

Elmtree School

Elmtree Hill, Chesham, Buckinghamshire, HP5 2PA

Inspection dates 3-4 March 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Early years provision		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Attainment has declined over the last three years. Not enough pupils reach the levels expected for their age.
- Pupils' early reading skills are underdeveloped. Too few pupils meet the standard for phonics (the sounds that letters make) at the end of Year 1.
- Teaching does not cater sufficiently well for pupils of differing abilities. For some the work is too hard and for others too easy. This limits the progress that pupils make.
- The most able are not always sufficiently extended in their learning and too few achieve the highest levels.
- Pupils do not have enough opportunities to develop their problem solving skills in mathematics. Pupils do not achieve as well as they should.
- When teachers' check pupils' work, they do not tell pupils how to improve.
- Children's progress has not been good in the early years and their next learning steps have not been identified clearly. Too few have the skills they need when they start Year 1.
- Leadership and management require improvement as teaching has not been consistently good and achievement has declined.
- Leaders and governors do not monitor closely enough the progress of disadvantaged pupils.
- Governors have not checked the school's work with sufficient rigour. They do not monitor closely whether leaders' actions are improving pupils' learning.
- Leaders have been too generous in their evaluations of the school's performance.

The school has the following strengths

- The school has a welcoming and nurturing ethos. The headteacher ensures staff, parents and pupils are well-supported.
- The needs of pupils with special educational needs, including those who attend the additionally resourced provision, are met effectively. These pupils make good progress.
- Safeguarding procedures are robust and pupils are kept safe. Many staff hold specific safeguarding qualifications.
- Parents are highly appreciative of the opportunities their children receive, including the wide range of extra-curricular activities and school trips.
- Transition arrangements to local junior schools are good. Pupils feel confident about the next stage of their education.
- The staff are highly supportive of the school's leadership and morale is high. Relationships between pupils and staff are a strong feature of the school. Pupils behave well.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 12 lessons, four of which were conducted jointly with the headteacher. A visit was made to the additionally resourced provision. Inspectors also heard pupils reading and discussed their reading progress with them. A meeting was held with a group of pupils in Year 2.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, other staff with significant responsibilities, and five representatives of the governing body, including the Chair of Governors. A meeting was held with a representative from Buckinghamshire Learning Trust.
- The lead inspector spoke on the telephone to the manager of The Buckinghamshire Primary Pupil Referral Unit - The Oaks.
- The inspectors took account of 83 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents.
- Inspectors also considered the 46 questionnaires returned by staff.
- Inspectors looked at a number of documents, including the school's own information on pupils' current progress, records showing leaders' checks on the quality of teaching, records relating to pupils' behaviour and attendance, and documents about how the school keeps pupils safe.

Inspection team

Elizabeth Farr, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Kate Robertson

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Elmtree School is a larger than average-sized infant school. There are two classes per year group from Reception to Year 2.
- The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is well above average, as is the proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language. Approximately half of pupils are from diverse ethnic backgrounds, with the largest proportion from Pakistani heritage.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for pupils in local authority care and pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, is below average.
- The school has an additionally resourced provision for pupils with a statement of special educational needs relating to specific speech and/or language difficulties. There are eight places available. The number of places has reduced over recent years.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is well above average.
- The early years provision comprises of a Nursery, where children attend part-time or full-time and two Reception classes, which children attend on a full-time basis.
- The headteacher took up post in September 2013 as part-time executive headteacher. She became the full-time substantive leader from November 2013. The part-time deputy headteacher works two days a week and is seconded from a local school until April 2015. The governing body has appointed a full-time deputy headteacher to join the school in September 2015.
- The school was awarded the British Council International Award in 2012. It has a well-established link with Katapila School and Project Luangwa (an educational charity) in Zambia.
- The school also holds the Green Flag Award.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement by ensuring that:
 - tasks are well-matched to pupils' abilities and that there is appropriate support and challenge for pupils with different needs including disadvantaged pupils and the most able
 - teachers check pupils' understanding during lessons and adapt their teaching accordingly
 - pupils know how to improve their work and further their understanding
 - pupils have regular opportunities to use their calculation skills to solve problems in mathematics
 - assessment in the early years clearly identifies next steps in learning.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - developing senior and middle leaders so that they are better able to improve teaching and learning
 - making better use of the information leaders gather to evaluate the school's performance accurately
 - improving governors' understanding of the school's performance so that they can balance challenge and support, and hold leaders to account.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management requires improvement

- Leadership and management require improvement because leaders are not ensuring that teaching and learning are consistently good. As a result, there has been a decline in pupils' achievement since the previous inspection.
- The headteacher's recent efforts to improve pupils' learning have, in part, been restricted by changes in leadership roles, the absence of key leaders and vacancies. Consequently, it is too early to see an impact on improving teaching and raising achievement.
- The headteacher has determination to improve the school. Since her appointment, she has made some well-judged changes. There are signs which confirm leaders have the capacity to improve the school and stop the decline in achievement. For example, pupils' progress is tracked more closely, teachers are receiving more helpful feedback to develop their skills and attendance has recently begun to improve.
- Parents and staff share great confidence in the leadership of the headteacher and feel the school is a happy, caring place for pupils to learn. The headteacher, other leaders and governors share a commitment to do their best for the pupils.
- The senior leaders' evaluation of the school's performance does not take sufficient account of the impact that teaching over time has had on the progress and attainment of the pupils. Consequently, they have an overly positive view of the school's overall effectiveness.
- Leaders ensure disadvantaged pupils receive additional help particularly in mathematics and literacy. Even so, leaders are yet to ensure this group achieve well overall.
- The headteacher and middle leaders gather a range of information about certain aspects of the school's work such as pupils' progress, the quality of teachers' planning and pupils' rates of attendance. Leaders are beginning to use this information to bring about improvements.
- Systems for checking the performance of teachers are more rigorous than in the past. Teachers' targets are linked to the national Teachers' Standards and whole school improvement priorities. Only those teachers who meet the required high standards, and whose pupils achieve their goals, are able to move up the salary scale. However, targets relating to improving pupils' learning are not sufficiently ambitious to ensure pupils make good progress.
- Safeguarding meets requirements. Staff are well qualified and policies are adhered to rigorously. This very strong aspect of the school's work is appreciated by the pupils and recognised by parents. It underpins the school's good pastoral care for all pupils.
- The school fosters good relationships between all of its pupils, and between pupils and staff. It promotes equality of opportunity and tackles any discrimination appropriately. However, leaders are aware that currently some pupils, including those who speak English as an additional language, are not learning as well as they might.
- British values are effectively promoted through pupils' learning about tolerance and respect. Pupils are proud to be members of the school council and contribute their ideas to fundraising activities. They make decisions fairly including how to improve the outdoor area.
- The work of alternative providers is monitored closely by the school. The progress of pupils who attend is tracked closely.
- The curriculum is planned carefully and includes appropriate links between subjects. Pupils enjoy opportunities to develop and use their creative skills. These are celebrated in displays such as Hansel and Gretel's House, an igloo constructed from milk cartons and rainforest artwork. Opportunities to develop pupils' understanding of the four rules in mathematics are less clear. Pupils' books indicate they have few opportunities to solve mathematical problems and apply their computation skills more widely.
- Music is promoted well. Pupils enjoy singing games, rhymes, action songs and hymns. Recently, the school council helped organise a theme day to support the charity Comic Relief. All pupils have learnt a special song and clearly enjoy rehearsing, singing with gusto. Assemblies alongside regular visitors, themed days, partnerships with overseas schools including Katapila School in Zambia, visits to local places of worship are used well to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The school is making effective use of the primary sports funding. Specialist teachers provide additional activities and support the training of staff. The range of sports activities available to pupils has increased and more pupils are participating. This makes a positive contribution to their strong sense of well-being.
- Leaders have forged a positive partnership between the school and its parents. Staff, including the headteacher, greet families every morning as they assemble in the school hall at the start of the day. Parents are effusive in their praise, appreciating the additional activities the school provides and the

high level of communication.

- Transition arrangements are particularly thorough. Pupils appreciate the opportunity to attend local junior schools for 'try out days' and special events. The schools work closely together and pupils take part in curriculum activities, such as the recent work on World War II. Pupils display high levels of confidence about taking the next steps to junior school.
- Buckinghamshire Learning Trust has increased the level of support for the school in light of its changing needs and this is appropriate. It has arranged useful visits from consultants to support mathematics and early years.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body has ensured that arrangements to manage the performance of staff are securely in place. Governors know about the quality of teaching and how it is being improved. They know how teacher performance links to pay. They review the school's key policies regularly and ensure safeguarding procedures are robust. The Governing Body ensure that the school is committed to providing equal opportunities for all pupils and is free from discrimination. Governors engage well with families and host regular parent voice sessions to gather their views. These contribute particularly well to supporting transition arrangements into school by reassuring new families. Governors regularly visit the school and monitor its work. However, the governing body lacks detailed knowledge about how well the school is performing and if it is improving. Although governors have an accurate understanding of how the pupil premium funding is spent they are less clear about its impact. Governors do not know precisely enough what the school needs to do to improve pupils' learning and raise standards.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils are well-mannered and show consideration towards each other. Routines are well-established and adhered to. Lunchtimes are sociable occasions and pupils chat politely to one another. Pupils have a clear understanding of what is expected.
- Pupils are supervised well at all times and know that they can talk to any adult in school should they have any problems. They play well together, enjoying energetic playtimes which are well resourced; the rhythmic gymnastics ribbons are particularly popular.
- Pupils say they feel happy in school. They particularly enjoy the termly trips, such as the visit to the seaside. They talk positively about the wide range of extra-curricular opportunities which include yoga, French, gardening and football clubs.
- Good relationships are a feature in all lessons. Staff use praise to encourage and motivate pupils to engage fully with their learning. Pupils enjoy the 'well done' assemblies and are proud when their achievements are recognised.
- Pupils are keen to improve their skills. They eagerly check their target cards at the beginning of activities. One pupil in a Year 2 writing lesson was able to explain confidently to a friend, who was uncertain, that her punctuation target meant trying to use exclamation marks. Pupils are thoughtful about how they help each other and take this responsibility seriously.
- In the main, pupils listen well, settle quickly to tasks and concentrate on their work, with or without adult support. However, on occasions when teachers set work that is too easy or not challenging enough, pupils' attention wanders. When pupils are not fully engaged some begin to fidget, talking quietly to their friends about other things.
- Pupils typically get on well together, regardless of background. They show sensitivity towards those pupils who have additional difficulties. Records show staff are successful when supporting a very small number of pupils with particular behavioural needs. This reflects the school's focus on its core values, 'We are respectful, inclusive, supportive, approachable, inspirational, professional and positive.' This helps to foster good relationships.
- Attendance rates have been below average. Persistent absence rates are above the national average. Leaders have had some success at improving attendance during the autumn term. Some families take their children out of school for extended periods and not all make sure that their children arrive at school on time every morning.
- Pupils wear their school uniform with pride, commenting that everyone always looks very smart. They say that behaviour is good and bullying is rare. They are confident that staff deal with any incidents of poor behaviour effectively and as a result, there are now fewer incidents.
- The school's records of behaviour indicate that behaviour is typically good with very few incidents of

poor behaviour. There are no exclusions. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about pupils' behaviour and enjoyment of school.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Parents strongly agree and have confidence in the school.
- Pupils are taught well how to keep themselves safe. For example, pupils know about road safety and the dangers of talking to strangers. Pupils have high regard for the work of the community police team and know officers help to keep them safe.
- Work to keep pupils safe online is effective. Helpful guidance is provided regularly to families, such as the 'Using ICT at home' leaflet. Pupils could confidently describe how to navigate webpages safely. They showed a good awareness of the importance of keeping themselves safe in the online world.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching is not yet good enough to ensure that all pupils catch up quickly and achieve well throughout the school. Not all teachers use assessment information well to plan activities that effectively challenge the most able pupils or support the lower attaining pupils. This means that tasks do not move pupils' learning forward when pupils are ready.
- Some teachers do not check pupils' understanding thoroughly or reshape tasks when it is clear that they are too easy or too hard. Consequently, pupils do not always make the progress they are capable of.
- Teachers mark pupils' work regularly and provide detailed comments about what has been achieved. However, feedback to show pupils how they can improve or practise a skill they have still to master is underdeveloped. As a result, some opportunities are missed to help pupils learn from their mistakes or deepen their understanding.
- Mathematics teaching is characterised by plentiful opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding of the four rules. Pupils are developing their competency with calculation skills well. However, the standards they reach in mathematics are hindered by a lack of opportunity to use their number skills to solve mathematical problems.
- The teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters make) requires improvement. Teachers do not adjust activities quickly enough, particularly if pupils are having difficulty with particular sounds. Sometimes learning time is lost which slows pupils' progress, for example following playtimes.
- Teaching assistants provide good support to pupils. They are highly skilled and support pupils well either in small groups or individually. They ask helpful questions which develop pupils' understanding well.
- Relationships in the classroom are particularly strong. Teaching in the additionally resourced base ensures statemented pupils make good progress in developing their communication skills. Pupils were able to confidently retell a traditional tale and identify key features.

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Since the previous inspection, standards at the end of Key Stage 1 have declined. In 2014 pupils reached standards that were below average in reading and writing and mathematics.
- The proportion of pupils who reached the higher levels of attainment by the end of Year 2 was below national averages in 2014, for reading, writing and mathematics. More pupils are now working at these higher levels than in the past.
- Pupils who are eligible for the pupil premium achieve less well than other pupils nationally, especially in reading. In 2014, disadvantaged pupils in Year 2 were two terms behind other pupils nationally in reading and one term behind in mathematics and writing. They were approximately half a term behind other pupils in the school in reading and writing and half a term ahead in maths.
- Pupils read regularly and enjoy reading at home to support their learning. The outcomes of the phonics screening check for pupils in Year 1 in 2014 have improved when compared to the previous year.
- Most pupils are making expected progress in Year 2 but progress in Year 1 is slower. Pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds and those who speak English as an additional language make similar progress to their classmates.
- Pupils with special educational needs receive good quality care and support from teachers and teaching assistants to help them in their learning. Consequently their skills are developing well.
- Many pupils who attend the additionally resourced base achieve similar standards to other pupils with

special educational needs in the school. Some pupils, who have very specific needs, benefit from well targeted support by skilful professionals, including an occupational health worker and speech and language therapist. Consequently, they are overcoming communication barriers and making good progress.

The early years provision

requires improvement

- Children join the early years with skills below those typical for their age. Over time, children's progress has not been good enough across the early years to prepare them well for Year 1. However, more children are now learning and developing the skills they need.
- Leaders do not use assessment information well enough to evaluate the quality of the provision. As a result, they have an overly generous view of how well children are learning.
- Children behave well, working and playing cooperatively. They are able to remain focused on tasks for sustained periods, cooperating well when undertaking small group activities such as performing a play with the puppet theatre. The children's personal and social skills are developed appropriately.
- Adults' observations identify the things that children can do but the information is not used well to move children on to their next steps when they are ready.
- Children show confidence, and are able to make their own choices about their learning, both indoors and outdoors. For example when following the theme of 'in my imagination' pupils were animatedly utilising cardboard boxes. One child declared, 'this is my speedboat and it goes really fast!' Opportunities for creative and imaginative play are increasing.
- Adults communicate well with the children and ask relevant questions to determine children's understanding. Sometimes opportunities are missed to reinforce ideas and deepen understanding further.
- Children are well cared for and procedures are in place to ensure that they are safeguarded effectively. Parents note that children settle in well.

What inspection judgements mean

School	Grade	Judgement	Description
	Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
	Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	110309
Local authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	443769

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	Infant
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3-7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	280
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Michael Bateman
Headteacher	Mrs Daphne Dru
Date of previous school inspection	25-26 May 2011
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