

Inspection of Elm House School

15 Mill Road, Cheadle, Stoke on Trent ST10 1NG

Inspection dates: 8 and 9 April 2025

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Outstanding**

Leadership and management **Good**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards? **Yes**

What is it like to attend this school?

This is a school where dedicated staff ensure pupils feel settled, secure and safe. Staff know the pupils extremely well and deeply understand their needs, views and ambitions. This enables staff to tailor provision for each pupil successfully. Pupils enjoy their time in school and are rarely absent.

Pupils arrive at this school having had very difficult experiences of education in the past. They all have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Staff understand this well and put in place the support needed. They are particularly skilled in addressing pupils' social, emotional and mental health needs. As a result, pupils typically achieve well and simply love talking about what they have learned.

Staff have high expectations of pupils' behaviour. They help pupils achieve these through developing highly positive relationships and treating pupils with sensitivity and kindness. Pupils respond well to this and trust adults to be fair, warm and always approachable. Pupils respect one another, and incidences of bullying are very rare and swiftly dealt with. Despite the negative experiences pupils have had before coming to Elm House, there is a tangible feeling of belonging here.

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

The school has ensured that pupils learn a broad, engaging curriculum. It has carefully considered what to teach in each subject and has made good use of the expertise across other schools owned by the proprietor. There is a focus on ensuring that pupils learn subject-specific vocabulary. This is paying dividends in how precisely pupils speak about their learning.

Staff have secure subject knowledge. They deliver curriculum content in an engaging way and use the abundant resources that the school provides effectively. Classrooms are calm, enticing learning environments where pupils' learning is supported and celebrated. Pupils learn the curriculum successfully.

Staff understand pupils' SEND well and are quick to notice when pupils have additional difficulties. Staff are passionate about providing help to pupils, but sometimes offer a little too much. This means pupils can become overly reliant on help and become less independent than they could be. Pupils work hard, but the work they produce is of variable quality. This is because they have gaps in their basic writing and mathematics skills. These include the ability to form letters and numbers consistently well. This means their writing sometimes lacks fluency. Also, their recording in mathematics risks leading to their work being inaccurate.

Pupils join this school with very different experiences of reading. Some have significant gaps in their reading knowledge. Staff are quick to put in place structured phonics lessons. These provide pupils with the knowledge they need to access texts effectively as they go through school. A range of reading activities throughout the week helps children to develop a love of reading. Pupils read regularly and become

competent, independent readers. The school has ensured that pupils have access to a range of high-quality texts and that reading is a fundamental part of every day.

The school has put in place an impressive, meticulously structured programme of activities and opportunities to broaden pupils' life experiences. Carefully selected trips enhance the curriculum and give pupils a secure understanding of the world around them. They develop an understanding of fairness and equality and love learning about other cultures. Whether visiting places of worship, taking part in music festivals or visiting the local library, pupils relish the chances they get. All pupils have leadership roles such as being a peer mentor; all pupils sit on an active school council. They relish these roles and take them very seriously.

The school helps pupils to develop dreams and aspirations by focusing on the world of work. This starts from the moment pupils join the school through the curriculum and trips. This careers offer is highly bespoke. Highly committed staff provide pupils with meaningful experiences.

The proprietor has ensured that the independent school standards are consistently and securely met. Pupils benefit from well-equipped, inviting accommodation in which to learn. Staff are happy and proud to work here because the proprietor and leaders at all levels provide regular support and training. The school works with other agencies very effectively. This includes the home and clinical teams within the company, as well as local authorities.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve? (Information for the school and proprietor)

- Pupils have gaps in some of their basic writing and mathematics knowledge, including how they form letters and numbers. This means that their writing is both difficult to read and lacks fluency, and their mathematics can be inaccurate. The school should support pupils in securing their basic skills in writing and mathematics, so their written work is fluent, and their mathematical recording is accurate.
- Sometimes pupils receive too much support during lessons. This limits pupils' time to process ideas or to develop independence. The school should support pupils in ways that provide them with the time and space to develop independent learning strategies.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	148133
DfE registration number	860/6069
Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	10342171
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent day school
Age range of pupils	5 to 14
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Proprietor	Halliwell Homes Limited
Chair	Mathew Hargreaves
Headteacher	Jenny Illsley (Executive Headteacher)
Annual fees (day pupils)	£41,600 to £62,400
Telephone number	01538 269937
Website	www.halliwellhomes.co.uk/elm-house-school
Email address	contact@halliwellhomes.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	8 to 10 March 2022

Information about this school

- Halliwell Homes Limited also runs five other schools. The executive headteacher is responsible for this school and two of the other schools.
- The school opened in January 2021. It caters for pupils with social, emotional and mental health difficulties.
- The school does not make use of alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics, geography and science. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- An inspector listened to some pupils read.
- An inspector held a meeting with the chair of the proprietor board.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons, at different times of the day and at breaktimes and lunchtimes. They spoke with pupils in lessons and around school.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted's staff and pupil surveys.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documents, including school improvement plans and the school's website.

Inspection team

Gareth Morgan, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Melanie Callaghan-Lewis

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 2025