

Elmhurst School

Dunsham Lane, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire HP20 2DB

Inspection dates

9–10 October 2018

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- Turbulence in leadership has led to a decline in the curriculum, teaching, and pupils' outcomes. Leaders' expectations are too low. Their evaluations of the school's work to improve teaching, outcomes and behaviour are too generous.
- Too many pupils leave the school without reaching the standards in English and mathematics required for them to make a good start at secondary school.
- In 2017, pupils' progress in key stage 2 declined compared with 2016. Early data for 2018 shows that, in some subjects, progress improved. However, the achievement of current pupils is too low, especially in key stage 2.
- Pupils' vocabularies and their reading skills are not developed well enough. Pupils' phonics knowledge is not embedded.
- The curriculum is not effective. Pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding in art, humanities and science are weak.
- Weaknesses in teaching, especially in teachers' subject knowledge, mean the tasks they set do not enable pupils to gain the knowledge and skills intended.
- Persistent absence rates increased last academic year compared with the previous year. Some pupils disrupt the learning of others. Pupils and children do not always follow instructions.
- Approaches to assessment do not support pupils in catching up, nor assist teachers in gaining a clear picture of where there are gaps in pupils' learning.
- Governors' feedback to leaders has sometimes not been challenging enough. Governors have not always questioned how reliable and accurate information provided by the school is.

The school has the following strengths

- Governors have sought to strengthen the school by joining a multi-academy trust.
- Leadership of safeguarding is effective. Pupils are well cared for and say they feel safe. Staff are complimentary about the school.
- Some new approaches in key stage 1 are having a positive impact. Teaching in mathematics has improved in some classes.
- Early years is stronger than other areas. Better teaching is leading to improved outcomes. The leader's analysis of the setting is insightful.

Full report

In accordance with section 44(2) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures, because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Leaders and governors should make substantial improvements in order to:
 - raise expectations across the school of what pupils can achieve, learn and do, and of how well they should follow teachers' instructions
 - evaluate the school's strengths and weaknesses more accurately, including by insightful analysis of information about achievement and behaviour
 - establish curriculums that enable pupils to acquire a broad and deep body of knowledge and skills in their timetabled subjects
 - ensure that the programmes of study outlined in the national curriculum are effectively delivered
 - make sure that subject leaders gain the subject knowledge and expertise they need to carry out their roles effectively
 - ensure that the systems for tracking pupils' progress enable leaders to provide timely support for pupils who have fallen behind, and more accurately identify how well pupils are meeting national curriculum expectations
 - ensure that governance offers a consistent level of challenge and that governors stringently scrutinise information provided by the school.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by:
 - developing pupils' ability to apply phonics knowledge and enhancing their vocabulary so they can better access learning across a range of subjects
 - ensuring that teachers plan learning that is sufficiently demanding and takes account of what pupils already know and can do
 - making sure that teachers are aware of the subject-specific content that pupils need to make progress, and that they know how best to deliver it
 - enhancing teachers' subject knowledge so that they set tasks that enable pupils to develop the subject-specific skills and knowledge that they intend
 - strengthening the way teachers use assessment so that they have an accurate picture of whether intended knowledge and skills have been properly learned
 - ensuring that teachers' questioning is better targeted and does not slow the pace of learning.
- Raise achievement and improve pupils' outcomes, especially in key stage 2, by ensuring that:

- pupils leave with sufficiently developed knowledge and skills in reading, writing and mathematics to make a good start at secondary school
 - pupils who have fallen behind, especially disadvantaged pupils, make the rapid progress they need to catch up
 - most-able pupils fulfil their potential and make the strong progress of which they are capable
 - pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) receive the support they need to make stronger progress from their starting points.
- Reduce levels of persistent absence so pupils do not miss out on their learning.
 - Improve the way that the behaviour of a small number of challenging pupils is managed and reduce low-level disruption.

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 funding should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Inadequate

- The school provides a poor quality of education for its pupils. Leaders have not established high enough expectations of what pupils should learn, know and be able to do. Too many pupils fail to reach the standards in English and mathematics that are required for them to make a good start at secondary school.
- Turbulence in leadership means that senior leaders (phase leaders) concentrate more on the day-to-day running of the school than on driving improvements in pupils' learning. Governors have recently sought to strengthen leadership by the appointment of a temporary executive headteacher. These leadership arrangements are in their infancy. However, the executive headteacher has helpfully secured support for the school from the multi-academy trust which it plans to join.
- Over the past two years, leaders' and interim senior leaders' actions to improve teaching and outcomes have not been successful enough. More recently, senior leaders have introduced some well-focused new approaches to improve teaching and learning, for example in the early years, key stage 1, and in mathematics. Although these new approaches are starting to make a positive difference, they are not yet fully embedded.
- Other planned developments have stalled because responsible leaders have been required to focus on day-to-day matters. For example, new initiatives for improving outcomes for disadvantaged pupils, which started well, have had limited impact on the attainment of this group because they have lost momentum.
- Some senior leaders have not got an accurate view of the school. They do not always check to see if planned changes are having the intended impact. In some cases, leaders set the bar too low and judge what they see as being more effective than it is. Reports of visits from the representative of the company commissioned by the local authority to support the school have also been too generous. This has meant that some weak practice has not been challenged; for example, weaknesses in teachers' subject knowledge.
- A number of subject leaders are new in post and, although keen, do not have a strong enough grasp of the knowledge and skills that relate to the subjects they lead. They have not received the training they need to make a positive contribution to improving pupils' learning and outcomes. There is also an unhelpful lack of clarity in accountability arrangements between phase leaders and subject leaders.
- Leaders' oversight of the curriculum is weak. They have not ensured that the taught curriculum covers the core content outlined in the national curriculum well enough, for example in computing. Leaders are not aware of the impact that weaknesses in the curriculum are having on pupils' learning and progress. In addition, leaders have not realised the extent to which pupils' poor vocabulary prevents them from acquiring knowledge and skills across a range of subjects.
- The tasks that are often outlined in curriculum plans do not enable pupils to embed and apply the subject-related knowledge and skills that are specified in the plans. For example, the geography programme of study indicates that pupils should show their knowledge of coastal topological features through a letter describing a day at the

seaside. This task does not provide the opportunity for pupils to either demonstrate or acquire this knowledge.

- Leadership of special educational needs is inconsistent. Some aspects are stronger than others, such as the help for pupils with speech and language needs, as well as support for some individual pupils. However, funding for pupils with SEND has not sufficiently assisted this group of pupils in making progress in their learning. Leaders do not systematically collate and interpret assessment information to evaluate the impact of support provided.
- Leaders have not yet embedded new approaches well enough. As a result, they are not clear enough about which pupils need to improve and in which subjects. Leaders do not consistently identify those who need to make rapid progress to catch up, nor have they ensured that success indicators link closely with the national curriculum. Last academic year's predictions were overgenerous. Some were a long way from the results pupils actually achieved in 2018, according to early published data.
- Leaders have introduced a new online system for recording behaviour. There are some anomalies in the way that the system records incidents. These issues mean that some information produced by the system needs sorting further to make it useful. Leaders have not analysed information generated by the system well enough.
- Leaders' actions to strengthen parental involvement and develop relationships with the local community have been effective. For example, the member of staff with responsibility for working with parents, carers and the community has successfully facilitated better access for pupils to after-school clubs.
- The school is currently receiving external support from the local mathematics hub, which is assisting leaders in developing pupils' problem-solving skills. Support from the multi-academy trust, which the school is hoping to join, is also helping the school to identify some areas that need further development. Newly qualified teachers (NQTs) feel well supported through the internal and external assistance they receive.
- Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

Governance of the school

- Governors have too easily accepted the accuracy of assessment information provided, including leaders' predictions. Despite governors accessing extensive training, some are not clear enough about how to interpret published performance information, including information about the achievement of different groups. Written reports after governor visits indicate that some governors' feedback is more accurate than others. As a consequence of the above, governors' evaluations of how well the school is doing are sometimes too generous and the challenge they provide is inconsistent.
- Governors are highly supportive of the school and very committed. Governors rightly recognised that they needed to strengthen leadership in the school, following a period of turbulence. In response to this, they have initiated the process of joining a multi-academy trust and successfully secured an interim executive headteacher from a local good school.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective and this aspect of the school's work is better led than others. Well-functioning systems are in place for recording concerns and tracking the progress of any referrals made to the local authority. Designated leaders assiduously follow through on the referrals they make and carefully monitor the impact of planned support.
- Designated leaders are highly attuned to the safeguarding concerns that are most pertinent to the school's context. They make sure that staff are properly trained and emphasise these issues in the training they lead. Designated leaders are especially diligent in following due processes when pupils take extended holidays. The new 'learning for life' programme includes topics that support pupils in staying safe.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Inadequate

- Practice in teaching is inadequate because it does not enable pupils to develop the subject-specific skills and knowledge they need to make progress. Teaching in key stage 1 is slightly stronger than in key stage 2 but is not consistently effective. Across both key stages, teachers' expectations of what pupils can do and achieve are too low.
- In too many classes, pupils are not given work that is sufficiently demanding. In some classes, teachers do not take enough account of what pupils already know and can do. The tasks teachers set most-able pupils do not enable them to apply their learning at a deep level.
- Teachers' questioning is not always effective. It often involves a small number of pupils, during which time pupils not targeted or willing to answer the teachers' questions become disengaged and sometimes disrupt the learning of others. As a result, the pace of learning slows. Some teachers do not insist that pupils meet the school's behaviour expectations by, for example, following their instructions.
- There is mismatch between learning goals intended and pupils' actual learning. The tasks teachers set do not enable pupils to demonstrate subject-specific skills and knowledge. For example, in history, pupils were required to draw and label the contents of an evacuee's suitcase to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the Second World War evacuation programme. The task did not facilitate the learning goal intended by the teacher, although it had been shared with pupils.
- New approaches to improve writing have supported pupils in understanding the structures of different types of writing. However, too many pupils' writing is not at the expected standard because their vocabulary does not have enough breadth and depth, and they do not confidently apply a range of grammatical structures. Pupils do not read enough high-quality whole texts in different genres that employ rich and varied language, including texts from our literary heritage. This has a negative impact on the quality of pupils' writing.
- Teachers do not assess pupils' learning effectively. They do not check whether the content they have taught has been properly learned. Day-to-day practice in assessment does not assist teachers in identifying gaps pupils have in their learning. Some exemplar material, which is meant to assist teachers in making accurate judgements, is assessed over-generously.

- In several subjects, pupils are taught facts and information that are wrong because teachers' subject knowledge is underdeveloped. Inspectors noted pupils being taught incorrect information in science, history and English and incorrect spellings of words.
- The leader responsible for phonics has made some changes that have led to improvements, but the teaching of early reading is not yet effective. The books pupils are provided with, in order to practise their phonics knowledge, do not enable them to do so. In some cases, when pupils encounter sounds that are unfamiliar, they guess and develop misconceptions, which slow their progress in reading further. Some teachers are not aware enough of the gaps pupils have in their phonics knowledge.
- Teaching does not support pupils in acquiring the vocabulary they need to grasp key concepts and knowledge. For example, in religious education, pupils' explanations of the differences between world religions were very limited because of their lack of subject-specific vocabulary.
- There have been some recent improvements in the teaching of mathematics, which mean that some pupils are now required to apply their mathematical knowledge in problem-solving questions. These new approaches are not yet being consistently employed across the school.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement. Although the school nurtures and cares for its pupils, this aspect of the school's work is not yet good because some pupils are not committed to their learning.
- In several classes, when the pace is slow or when pupils are not given work that they find challenging enough, pupils lose concentration, become noisy and some disrupt others' learning.
- The school has introduced a new personal development programme called 'learning for life'. The programme covers a wide range of relevant well-chosen topics, including fundamental British values. It is too early to establish whether the programme is having a positive impact on pupils' personal development and well-being. However, the topics planned indicate that the school is rightfully emphasising the importance of making healthy choices and reducing risk.
- Most parents who spoke to inspectors and completed Parent View were pleased with the support and nurture that the school provides for their youngsters.
- Weaknesses in some pupils' vocabulary make it difficult for them to engage well with teaching or their own learning.

Behaviour

- Most pupils are keen to learn and are respectful to their teachers. However, in a number of classes, particularly where teaching is less effective, some pupils disrupt the learning of others. They talk when the teacher talks, and several pupils told inspectors

that they were distracted by the behaviour of others. Consequently, the behaviour of pupils requires improvement.

- Parent View responses and parental questionnaires carried out by the school indicate that parents are very positive about pupils' behaviour.
- Around school, inspectors noted that pupils behaved well. Breaktimes and lunchtimes were orderly.
- The school has introduced an online system for recording behaviour incidents. The way the system presents some information is misleading. For example, when an incident concerns several pupils, it is recorded several times, which skews the figures.
- Last academic year, the school introduced a new approach to resolving disputes between pupils. Records from the online system show that, over the year, low-level behaviour incidents reduced, indicating that the new approach is helping to cut down on less serious incidents. However, the frequency of these low-level incidents is still too high.
- Last academic year, there was a rise in the number of serious behavioural incidents. These were carried out by a minority of pupils, many of whom have SEND. Although leaders provided support for these individual pupils, leadership and management of behaviour, including of serious behaviour incidents, are not effective.
- Alternative provision is used for a very small number of pupils. School leaders liaise well with leaders of off-site provision. Pupils who access this provision are given the support they need to improve their attendance and behaviour.
- Last year, persistent absence rates increased compared with the previous year. Some pupils take extended holidays abroad during term time, which has a negative impact on persistent absence figures. The school is working closely with families to encourage them to take trips abroad during school holidays.

Outcomes for pupils

Inadequate

- Pupils' achievement over the past two years has been poor. The majority of pupils leave the school without the knowledge, skills and vocabulary needed to make a good start at secondary school. In 2018, according to early indications, only 41% of Year 6 pupils achieved the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics.
- According to the school's own information, the achievement of current pupils is weak in several year groups, most notably in key stage 2. For example, nearly half of the pupils now in Year 5 started this academic year well below where they should be in reading, writing and mathematics. The work in their books suggests that pupils are not making the rapid progress required to catch up. In addition, across the school, some pupils have gaps in their learning for a variety of reasons, such as joining in the middle of the academic year. These gaps are not being identified and filled effectively enough.
- Disadvantaged pupils do not do well enough. Results from national tests and assessments in 2017 showed that their progress and attainment were well below average. In 2018, early indications suggest that disadvantaged pupils in key stage 2 made better progress in reading and writing than they did in the previous year. However, their progress in mathematics remained poor. Disadvantaged pupils currently

in school do not make the rapid progress they need to catch up. In some year groups, their progress is weaker than that of their peers.

- Pupils do not achieve well enough in early reading. In 2017, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in the phonics screening check was well below average. It improved in 2018 and 83% achieved the expected standard. However, pupils who do not reach the expected standard in Year 1 and Year 2 are not well enough supported to catch up in reading.
- Similarly, there are weaknesses in the teaching of reading in key stage 2 that impact on pupils' outcomes. In 2017, pupils' progress and attainment in reading were well below average in key stage 2 tests and assessments. Early performance data for 2018 shows that there have been some improvements in reading, notably in boys' progress. However, overall, pupils achieved below average in reading in 2018 national tests.
- Throughout the school, pupils do not make enough progress in acquiring a rich and extensive vocabulary, which inhibits their achievement across a range of subjects. For example, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in science in 2017 was well below average.
- Pupils with SEND make weaker progress from their starting points than do other pupils. Leaders do not have a sharp enough picture of the progress that this group is making.
- Outcomes in key stage 1 assessments are stronger than in key stage 2. However, work in books and observations of learning show that progress is not yet consistently strong.
- In 2018, pupils' progress and attainment in writing in key stage 2 assessments improved compared with the previous year.

Early years provision

Requires improvement

- The early years is better than other aspects of the school but is not yet good. The senior leader responsible for the early years is new in post and has introduced some carefully considered approaches. She has a sharp and detailed understanding of how well the new approaches are working. She has accurately identified that the teaching of literacy is not yet consistently good across the early years setting.
- The outdoor area provides interesting opportunities for children to extend their knowledge and skills. Adults were observed using equipment to demonstrate key concepts, which helped children to learn.
- Some teachers' and other adults' expectations of children are too low. For example, expectations are not always high enough for children who have experienced one or more years of pre-schooling in the setting.
- Under the guidance of the leader responsible for the early years, adults are developing the way that they support children. However, there are some inconsistencies in how well assistants working alongside children ensure that they gain planned knowledge and skills through their play. For example, some adults do not develop children's vocabularies as well as others. The early years leader has identified this training need and is working closely with staff to ensure that this aspect of practice is equally well developed across the setting.

- Children are generally safe and well looked after. They are adapting to new routines and most follow instructions from adults well. Occasionally, teachers do not follow through when they have asked children to give them their full attention and they fail to do so.
- There have been improvements in the proportion of children, including disadvantaged children, reaching a good level of development over the past couple of years. Children are increasingly better prepared for the academic demands of Year 1.

School details

Unique reference number	110286
Local authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	10052918

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	460
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Gamble
Interim headteacher	Christabel Bunce
Telephone number	01296 481380
Website	www.elmhurst.bucks.sch.uk
Email address	office@elmhurstschool.org
Date of previous inspection	24–25 June 2015

Information about this school

- Elmhurst School is larger than the average-sized primary school.
- The school applied for academy status in March 2018 with a request to join the REAch2 Academy Trust.
- The proportion of pupils who enter or leave the school during Years 1 to 6 is well above the national average.
- From September 2018, the school is being overseen by an interim head of school and a part-time interim executive headteacher. The interim executive headteacher is also the substantive headteacher of another local primary school.
- Over the past two years, the school has undergone a period of turbulence with interim leaders undertaking the roles of headteacher and deputy headteacher to cover the maternity absences of senior leaders.

- A large proportion of pupils come from a range of minority ethnic groups. Many pupils are British children of Pakistani heritage.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is much larger than the national average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is above average.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is in line with the national average. The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan is well above average.
- A very small number of pupils attend the Pathways Pupil Referral Unit for part of the week.
- The proportion of pupils who join or leave the school during the year is well above average.
- The early years provision consists of two full-time Reception classes, two part-time Nursery classes and a part-time class for two-year-olds.
- The school was supported until the start of this academic year by Buckinghamshire Learning Trust, the company commissioned by the local authority to provide support for schools. The school is now being supported by a representative of the local authority.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors made visits to observe learning in approximately 28 lessons and attended an assembly. On most, but not all, occasions they were accompanied by senior leaders. Samples of pupils' work were scrutinised by inspectors on two separate occasions. On the second occasion, inspectors reviewed work from the previous academic year. Inspectors also reviewed a sample of learning journals from children in Reception. On two separate occasions, inspectors met groups of pupils. A number of pupils in Year 2 and Year 1 read aloud to an inspector and two members of the school council gave an inspector a guided tour of the school.
- Meetings were held with the interim headteacher and the interim executive headteacher, together and separately. Inspectors also held separate meetings with senior leaders (phase leaders), subject leaders, a representative of the local authority and the special educational needs coordinator. Meetings were held with leaders responsible for assessment on two separate occasions.
- Inspectors also met separately with leaders responsible for the early years, disadvantaged pupils, safeguarding, sports premium funding, behaviour and attendance and with the leader responsible for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Inspectors met informally with parents at the end of the school day.
- On separate occasions, inspectors met with a group of staff, NQTs, and the chair of the governing body of the school that the interim executive headteacher also oversees. Inspectors also held a meeting with the vice chair of the governing body accompanied by one other member of the governing body.
- Telephone calls were made to the pupil referral unit used by the school.
- Inspectors reviewed the 32 responses made by pupils to the online survey and responses made by staff. They also took into account thirteen responses given by parents to the online survey, Parent View, and six comments made by parents using the free-text facility within Parent View.
- Documentation and policies, which included the school's own evaluation, development plans and responses to the school's own parent questionnaires, were reviewed. Inspectors scrutinised the school's safeguarding records, including safety checks made when teachers are appointed, pupils' records and a selection of teachers' files.

Inspection team

Sarah Hubbard, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Matthew Newberry	Her Majesty's Inspector
Alan Jenner	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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