

Elmwood School

King George Crescent, Rushall, Walsall, West Midlands WS4 1EG

Inspection dates

14–15 November 2018

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Governors have put in place an interim senior leadership structure since the start of this academic year. However, leaders have a reduced capacity to work strategically and to hold other staff to account for pupils' learning.
- Middle leaders do not have the necessary opportunities to check on the quality of teaching and develop further improvements.
- Leaders do not have good enough systems in place to enable them to analyse patterns and trends. This prevents them from prioritising areas for improvement in a timely manner.
- Work set for the most able pupils lacks suitable challenge. As a result, some pupils do not make the progress of which they are capable.
- Some teachers do not take sufficient account of pupils' prior learning at the start of lessons. This leaves too little time for pupils to learn in greater depth.
- The school's assessment policy is not consistently applied by staff. As result, some pupils do not receive appropriate feedback to develop their understanding and learn from their mistakes.
- Governors recognise that information presented by school leaders does not always allow them to question and challenge effectively. They have commissioned an independent review to improve this aspect of their work.

The school has the following strengths

- Staff use very effective strategies to engage pupils in their learning. As a consequence, pupils study a range of qualifications at entry level and GCSE and the vast majority achieve or exceed their targets in English and mathematics.
- Pupils are not concerned about bullying. They feel safe and know who to talk to if they have a problem. This view is supported by parents and staff.
- Elmwood School has created a calm and purposeful learning environment. Pupils are well behaved, respectful and polite. The relationships between pupils and staff are excellent. The pastoral support and welfare of pupils is a high priority.
- One hundred per cent of pupils consistently continue in education, employment or training when they leave Elmwood School.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Governors should review the interim leadership arrangements to enable the acting leadership team to:
 - develop more strategic leadership
 - check on the quality of provision
 - use data to analyse trends
 - identify priorities for future planning
 - hold others to account.
- Leaders should:
 - analyse trends to ensure that all groups of pupils fulfil their potential
 - provide governors with information in a format that enables them to challenge more effectively
 - record the use and effectiveness of existing systems such as the use of the 'pupil request system' and 'reflection rooms' to support pupils to more quickly change their behaviours
 - review systems for updating individual behaviour plans and risk assessments to include all current information about the pupil
 - further support the rapid reduction in physical interventions
 - improve attendance
 - consider how the curriculum can be further developed to support pupils in keeping safe.
- Improve teaching and learning so that pupils have the right level of challenge in all classes, by:
 - taking into account pupils' prior knowledge and planning work that stretches and challenges them from the start of the lesson
 - ensuring that all teachers follow the school's assessment policy
 - providing pupils time to respond to feedback so that they deepen their learning
 - ensuring that pupils' targets are appropriately aspirational and regularly reviewed
 - ensuring that the focus of feedback at the end of lessons is on the academic learning as well as the emotional and behaviour learning.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- An interim senior leadership team has been put in place due to the absence of the substantive headteacher. As a result of the increased responsibilities of the acting headteacher and senior leaders, they have not got the capacity to make sure that some of the existing systems are of a good quality. For instance, they have not had time to visit and check on alternative providers within the agreed timescales.
- The school's self-evaluation is too descriptive and while it gives an accurate overview of the school, there is very little analysis. This means it is hard for governors and leaders to use resources effectively to plan for sustained improvements.
- Curriculum leadership is undertaken by lead teachers and they currently do not have an effective system to check on how the school's assessment and marking policy is implemented. Therefore, there is a lot of variation between classes within a subject area.
- The local authority and leaders have both commissioned helpful reports into leadership, management and safeguarding in order to improve current practice. Leaders demonstrated to inspectors that they had a comprehensive understanding of what they needed to do to improve. Leaders have made a start on the recommendations, but it is too early to see the impact of the recent initiatives.
- The acting headteacher aims to reduce alternative provision to zero. Currently, a small number of pupils attend alternative provision. Leaders are actively seeking to extend pupils to full-time provision at Elmwood wherever possible. Leaders do not have a suitable system to show how the timetables and effectiveness of the alternative provision are reviewed and monitored.
- The school undertakes reviews of education, health and care (EHC) plans, but does not always use the information effectively to inform future interventions. For example, when a high number of physical interventions have occurred these are not referred to in the EHC plan. In addition, useful information within the EHC plan is not included in the pupils' individual behaviour plan (IBP). These omissions can result in the school taking longer to implement effective strategies to support the pupil.
- Pupils do not have individual risk assessments recorded on their IBP. Systems to review the risk assessments are not consistently applied. This means that staff do not always have the most up-to-date information to support pupils.
- Risk assessments for visits and appropriate checks on the suitability of venues are undertaken. However, some are generic in nature and do not consider some of the associated risks about the known behaviours of individuals going off site.
- Leaders have been very successful in reducing the number of physical interventions since the last inspection. However, the collection of the data does not allow leaders to identify trends, for example who has received the most holds and by whom. Furthermore, there is too little analysis of whether there is a pattern of behaviour leading to physical intervention or if new pupils are held more than existing pupils. This type of analysis would support leaders in reviewing arrangements for induction.

- Leaders have developed a curriculum that enables pupils to develop emotional resilience and adopt calm and purposeful attitudes to learning. Time for group discussions enables pupils to take responsibility for their learning. These approaches have led to calm and focused lessons, breaktimes and lunchtimes.
- Leaders and governors make good use of additional funding. It is used effectively to improve attendance as well as academic and social progress. Current data demonstrates that the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those who are looked after is improving at a greater rate than that of other pupils. Progress in English and mathematics shows that the progress of disadvantaged pupils is similar to that of other pupils nationally.
- Staff are very supportive of the acting headteacher and feel that the school has improved since the last inspection. Of the few parents who responded to the survey, all were positive about the school. One parent stated, 'This is a fantastic school and without their dedication and patience, I really don't know where my family would be right now. I can't thank them enough.' This reflects the school's focus on the individual pupil and how staff want to support them to do their best.

Governance of the school

- Governors have a wide range of experience and their expertise is utilised by the school. Governors are very committed to the school and want to develop further as a governing body. The chair of the governing body is new to the role but has been a governor for a number of years and has arranged for an independent review of governance. They are part way through the review and are committed to implementing all the recommendations.
- Governors are provided with plenty of information from school leaders and have regular presentations from senior staff. However, when governors set up the interim leadership of the school they failed to ensure that the current school leaders had the time to carry out checks on the quality of provision and plan effectively for school improvement.
- Governors have an open and transparent relationship with senior leaders but recognise that some information they receive lacks analysis and is in a format that does not enable them to scrutinise it in detail. This means that they are often dealing with a broad overview that is not broken down by groups or does not have comparisons of how it has changed over time. As a result, they are not always able to ask the right questions to be able to challenge leaders effectively.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The single central record and all safeguarding policies and procedures are in place and staff know what to do if they have a safeguarding concern.
- Pupils told inspectors that they know who to talk to if they have a problem and that their teachers listen to them. Pupils feel very safe, valued and secure at school.

- The school links well with outside agencies, such as the youth offending team and child and adolescent mental health service. Leaders encourage parents and pupils to engage with the school and, as a result, staff have a fuller understanding of the pupils' needs and circumstances.
- Staff are up to date on all relevant safeguarding training and leaders keep a record of staff who have undertaken the training. However, staff do not sign that they have had the training as the register is completed electronically. This means that leaders cannot quickly identify staff who may have missed a training update.
- All staff are trained to an advanced level in de-escalation care and control and recent training reviewed the purpose and reasoning for holding a pupil. This focus has further supported a significant reduction in the number of physical holds over time.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Leaders have worked with teachers to effectively manage pupils' behaviour for learning and, as a result, pupils in lessons are calm and focused on the task set. Pupils are supported to manage their own behaviours and, if they become unsettled, to use a 'pupil request' card to support them to refocus and become ready for learning again. However, the use of this option is not fully monitored and, as a result, pupils may miss learning opportunities as the 'request' activity may not effectively re-engage them in learning.
- Pupils in some classes are clear about what level they are working at and what they need to do to improve. One pupil in English was very proud to explain what they needed to do to achieve the next level. However, this level of knowledge is not consistent across the school. As a result, some pupils are not clear about what they need to do to improve and how to make better progress.
- Staff assess pupils on arrival and set a target related to their induction. Staff monitor pupils' progress against the set target but do not review them once the target is met. As a result, teachers may not sufficiently stretch and challenge pupils.
- Teachers and support staff do not extend pupils' learning enough over time. For example, in mathematics a starter activity was not directly related to the work being undertaken and for some pupils it was at a less challenging level than they had previously completed. Consequently, the amount of time they had to develop a deeper knowledge and make more progress was reduced.
- In some lessons, teachers structure the learning to effectively engage the pupils and build in challenge matched to the pupils' abilities. However, this practice is not consistently adopted in lessons and as a result not all learners are suitably stretched and challenged. In some cases, extension activities are simply more work at the same level.
- Teachers do not consistently apply the school's marking policy and, sometimes, if feedback is provided, pupils are not given the opportunity to respond. As a result, written feedback fails to inform pupils how to correct or extend their work.
- Some teachers do not check pupils' knowledge or understanding as the lesson proceeds. As a result, these teachers do not adequately stretch the most able and provide appropriate support for the least able.

- In a Year 10 English lesson, pupils were very proud of the project work they were working on and shared with inspectors how they had been able to choose a topic of their choice to research. There was clear evidence of progress in the folders from work that had been drafted and redrafted and pupils were motivated because they knew what was expected of them and the project allowed them to focus on an area of special interest to them.
- Pupils are happy in lessons and proud of the work they are doing. Inspectors observed pupils working independently and in small groups supporting each other. In a design technology lesson, for instance, pupils showed others the correct way to use a saw.
- Teaching assistants are adept at supporting pupils to manage their feelings and moods by using such strategies as a mood wheel, where the pupil can identify how he or she is feeling and whether they are anxious. Through identification and naming their mood they are able to control their emotions.
- Reading is a strength of the school. Pupils are encouraged to harness their special interests, select books with some guidance and read aloud with confidence. Pupils' choices are very wide, from Charles Dickens to fishing.
- Where possible, pupils are given real-life experiences to help underpin their knowledge. Pupils returning from a recent visit were able to articulate clearly what they liked and disliked about the film they had watched. This experience helped them to complete their tasks with a higher level of detail and appropriate vocabulary.
- Pupils are set homework and they know if it is completed it will be rewarded.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- The division of the school into three learning zones with access control points is a strength of the school. Combined with a timetable that reduces movement around the school, the zones have created a calm environment that helps to keep pupils safe. In addition, it has created a sense of belonging and encourages pupils to own and value their school environment.
- The reduction in movement has also reduced pupils' frustration when moving around the school. Staff closely monitor pupils' interaction with each other and provide support when needed. Staff have established positive relationships with pupils.
- Displays around the school are bright, undamaged and reflect the wide range of opportunities on offer to the pupils, reinforcing many aspects of the spiritual, moral and social education as well as British values. An example of this is the positive role models display which includes a mix of sports personalities from a range of ethnic backgrounds and genders. Another display raised awareness of mental health and how pupils could get support.
- Pupils explained to inspectors how the school had helped them keep themselves safe. They were able to describe the risks involved with internet use and social media. They

were accepting of why they had to hand in their mobile devices in the morning and felt that this kept them safe.

- Pupils are well prepared for the next stages of their education. Pupils in key stage 4 have the opportunity for college 'taster' courses and to attend a large careers fair where they find out more about apprenticeships, colleges and employers. Pupils' destinations at the end of Year 11 are consistently strong, with 100% of pupils in education, employment or training. Pupils told inspectors this was because of the good careers advice and because staff encouraged them to be aspirational.
- Pupils told inspectors they were proud of their school and spoke positively about it. The student council and pupil voice are strong in the school. They are involved in the interview process, have influenced a staff uniform, raised money for charity and decided which charities to donate to. Pupils commented to inspectors that staff listen to them and help them work things out.
- Pupils are supported to understand their emotions and how they can impact on their behaviour. Over time this means they become more emotionally resilient and confident at self-regulating their behaviours as they make better choices. The pupil request cards empower pupils to have a say in how they should manage their own behaviours. Currently, they are reviewed every four to six weeks. However, leaders do not currently monitor and measure the impact of such systems.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- In nearly all of the lessons observed, inspectors found pupils to be attentive and well behaved. Pupils are keen to learn and do their best. They cooperate well when working in groups or with another pupil.
- The school encourages pupils to reflect on their behaviour choices, and this is done during group discussion sessions and following significant incidents. This approach supports pupils to recognise their own behavioural triggers and take ownership for their actions. As a result of this process, there are very few instances of low-level disruptive behaviours in lessons or during social times.
- Staff, parents and pupils have no concerns about pupil safety or behaviour. Pupils stated that bullying is rare and know who to report it to. Staff and parent surveys also support this view.
- The number of physical interventions since the last inspection has significantly reduced and has reduced rapidly over the last year.
- While still at a high level, the number of fixed-term exclusions since the last inspection has significantly reduced and has decreased at a greater rate over the last year. The acting headteacher reported that there were no permanent exclusions in 2017/18.
- Pupils are punctual and well prepared for their lessons. However, attendance is below the national average. Leaders demonstrated improvements made since the last inspections and in particular the reduction of differences between disadvantaged pupils, children looked after and other pupils. Leaders record attendance accurately and are using effective strategies to work with families to reduce persistent absence rates.

- Leaders use data at an individual level and therefore do not always pick up on trends early enough to put in place plans to support groups rather than individuals. This applies to physical interventions, exclusions and attendance. They focus on improving the outcomes for the individual pupil and do not use data to consider what the trends are telling them and how they could use this information to increase the pace of improvements.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Leaders have introduced clear systems to work with students to determine appropriate post-16 pathways. This information is then used to determine the most appropriate qualification to prepare students well for the next stage of their education and employment. Consequently, all pupils remain in education, employment or training.
- Pupils over time are able to monitor their own behaviour triggers and follow strategies to help them self-regulate. As a result, they are more engaged in the learning process and make good progress in English and mathematics from their relative starting points.
- Leaders have developed a culture of reading. All groups of pupils actively and happily engage in regular reading activities both independently and by reading out loud to their peers. This has helped support the development of their literacy skills and their self-confidence.
- Pupils in Year 11 in 2018 achieved a good range of entry level and GCSE qualifications and the vast majority achieved or exceeded their target grades.
- The vast majority of pupils are making progress towards achieving their target grades in English and mathematics. Some most able pupils require a greater level of challenge to fulfil their potential.

School details

Unique reference number	135461
Local authority	Walsall
Inspection number	10025419

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	Secondary special
School category	Maintained special
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	69
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ms Tracey Brandwood
Acting Headteacher	Mr Lee Cross
Telephone number	01922 721081
Website	www.elmwood.walsall.sch.uk
Email address	postbox@elmwood.walsall.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	March 2014

Information about this school

- Elmwood School is a small special school for 11- to 16-year-old pupils. The number of pupils on roll has grown since the last inspection.
- The school uses two alternative provision providers, Alpha Hair and the Walsall Education Skills Centre.
- The majority of pupils are White British. The largest other minority ethnic group is Black or Black British.
- All pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities. All pupils have social, emotional and mental health difficulties. Some pupils have additional needs and over a third of pupils currently have a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder.
- The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged is over twice the national average.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors visited 23 lessons. Inspectors also observed pupils' conduct before school, at breaktimes, lunchtimes and after school.
- The inspectors held discussions with senior leaders, subject leads and class teachers. The lead inspector met with governors and a representative from the local authority.
- One group of randomly selected pupils met with inspectors. Inspectors spoke with a large number of pupils informally.
- The inspectors looked at books and folders in their visits to classrooms and scrutinised in depth pupils' work in English and mathematics. They considered a range of information about pupils' current and recent performance.
- The inspectors looked at a wide variety of documents, both electronically and on paper. These included development plans, and evaluations of the school's progress, policies and anonymised information showing how the headteacher manages the performance of teachers. Inspectors scrutinised in detail the single central record and safeguarding procedures.
- The inspection team took account of the seven responses to the online Parent View questionnaire and comments made by free text. Inspectors considered evidence from parent surveys undertaken by the school. They also considered 27 responses to the staff questionnaire. No responses were received from the pupil questionnaire.

Inspection team

Chris Field, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Sarah Ashley	Ofsted Inspector
Andrea Quigley	Ofsted Inspector

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