

Inspection of a good school: Elmfield School for Deaf Children

Greystoke Avenue, Westbury-on-Trym, Bristol, Bristol BS10 6AY

Inspection dates: 10 and 11 May 2023

Outcome

Elmfield School for Deaf Children continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils who attend Elmfield School for Deaf Children gain a deeper understanding of what it means to be deaf. For many, prior to starting at Elmfield, their experience of this has been disjointed and limited. Staff support them to find their deaf identity. Pupils feel more positive about what they have to offer.

Pupils value the opportunities and relationships that staff provide. They feel safe and trust that they can make mistakes, take risks and interact fully with those around them. Staff support pupils as they grapple with the bi-lingual nature of successful communication using spoken English and British Sign Language (BSL). Staff encourage them to use this new 'voice' to express their views and opinions. It helps prepare pupils well for their next steps.

Expectations of pupils are high. Pupils respond positively to this and behave well because of the strong relationships staff have with them. The care and nurture from adults is clear. Many parents agree with one parent commenting that their child's most 'wonderful and unforgettable moments' have been at Elmfield.

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

Leaders are ambitious for pupils and aspirational in their outlook. Staff are dedicated to ensure that pupils' deafness, as well as any additional special educational need and/or disability (SEND), is not a barrier to success. Leaders take full advantage of the opportunities of being co-located with a secondary school. There are also strong links with local primary schools. This enables pupils to immerse themselves with a diverse range of peers. In secondary, leaders capitalise on this to be ambitious in the range of subjects offered. This is in addition to the core offer of English, mathematics, science and personal, social and health education (PSHE) that Elmfield staff, who are qualified teachers of the deaf, provide.

Staff are knowledgeable about the support and adaptations that pupils need to overcome barriers to learning. Leaders use education, health and care (EHC) plans and accurate knowledge of pupils' needs to design precise learning plans. However, the academic curriculum is not fully aligned with this. Teachers do not have the subject-specific knowledge they need to have the most effective impact on how pupils learn. Governors have not placed sufficient focus on this aspect of pupils' education. This means that leaders are not fully equipped to support this as well as they could. Staff ensure that pupils' needs are met, and they have strategies to help them learn successfully. However, the curriculum is not yet fully established to make the most of pupils' readiness to learn.

Leaders have strengthened their approach to how pupils learn to read, write and use their speaking and listening skills. This comes through combined use of BSL, sign supported English and visual phonics. This enables pupils to learn in a way that best suits them, while increasing their skills and understanding in the other methods. Teachers accurately assess pupils' starting points in these aspects of language learning. They design learning to address gaps that have formed as a result of varying previous learning experiences. The use of visual phonics, for those children who are at the very beginning of this journey, starts as soon as children begin in Nursery.

Leaders have designed the curriculum in other subject areas, such as mathematics and PSHE, so that teachers can cover the requirements of the national curriculum. Teachers assess pupils so that they can adapt learning accordingly to meet the wide range of needs in the mixed-age classes. This bespoke approach is not as effective as it could be. Staff do not have the same subject-specific expertise as they do SEND expertise.

Pupils' wider development is a strength of what the school offers. Pupils' learning is enriched by a wealth of experiences. These are carefully considered to increase pupils' knowledge and understanding of the world around them. They are well prepared to be active participants in society. Leaders arrange visitors into school, involvement in the local area and activities and events that strengthen pupils' character and interests.

Pupils experience some challenges from the environment around them, particularly on the secondary school site. Despite this, pupils manage their behaviour well. Where the learning environment can cause pupils to feel dysregulated or overwhelmed, staff ensure that pupils develop strategies to help them to cope. This also helps to prepare them for their next steps in a predominantly hearing world.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders make sure that the safety and welfare of pupils is a high priority. They deliver training to address the increased vulnerabilities of pupils. Staff are clear about their responsibilities to safeguard pupils. Leaders make sure staff remain vigilant. They work closely with families to provide the right support at the earliest opportunity. Work with appropriate external agencies strengthens this further. Leaders complete appropriate checks during recruitment for new members of staff.

Pupils feel safe in school. They learn about how to respond to risks. Leaders make sure that the curriculum revisits important learning so that pupils learn to keep themselves safe.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Governors have not placed sufficient focus on holding leaders to account over the quality of the curriculum pupils learn. They have prioritised other areas of pupils' education. As a result, leaders are not secure in the knowledge and expertise they need to support teachers to implement a curriculum that is well sequenced to ensure pupils learn as successfully as they can. Governors need to assure themselves that leaders have what they need to strengthen teachers' expertise and curriculum knowledge. This will help pupils to learn the academic curriculum and achieve the best possible outcomes.
- Teacher's subject-specific knowledge is not as secure as it needs to be. As a result, pupils do not learn the curriculum as well as they could. Teachers do not consistently maximise on how successfully they meet and overcome pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities. Leaders must ensure that teachers' subject-specific knowledge and expertise is as strong as their knowledge of SEND so that pupils learn and remember more over time.

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 second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good January 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 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	109385
Local authority	Bristol City of
Inspection number	10268636
Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	2 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	48
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Deborah Crossan
Headteacher	Kate Persaud
Website	www.elmfield.bristol.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	14 November 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Elmfield School for Deaf Children is a maintained community special school for moderate, severe and profoundly deaf pupils. Pupils also have a range of additional special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- The majority of pupils have an EHC plan.
- The school has provision for three- and four-year-old children. There are currently no children in Reception.
- The school is waiting to relocate to a purpose-built primary provision. It is awaiting further information on the relocation of the secondary provision. The secondary school is currently located on the same site as Fairfield High School.
- The school makes use of one unregistered alternative provider.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 7 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The 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 executive headteacher, assistant headteachers, and a representative from the local authority. In addition, an inspector met with members of the governing body.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading and communication including BSL, mathematics and PSHE. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- An inspector listened to and observed pupils read to an adult using either spoken English or BSL.
- Inspectors were, at times, accompanied by independent BSL interpreters.
- Inspectors met the designated safeguarding lead, checked the single central record of adults working in the school and looked at safeguarding records.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in class, around school and at breaktimes and held discussions with leaders about pupils' wider development.
- Inspectors gathered parents' views by considering responses to Ofsted's online survey for parents, Ofsted Parent View, and by talking to parents before school. They also evaluated responses to Ofsted's staff and pupil questionnaires.

Inspection team

Leanne Thirlby, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Tracy Hannon

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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