

Inspection of a good school: Elms School

Elms Vale Road, Dover, Kent CT17 9PS

Inspection dates:

13 and 14 March 2023

Outcome

Elms School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Leaders and staff have established a positive and purposeful atmosphere in the school. The school day starts with breakfast, an opportunity to catch up with friends and teachers and physical activities for those who need to move around after their journey to school. This helps pupils to settle and sets the tone for the rest of the day. Pupils understand that they are in school to learn. They want to do well, and they work hard. Some pupils find it hard to meet new people. However, all those who spoke with inspectors did so sensibly, despite some of the challenges they face.

Staff build strong and trusting relationships with their pupils. Pupils know that they can rely on them to keep them safe, and they feel that adults are fair. They know how they are expected to behave, and most follow the rules. However, some pupils struggle to behave well and have found recent changes in staff particularly unsettling. Adults provide skilful support when this is the case. Recent improvements in behaviour management procedures are helping too. For example, pupils told inspectors that they like some of the new things in school, such as the sensory rooms, which help them to feel calm and secure.

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

The school's broad curriculum is well designed. It provides a firm framework for teaching and clear progression in pupils' learning across a range of subjects. Teachers assess pupils' learning continuously, adapting what they teach with care so that all pupils learn well. The older pupils study nationally accredited courses, such as functional skills and GCSEs. Subjects such as art, food technology and design technology make a strong contribution to pupils' enjoyment of school, as well as equipping them with secure knowledge for future education and employment and valuable life skills. During the inspection, for instance, some of the older pupils skilfully prepared a tasty meal, while others worked on high-quality ceramic and design technology projects.

Leaders aim to ensure that all pupils can read. The teaching of phonics is a well established part of the school's curriculum. Adults are knowledgeable about teaching reading and do so confidently. They choose engaging texts to use in lessons and design

interesting activities which motivate pupils to learn. Pupils are rightly pleased with the progress that they have made in their reading. Some of the youngest were keen to show off their reading during the inspection. Their growing confidence in reading is clear, as they become increasingly willing to have a go at reading more complex words. However, some of the older readers find reading hard and are not making the progress that they could. Leaders know that support for older readers needs to be strengthened. They have already chosen a programme which will be introduced in the coming months.

Classrooms are calm and purposeful. The nature of pupils' needs means that their behaviour disrupts learning sometimes. Adults respond promptly and sensitively when this is the case so that disturbance is kept to a minimum. Leaders are working hard to ensure consistent routines and expectations during a period of staff turnover. For example, they make sure that new staff are familiar with policies and procedures, and they monitor behaviour incidents closely. However, leaders know that some pupils need more support. They are currently making changes to behaviour management systems to ensure this happens, and there are early signs of improvement in pupils' behaviour as a result.

Leaders use a wide range of activities to enhance pupils' learning and enjoyment of school, such as swimming, cinema trips and sports events. The older pupils talk of their enjoyment of activities such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, which plays a key part in school life. The school's recently updated personal, social and health education programme covers a suitable range of topics and themes which help to prepare pupils for life in the UK. Pupils speak with interest about their ambitions for future education and employment.

Staff report strong teamwork. They feel that the headteacher and his leadership team are considerate of their well-being. Staff appreciate the small acts of kindness and recognition from leaders which help them feel valued. Teachers say that recent improvements in the curriculum have helped to make their workload more manageable. Governors use a range of activities to monitor staff morale, such as surveys and conversations with staff during school visits.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and staff are very knowledgeable about safeguarding procedures. They give pupils' safety a high priority and report any concerns promptly. The designated safeguarding lead keeps a close eye on individual cases. She liaises closely and effectively with parents and a wide range of agencies.

A small number of pupils are currently attending school on a part-time basis because of their individual needs and circumstances. This includes several who are waiting for the local authority to arrange a change of placement. In the meantime, leaders have taken suitable steps to ensure that these pupils are safe and continue to learn.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some of the older pupils are behind where they should be in their reading. The new programme chosen to support them is not yet fully in place. Leaders should implement plans to deliver this programme.
- Recent improvements in systems to support pupils' behaviour and well-being are not yet fully in place. This means that some pupils are not as well supported in managing their feelings and behaviour as others. Leaders should make sure that improvements in behaviour management procedures are fully established and used consistently well.

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 an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in October 2017.

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 information from Ofsted Parent View 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.

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	119046
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10256537
Type of school	Special
School category	Foundation special
Age range of pupils	5 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	149
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Asif Hussain
Headteacher	John Dexter
Website	www.elmsschool.org.uk
Dates of previous inspection	9 and 10 October 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Elms School is a special school for pupils aged five to 16 years of age. All pupils have education, health and care plans to support them with their complex behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Many have additional learning difficulties. Some have autism spectrum disorders.
- The headteacher was appointed in January 2022. The deputy headteacher joined the school in June 2021.
- The school uses three unregistered alternative provisions.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher and other senior leaders. The lead inspector also met with a local authority representative.
- Inspectors spoke with a range of staff at different times during the inspection. They

also considered the views expressed by staff in Ofsted's survey.

- The lead inspector met with two governors, including the chair of governors.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics and personal, social and health education. The lead inspector also visited lessons in art, food technology and design technology. Deep dives included visiting a range of lessons, looking at pupils' work and talking with leaders, teachers and pupils.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils in lessons, during the lunchbreak, and at other times during the school day. The lead inspector met with members of the school council, known as the 'LEAF' ('Listen – Empower – Action – Friendship') team.
- The views of parents were gathered through a range of sources, including Ofsted's surveys and informal discussions at the start of the school day.
- Inspectors assessed the school's safeguarding culture throughout the inspection. Inspectors checked the single central record and reviewed a wide range of safeguarding documents and records.

Inspection team

Julie Sackett, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Anne Allen

Ofsted Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2023