes.

Inspection team

Anne Hudson, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Terry Millar	Ofsted Inspector
Sophie Cavanagh	Ofsted Inspector

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