

Inspection of an outstanding school: Elm Tree Community Primary School

Elmers Wood Road, Tanhouse, Skelmersdale, Lancashire WN8 6SA

Inspection dates:

14 and 15 November 2023

Outcome

Elm Tree Community Primary School continues to be an outstanding school.

What is it like to attend this school?

This school is a safe haven where pupils, all of whom have education, health and care (EHC) plans, flourish. Many pupils arrive having experienced disruption to their schooling and emotional upheaval.

From the start of school, pupils experience consistent routines paired with expert support. They quickly benefit from highly positive relationships with staff, who treat them with patience and kindness. This helps pupils to build trust and to feel safe in their surroundings. Pupils are encouraged to make friends and learn to treat others with respect.

Pupils appreciate that staff take care and time to understand them as individuals. They said, 'If I do something wrong, they help me to get past it' and 'Staff know what to do to help me when I am upset.' Pupils are happy at school.

Once settled, pupils access a stimulating curriculum. The carefully considered environment helps to further unlock their potential. As a result, pupils make exceptional progress from their starting points.

Pupils spoke with enthusiasm about the many exciting activities they experience, such as residential visits and trips to local theatres and museums. They gain social confidence through their regular outings in the local community and by representing their school in sports competitions. They spoke with great pride about their notable success in a local swimming gala.

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

Since the previous inspection, the school has adapted successfully to many changes. For example, over recent years, there has been a significant increase in the number of pupils on roll, including a larger number of children in the early years. Many pupils attending the school also have a range of more complex needs.

Throughout this changing landscape, leaders' values and vision have remained consistent. They have harnessed the high levels of expertise and knowledge at the school to continue to provide the highest quality of education for their pupils.

Before pupils start, staff work closely with their previous schools and their parents and carers to build an initial picture of their individual strengths and difficulties. On entry to the school, highly skilled staff continue to work closely with pupils to accurately assess their needs even further. Staff get to know every pupil well. This means that staff are finely attuned to the signs that may indicate when a pupil is feeling overwhelmed. Staff act quickly and sensitively, using a range of agreed and consistent approaches, to prevent any issues from escalating. Over time, supported by a range of therapeutic approaches, pupils learn to overcome setbacks. They learn how to ask for help and to independently select activities that help them to manage their emotions. This means that any barriers to learning are quickly minimised.

The school has applied its typical creativity and ambition in implementing a broad curriculum, rich with opportunities to motivate pupils to learn. Targets from pupils' EHC plans are meticulously interwoven into their individual pathways through the curriculum. A range of external specialists help to further extend the plethora of approaches that the exceptionally knowledgeable staff already have. This ensures that pupils experience success without limits to their achievements.

The school has prioritised helping pupils learn to read well. Staff have regular training so that they implement the well-structured phonics programme effectively. Pupils read daily and staff provide additional support for pupils who need extra help. This ensures that they become fluent and accurate readers as soon as possible. Staff expose all pupils to a wide range of high-quality texts that promote their ideas and thinking beyond the level that they can access independently. This provides pupils with opportunities to extend their understanding of plot, character and vocabulary. It also helps them to explore themes about the wider world.

The school offers a rich variety of meaningful opportunities to broaden pupils' horizons and to increase their confidence. For example, pupils benefit from many exciting events, combined with regular opportunities, to develop their social skills. They understand that people have different religions, backgrounds and families, and that such differences deserve equal respect. By carrying out special roles, such as reading mascots and school councillors, pupils learn that their actions can make a positive difference.

The governing body uses its strong expertise and experience to contribute effectively to the school's strategic development. Governors have a clear understanding of their statutory duties, providing strong support and robust challenge to the school.

The school invests deeply in the continuing development of staff at all levels. Teachers, including those at the early stages of their careers, benefit from coaching and many opportunities to collaborate with each other. They appreciate the school's meaningful consideration of their well-being.

Parents are effusive in their praise of the school, including its innovative ways to bring them together. The school has organised transport to ensure that pupils attend school regularly.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Background

When we have judged a school to be outstanding, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains outstanding. 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 outstanding in September 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' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	135457
Local authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	10256237
Type of school	Primary
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	157
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Dianne Hodgson
Headteacher	David Lamb
Website	www.elmtree.lancs.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	26 and 27 September 2017, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school provides education for pupils with special educational needs, including social, emotional and mental health needs. All pupils have EHC plans. Many pupils have complex learning difficulties, including autism and sensory difficulties.
- Since the previous inspection, the number of pupils on roll has increased significantly. Recently, the school has admitted more children into the Reception Year.
- There have been several changes to the leadership team since the previous inspection. These include the appointment of a deputy headteacher, two assistant headteachers and a school manager.
- Pupils attend the school from a wide geographical area. Most pupils reside within the boundaries of Lancashire local authority. Pupils also attend from several other areas, including Sefton, Wigan and St Helen's local authorities.
- The school does not currently make use of alternative provision for pupils.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school has received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspectors held discussions with the headteacher and other leaders of the school.
- The lead inspector spoke with six members of the governing body, including the chair of governors.
- The lead inspector spoke on the telephone with a representative of the local authority and with the school improvement partner.
- 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.
- The inspectors observed pupils' behaviour around the school and during lessons. They spoke with pupils to discuss their views of school, their learning, their behaviour and safety.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in early reading, mathematics and design and technology. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and reviewed samples of pupils' work. The lead inspector observed some pupils reading to a familiar adult. The lead inspector also reviewed leaders' documentation and samples of pupils' work from several other subjects.
- The lead inspector met with the special educational needs coordinator and reviewed samples of documentation relating to SEND.
- The inspectors reviewed a range of evidence about pupils' attendance, safety and behaviour.
- The inspectors considered the views of parents through Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. An inspector also spoke to some parents at the start of the school day. The inspectors also reviewed the responses to Ofsted's surveys for staff. There were no responses to Ofsted's survey for pupils.
- The inspectors considered a range of documents shared by school leaders, including the school improvement plan, leaders' self-evaluation document and the minutes taken at governing body meetings.

Inspection team

Janette Walker, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Sheldon Logue

Ofsted Inspector

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