

Elmwood School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	135461
Local Authority	Walsall
Inspection number	329095
Inspection date	22 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Sarah Mascall

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number on roll	
School (total)	36
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dave Watton
Headteacher	Hillary Short
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	King George Crescent Rushall Walsall WS4 1EG
Telephone number	01922 721081
Fax number	01922 726979

Age group	11–16
Inspection date	22 May 2009
Inspection number	329095

© Crown copyright 2009

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one additional inspector.

Description of the school

Elmwood is a new school that opened in January 2008. It caters for students with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD). All students have a statement of special educational needs and many have additional special needs including autistic spectrum disorders, moderate learning difficulties, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and speech and language disorders. The majority of students are White British. A small percentage of students are looked after by the local authority.

Initially, the new school was based on the site of the previous BESD school which closed in December 2007. The headteacher, who took up post in January 2008, inherited the staff and students from the previous school. The building and premises were not fit for purpose and the school moved to its present new premises in September 2008.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Elmwood School has developed very quickly into a successful BESD school that provides a good education for its students. Much of its success is due to the exceptional and determined leadership of the headteacher. Her enthusiasm for, and understanding of, the students and their special needs enables her to provide a very positive role model for staff in managing students' specific needs. She has given staff and students the confidence and ability to want to develop and improve. As a result, the school is a settled and calm place where learning is seen as all important. Staff, students and parents speak very highly of the headteacher's skills and achievements in moving the school forward at a rate no one thought possible.

Students talk positively about their new school. They have been very much involved in the decision-making process and have been very clear about the direction they want the school to take. They have, for example, asked for a school uniform and as a result, most students wear blazers. They asked that the school be called Elmwood School and that there be no mention of the word 'special' because they want the school to be the same as any other secondary school. Their views have been listened to and because of this they feel valued and act responsibly. Students feel they make good progress in their learning because teaching is good. This is the case and students achieve well. Teachers have high expectations that students will settle and work and, through good behaviour management, this invariably happens. They know the students well and use their teaching assistants to support individuals who may struggle with the work. Not all teachers, though, use information about students' progress effectively to set tasks that are matched to their ability. As a result, students are sometimes too reliant on teaching assistants to complete tasks.

Considerable thought has gone into the curriculum and it is effective in meeting the needs of the students. Students are well supported in Years 10 and 11 in gaining accreditation and experiencing the world of work and college. For Years 7 to 9, the curriculum is broad and balanced and enables students to develop effective basic skills that support their learning well. The care, guidance and support students receive are good and enable them to make good progress in their personal, social and health education. Very good attention is paid to ensuring students are safe and the excellent links with outside agencies enhance the quality of care. Strategies for supporting behaviour are effective and well understood by staff and students. As a result, behaviour in and around the school is good. Students comment that they feel safe and that there is very little bullying. If there are problems, they know staff will address any issues. There are good systems to support students' learning and students are aware that they have targets for learning and behaviour. They are confident about what they need to do to improve their behaviour, but are not so sure about what they have to do to improve their work. This is because systems for ensuring that students know how well they are doing and how they can make better progress are not fully secure.

There is a clear structure for the senior management team and this is due to be completed when a deputy headteacher is appointed. Staff have relished the opportunity to take on new roles and responsibilities and have worked incredibly hard to accomplish so much in such a short period of time. Although subject leaders undertake their roles satisfactorily, they do not have a clear enough understanding of students' progress and how to use this information to improve students' achievements in their subject areas. The combination of determined leadership, good support from governors and a committed, empowered staff ensures that the school is well placed to continue to move forward.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that teachers make better use of assessment information to provide tasks that are matched to students' individual needs.
- Improve systems for informing students how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve further.
- Develop the role of subject leaders so that they have a better understanding of the progress students are making and use this information to improve students' achievements.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Many students' education has been disrupted and some have learning difficulties. From this very low starting point, students make good progress and achieve well; however, standards remain below average overall. Year 11 students are developing good skills in learning to cope in work and at college and many gain a range of accreditation and experiences to support them in the next stage of their career. The current Year 10 students are predicted to gain a range of passes at GCSE and Entry level and this reflects good progress. Students in Year 9 are undertaking accreditation in Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) awards and gaining qualifications through the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN).

Students make extremely good progress in information and communication technology (ICT) and expectations are high for them to achieve very well in their GCSE ICT examinations. Progress in English is good and many students make good gains in their reading and spelling because of well-focused support. The move to new premises has enabled science teachers to have the use of specialist resources and accommodation. As a result, students' progress has improved and is now good. The school recognises that achievement in mathematics is satisfactory rather than good and is already taking effective action to enable students to make better progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students are very positive about school and talk about the many activities they can now do and how much they value the opportunities to learn and gain accreditation. Their clear enjoyment of school is reflected in the high number of students with a 100% attendance rate. However, attendance is satisfactory overall because a small number of students, mainly in Year 11, still struggle to attend as well as they should. Students show a good understanding of staying healthy. They are enthusiastic about all the sports they can participate in and the fact that they have access to a fitness suite in school. Students talk about the right foods to eat and feel that lunches are healthy.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They have a very good awareness of right and wrong, talking about their behaviour in their previous school and how much they have changed. They show a very good understanding of the school rules and the consequences of misbehaviour. Students' respect for staff and their new school is reflected in the huge reduction in incidents and exclusions over the last year. The vast majority of parents and students consider behaviour to be good. Students are becoming more involved in the community as the new school becomes known and established within the local area. They are involved in local projects and make good use of the local community to support their learning and work experiences. Students develop good basic skills and are well prepared for life when they leave school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching has many strengths. Teachers use their good subject knowledge well to promote students' interest in their subject. This is reflected in the fact that students are positive about a whole range of subjects, and not just the practical ones. They are keen to learn and one, for example, when asked what he would change in the school, said he would like more science lessons. Lessons are planned well and teachers ensure that students know what skills they will learn by the end of the lesson. Teachers make particularly good use of the interactive whiteboards to model work and ensure students are clear about what they are doing. Lessons are well paced, and for the younger students there is a good focus on moving from one activity to another during the lesson so that they stay on task well. Teachers' confidence and their good use of behaviour management strategies enable them to make lessons more interesting and 'take risks'. For example, in a Year 10 lesson students participated in role play through 'hot seating', which involved taking the part of Billy and the physical education (PE) teacher in the novel 'Kes'. Although reticent at first, students showed good knowledge of the characters and were soon able to respond to questions. Teachers clearly know the students and ensure that teaching assistants are used well to support learning. However, because work is not always adapted to the different abilities of students some are very dependent on support from staff to complete their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is planned and organised well to ensure that it meets the different needs of students. Provision for Year 11 enables them to gain experiences in college and the work place in order to prepare them for when they leave school. Equally, the curriculum has been adapted for the Year 9 students who are recognised as needing a far more focused approach to improving their social and interactive skills as well as their basic skills. As a result, they are involved in a lot of team-building activities and ones which improve their self-esteem and confidence. The range of accreditation is good and being developed further to ensure all students form Year 7 gain recognition for their hard work. There are good examples, such as in ICT, where subject leaders have a clear overview of how well their subject is taught across the curriculum. This, though, is not consistent in all subjects and the school has already started to look at how literacy and numeracy can be better promoted across the curriculum. The range of extra-curricular activities is good and much valued by students.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The care and welfare of students are excellent. Much thought has gone into providing structures that ensure students are safe. Procedures for risk assessments, child protection and all other aspects for ensuring safety are robust and monitored well. The excellent links with outside agencies and the considerable support for students and their families have done much to improve the outcomes for students. Parents speak very positively about the close relationship with the school and how much it has done for them and their children.

The guidance and support for helping students improve their behaviour are good and students have a clear understanding of what they have to do. While teachers ensure students' work is marked and contains positive comments, not all provide students with a clear picture of how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve further.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

A strength of leadership has been the empowering of staff to take on additional responsibilities and effectively carry out their roles. The present senior leadership team is very supportive of the headteacher and has done much to move the school forward. They have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and self-evaluation is accurate. The school improvement plan is very detailed. It has, provided very clear direction for staff and has been monitored closely by senior staff and governors to ensure that targets are met. Subject leaders have a satisfactory overview of their subjects. At present, they are too reliant on the leadership team in assessing the progress of students and ensuring that they have a good understanding of what needs to be done to bring about improvements.

The governing body plays an important role in supporting the school and ensuring that it moves forward. It is diligent in providing challenge to the headteacher. Governors are very clear about how much progress has been made and are reviewing their role to enable them to become more involved in supporting staff and working with the students. There is good planning to develop community cohesion and much has already been achieved in improving links with nearby schools and colleges and the local and wider community.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
---	----------------

Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2

¹Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

26 May 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Elmwood School, Walsall, WS4 1EG

Thank you for making me so welcome during the inspection. I enjoyed the opportunity to talk to you during the day and see you in lessons. You were right in being so positive in your comments about your school. This is because the school is providing you with a good education. As a result, you are making good progress in your learning and achieving well. Here are some of the most important parts of the inspection report that I thought you might like to know about.

- You are proud of your new school and are looking after it very well.
- You are rightly very pleased with how well your behaviour is improving and how well you are doing in school.
- You are very involved in bringing about change in the school and the school is very good at listening to your views heard.
- Teachers know a lot about the subjects they teach and are good at making lessons interesting
- The curriculum is good and is helping you to learn about life when you leave school as well as gain lots of accreditation.
- You have a good understanding of staying healthy and keeping fit.
- The school is good at making sure you are well looked after and systems to keep you safe are good.
- The school is well led and managed and senior staff are keen to make it even better.

In order to make the school even better I have asked staff to do three things.

- Ensure that teachers make better use of information they have on your achievements to provide tasks that are matched to your individual needs.
- Improve systems for informing you of how well you are doing and what you need to do to improve further.
- Develop the role of subject leaders so that they have a better understanding of the progress you are making and use this information to improve your achievements.

I wish you well for the future and hope you continue to play an active role in the school. Yours faithfully

Sarah Mascall Lead inspector