

Elms School

Elms Vale Road, Dover, Kent CT17 9PS

Inspection dates

18–19 October 2017

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders, governors and staff display high aspirations for pupils. They provide very good support for pupils' social, emotional and academic learning. Carefully planned actions have improved pupils' outcomes.
- The broad and balanced curriculum successfully meets pupils' social, emotional and academic needs. In particular, the nurture programme provides pupils with very effective support that contributes well to their overall progress.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good. Teachers and teaching assistants build on their good relationships with pupils to adapt learning to meet pupils' needs.
- Teachers' and teaching assistants' questioning is effective. It helps pupils to apply their learning and make good progress. However, some teachers need to refine their approach to feedback to make sure that it helps pupils to make progress.
- Leaders have made effective improvements to school systems, including the behaviour and reward policy. They have successfully included pupils in decisions and this has helped to create a cohesive school community. However, leaders need to ensure that teachers routinely apply this policy.
- A minority of teachers do not have consistently high enough expectations of what pupils can achieve.
- Pupils value the support that they receive. They are happy at Elms and proud of the progress that they make.
- Pupils make good progress from their starting points. Academic outcomes have risen steadily across the school.
- Pupils are supported well to move to mainstream college after Year 11. Staff provide very effective personalised support to make sure that these transitions are successful.
- Safeguarding is effective. All staff are well trained in keeping pupils safe. The school works well with families and external organisations to make sure pupils are kept safe.
- Staff work well to improve pupils' behaviour. Their 'fresh start' approach successfully supports pupils to focus on their learning.
- Governors are dedicated to the school and have rapidly increased the quality of their challenge to leaders. They understand the need to more closely with leaders and hold them to account for the use of additional funding.
- Some pupils' attendance is too low. This prevents them from making the best progress possible.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the consistency of the quality of teaching by ensuring that all teachers:
 - have high expectations of what pupils, especially the most able, can achieve, and routinely increase the level of challenge to make sure that pupils make rapid progress
 - consistently apply the new behaviour and reward policy.
- Improve leadership and management, by:
 - making sure that the school's marking policy is followed, feedback is appropriate to need and that it supports pupils to make good progress
 - ensuring that governors continue to increase their level of challenge to leaders, especially for the use of additional funding.
- Improve pupils' attendance.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher, ably supported by the leadership team, has established a culture of high expectations and aspirations for the pupils, staff and school as a whole. All staff are determined to improve pupils' life chances through supporting their social, emotional and academic learning. As a result of this work, the school is securely good.
- Leaders have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They have worked carefully through their precise action plan in order to make necessary improvements after a period of turbulence in leadership and staffing following the previous inspection report. They have made good use of external advice and support where appropriate. For example, the local authority has helped to improve the school's physical environment, including its safety.
- Leaders have involved the whole school community in making improvements and this has helped these to be successful. For example, pupils are proud of having contributed to the design of the new behaviour and reward policy. They have responded well to the clear rules and high expectations they helped to set out.
- Leaders have ensured that effective performance management for all staff has helped the school to move forward. All staff have targets that are linked to the school's improvement plan. This has helped to create the strong sense of community and determination displayed by staff. There is a real sense that all are working together to make the school as good as possible.
- Staff value the training and development that are provided. They are encouraged to develop their specialist interests so that they can support each other. For example, staff spoke very highly about the training provided to increase their expertise when working with pupils who have autistic spectrum disorder. Newly qualified teachers are supported well.
- Leaders work closely and very successfully with a wide range of external agencies and other providers. For example, the leader of the virtual school said that leaders go 'above and beyond' in their care for children who are looked after. Leaders make sure that pupils are supported well when they are investigating their post-16 pathways. Planning and support to make sure that this is successful runs through key stage 4 and includes regular communication with colleges to make sure that these colleagues are trained to understand and support pupils. As a consequence, pupils are successful when they leave Elms.
- The parents that replied to Ofsted's survey and the school's earlier questionnaire were very positive. Parents highlighted the hard work of all staff and the way it has helped children to thrive. A typical comment to Ofsted was: 'I cannot express how amazing this school is. They have helped my child to excel academically and also socially and emotionally too.'
- The curriculum is designed to support pupils' needs. Leaders make sure that all pupils follow a broad and balanced academic curriculum that is supported well with a nurture programme. This is successful in supporting pupils to make progress in all aspects of their learning and development. It prepares pupils well for life in modern Britain

because it furthers pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. It also promotes aspects of life such as tolerance and democracy.

- Leaders have used the additional pupil premium funding very well to address pupils' barriers to learning. In particular, the nurture work is highly effective. Other additional funding for Year 7 catch-up and primary sports funding is also used well but leaders have not systematically evaluated how this funding has made a difference for pupils.
- Leaders have improved the assessment system so that it shows pupils' progress from their starting points against ambitious targets. This information is used well across the school to support teachers and teaching assistants with their planning. It has also allowed leaders to identify trends in attainment and reshape staff training appropriately. Leaders are aware of the need to further develop this system so that they can track how well the most able pupils are doing and make sure that they are routinely challenged.

Governance of the school

- Governors are dedicated to the school and committed to ensuring that it provides the best for its pupils, families and staff. They commissioned a review to support them to hold school leaders to account and discharge their statutory duties more effectively. They have made rapid progress with many of the recommendations arising from this review. For example, they routinely challenge the headteacher when discussing pupils' progress.
- Governors attend training and use this to improve the effectiveness of their work. They visit the school and speak with pupils in order to have a thorough understanding of how it may be further improved. This helps them to contextualise and understand the information leaders present to them. This deeper understanding has helped them to improve their scrutiny of leaders' work.
- Governors recognise that, up to now, they have not acted swiftly enough to achieve all of the recommendations from the review of governance. For example, they have not held leaders to account for the use of some additional funding. In addition, they have not kept up to date with their duties in relation to the publication of information on the school website. During the inspection they demonstrated capacity through a clear understanding of what is required and how to achieve it.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders have prioritised the safety of pupils. On arrival at the school, leaders acted quickly to rectify possible weaknesses in the school's physical environment, swiftly making appropriate changes. They put rigorous risk assessments in place for all school activities and have secured welcome additional improvements to the school site.
- Leaders ensure that all adults working with pupils are fully checked as to their suitability. These checks follow the latest national guidance. They also make sure that all adults are well trained so that they understand their roles and responsibilities. Staff show keen awareness of the risks that their pupils may face, including radicalisation,

gang culture and child sexual exploitation. Staff report any concern, using the agreed system, so that all worries are swiftly considered.

- Staff work closely with pupils, parents and external agencies to make sure that pupils are kept safe. For example, the safeguarding lead supports parents with understanding how to manage online security. She makes sure that they are equipped with skills to understand the dangers of online grooming and support their children to manage their online lives safely.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Staff work very hard to build and maintain positive relationships with pupils. Staff get to know pupils very well and use this knowledge well to support pupils to develop socially and academically.
- Teachers plan learning based on pupils' needs and interests. This is supported by a secure assessment of pupils' starting points. In most lessons, teachers use resources very well to engage pupils and support their learning. Teachers and teaching assistants quickly adapt learning activities as needed by pupils during lessons.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and many use this to engage and motivate pupils. Pupils use technical terminology well. For example, pupils in a food technology lesson proudly explained how to make glazed carrots, including how to make and use a cartouche.
- Many pupils arrive with gaps in their basic skills, and staff work well to fill these. In particular, the teaching of phonics has been adapted well to the needs of pupils, many of whom benefit from this learning when they arrive in key stage 3.
- Staff support pupils well to develop their self-confidence. For example, all primary-phase pupils took part in a harvest assembly, with many performing or reading aloud to the parents and other visitors.
- Many teachers and teaching assistants use questioning well to remind pupils of their prior learning and help them to apply their understanding to their new learning. For example, Year 5 and 6 pupils successfully applied their knowledge of the Vikings and life at that time to work out why the runic alphabet only has straight lines.
- In some subjects, including art, food technology, science, history and design technology, pupils are highly engaged and make excellent progress. The teaching is challenging and supportive and pupils are encouraged to apply their knowledge to help them solve problems or challenges. However, this is not secure across all subjects and phases of the school. Expectations of pupils' academic learning are not consistently high enough across the school. The most able pupils are not routinely challenged to make rapid progress with their academic learning.
- Most teachers and teaching assistants have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and this supports pupils' learning. However, some teachers do not apply the behaviour policy consistently.
- Teachers provide different forms of feedback to help pupils to improve their work. Much of this is useful; however, some of it is vague and does not help pupils to

improve their learning. Some of it is very long and detailed and the difference it makes is hard to identify.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Most pupils display positive attitudes to the way staff at Elms are helping them with their learning, with several telling an inspector that they are doing much better at Elms than at their previous provision. They like the fact that there is always a member of staff they can speak with if they are worried or upset. They recognise and appreciate the ways staff work very hard to help them.
- Pupils' books show that they take pride in their work and academic progress.
- The school's nurture programme successfully supports pupils to develop social and personal skills. Pupils enjoy sitting down to eat their lunch with staff and each other. They develop valuable social skills during this time.
- Pupils are supported well to develop active and healthy lifestyles. All pupils study food and nutrition and learn how to cook a variety of meals. A wide range of sporting activities are offered in the endeavour to find something that each pupil will enjoy.
- Leaders ensure that pupils' pastoral and behavioural needs are met when they attend alternative provision. Staff routinely communicate with the alternative provider and families about pupils' progress, conduct and attendance.
- Pupils feel safe at school and trust the staff to keep them safe. Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe, for example when online. Pupils say that there is bullying at the school and that staff deal well with it. However, when discussing bullying incidents with pupils, it is clear that many incorrectly apply the term 'bullying' to any friendship issue.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Staff have established high expectations for pupils' behaviour. The very clear boundaries are applied consistently by the behaviour team whose members respond quickly and calmly to any pupil who struggles to cope with the demands of school life. Steady messages from this team help pupils to make positive choices. Pupils are reintegrated quickly into lessons. The 'fresh start' approach successfully supports pupils to focus on their learning.
- Pupils' behaviour has improved over time. School information and discussions with pupils indicate that fewer lessons are disrupted by poor behaviour, and fewer pupils miss lessons.
- Pupils like the new behaviour and reward policy. They are proud of having contributed to its design through the school council. They are motivated by the rewards on offer but these rewards are not always given regularly by classroom staff.

- The overall attendance of pupils is still lower than the target set by leaders and governors. Leaders have worked hard with pupils and families to improve this and it remains a priority.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils join the school at different stages and with attainment below that typical for their age, often because they have previously missed a lot of school.
- The improvements leaders have put in place support pupils to make good progress with their social, emotional, behavioural and academic learning and development. For example, as part of their support for pupils who are from disadvantaged backgrounds, teachers and teaching assistants use a nurture programme to develop pupils' approaches to social situations, including in the classroom. As a consequence of all the support provided, pupils, including those who are from disadvantaged backgrounds, now make good progress across the curriculum, including in English and mathematics.
- Pupils make good progress towards the outcomes specified in their education, health and care plans. Leaders work closely with pupils and families to make sure that targets are appropriately challenging.
- Leaders prioritise the development of pupils' reading skills so that pupils are able to more successfully access the wider curriculum. Primary age and some key stage 3 pupils follow a phonics course that is highly successful in developing pupils' literacy skills. The Year 7 catch-up funding is used well to support this work.
- Many primary pupils successfully move on to other providers after key stage 2 because they have made good progress with their social, emotional and behavioural skills. They also make good progress from their starting points across the academic curriculum.
- Secondary pupils make good progress with their academic learning. In 2017, all Year 11 pupils attained nationally recognised accreditations and many achieved GCSE qualifications. These successfully prepare pupils for their next steps at college. Pupils' transitions to college are very well managed by leaders who continue to support pupils after they have left the school.
- Pupils who attend alternative provision make good progress overall.
- Leaders do not routinely track the progress of the most able pupils, including the most able pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. It is not clear if this group of pupils could be making more rapid progress.

School details

Unique reference number	119046
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10024885

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

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	105
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Alex Hadley
Headteacher	Juli Timoney
Telephone number	01304 201964
Website	http://www.elmsschool.org
Email address	headteacher@elms.kent.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	14–15 January and 3 April 2014

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 autistic spectrum disorders. The vast majority of pupils are boys.
- The headteacher joined the school in September 2015, following a period of leadership and staffing turbulence. The current leadership team has been formed since that time.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for pupil premium funding and/or the Year 7 catch-up funding is much higher than the national average.
- A small number of pupils attend alternative provision at Aspire Academy.
- The school is part of the Kent Special Educational Needs Trust (KSENT), working collaboratively with other special schools in Kent.

- The school does not meet requirements on the publication of information on its website. The website does not include information about the curriculum or the difference the additional funding for primary sports and Year 7 literacy and numeracy catch-up has made.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed pupils' learning in a wide range of lessons across every year group. All observations were conducted jointly with senior leaders. Inspectors also scrutinised a sample of pupils' books.
- Inspectors held meetings with senior leaders, governors, and a representative from the local authority. Inspectors met with groups of staff and also took account of the views of the 26 staff who completed Ofsted's online staff survey.
- Inspectors held telephone calls with the leaders of the alternative provision, Aspire Academy, and the virtual school.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils in lessons and around the school, and listened to some read. They also met formally with a group of pupils and considered the views of the 20 pupils who responded to Ofsted's online pupil survey.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents. They took account of parents' responses to the online Ofsted questionnaire, Parent View, including their free-text responses. They also reviewed the school's own survey of parents.
- A wide range of documentation was reviewed, including information available on the school's website and records relating to pupils' attainment, progress, attendance and behaviour. Information on governance, including minutes of governors' meetings, was examined. The school's self-evaluation summary and school improvement plan were scrutinised, along with records of the school's arrangements for keeping pupils safe.

Inspection team

Lucy English, lead inspector

Emma Phillips

Her Majesty's Inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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