

Inspection of a good school: Elstow School

Abbeyfields Road, Abbeyfields, Elstow, Bedford, Bedfordshire MK42 9GP

Inspection dates:

8–9 January 2020

Outcome

Elstow School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are happy and well cared for at Elstow School. They are friendly and speak confidently about the school's values. Pupils eagerly line up for the start of the school day and enthusiastically remind themselves of their motto of 'work hard and be nice'. Pupils settle quickly to learning and no time is wasted.

The school continues to grow and there is a waiting list to join in most year groups. Leaders have designed a curriculum to match their high expectations of what all pupils should experience. Pupils' work is of good quality. Pupils are increasingly successful in national assessments.

Pupils are respectful and well mannered to adults and each other. Leaders recently introduced a new behaviour policy. I found that pupils understand the higher expectations and value the rewards they earn. Pupils know what bullying is and what it is not. They are confident that adults listen to them and sort out any issues that pupils may have.

Leaders ensure that pupils' safety is of paramount importance. I saw that staff help parents and carers at the start of the school day when they bring their children to school. Parents speak highly of the support and welfare guidance leaders provide.

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

The principal and other leaders have made carefully considered changes to the curriculum. Teachers deliver the curriculum skilfully and are increasingly expert in the teaching of many subjects. They know what needs to be taught and the best way in which to teach it. Staff are proud to work at the school and appreciate leaders' consideration of their workload.

Leaders want every child to be a fluent reader. Children immediately start learning to read when they start school. Children leave early years reading well. Leaders considered that pupils in key stage 1 were not using their knowledge of sounds when spelling as well as

they could. Leaders changed the phonics programme. They have trained staff and invested in reading books that are better matched to the sounds that children are learning. This chosen approach is reaping rewards. Phonics results in Year 1 have been above the national average for the past two years.

The reading curriculum is similarly well planned and delivered in key stage 2. Pupils read widely across the curriculum. In reading lessons, teachers help pupils develop their understanding and comprehension by providing carefully chosen resources. Teachers have good subject knowledge and effectively explain complex vocabulary to pupils. Pupils often show their understanding when answering questions in other subjects. For example, in history, pupils successfully used appropriate vocabulary and evidence to justify their answers.

Leaders had identified the teaching of mathematics as an area for overall improvement. In the previous two years, pupils have not achieved as well as they should by the end of Year 6. Leaders have changed the way mathematics is taught across the school so that the content in each year group is logically sequenced. Leaders have provided staff with good-quality training to enhance adults' subject knowledge. Teachers make full use of this training to implement the curriculum consistently well.

Teachers make effective use of well-chosen resources. They spot when pupils need additional help and provide them with effective support. Teachers adapt the learning well for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Pupils are confident when practising increasingly complex mathematical questions and problems. In Year 4, for example, pupils are secure with many of their times tables. Leaders have taken a different approach to the teaching of mathematics in Year 6. Pupils are increasingly confident in using and applying their mathematical knowledge and understanding. Pupils' achievement is improving.

Pupils enjoy the many activities provided to develop personally and socially. They have opportunities to participate in a range of sporting events. Adults organise educational trips to broaden pupils' experiences and enjoyment of the curriculum. This year, older pupils have the opportunity to go to France on a residential visit.

Leaders have identified that there are not enough opportunities for those pupils who have the potential to use and apply their knowledge at greater depth. Additionally, in Reception, leaders' changes to the way that teachers approach the teaching of number are relatively new. The curriculum leader has firm plans in place to make the necessary improvements.

The chief executive officer (CEO), governors and members of the trust board have an accurate view of the strengths and areas for ongoing improvement. They provide leaders with the necessary challenge and support so that the school continues to improve.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Adults are well trained to spot potential safeguarding concerns. Leaders keep careful records of these concerns, and when necessary work effectively with other professionals. They make sure that pupils' safety and welfare are at the centre of their actions.

Pupils learn about keeping themselves safe through the well-organised curriculum for pupils' personal, social, emotional and health development. Older pupils have a good understanding of using mobile phones safely and well.

Leaders carry out the appropriate checks when employing staff to work at the school. Trustees regularly check the records to assure themselves that records are well kept. They make the necessary checks when pupils leave the school and make sure all necessary processes are followed.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders have changed the mathematics curriculum and how it is taught. Pupils are making better progress as a result. Leaders need to continue to equip teachers with the knowledge and skills to enable more pupils to achieve the higher standards.
- Leaders recognise that changes to the mathematics curriculum in early years are recent. Leaders should continue to ensure that adults in early years provide children with a more thorough grounding in key mathematical skills.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good school or non-exempt outstanding school. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find some evidence that the school could now be better than good or that standards may be declining, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will convert the section 8 inspection to a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the predecessor school, Elstow School, to be good in November 2016.

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 Ofsted Parent View information 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.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	144039
Local authority	Bedford
Inspection number	10121420
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	412
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trustees	Ryan Tobias
Principal	Samantha Baxter
Website	www.elstowschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected as an academy

Information about this school

- This is a large primary school that is part of the Advantage Schools Multi Academy Trust. Currently in this multi-academy trust there is one secondary school as well as Elstow School.
- The school converted to an academy in May 2017. The current principal commenced her employment in September 2017.
- The interim chair of the board of trustees is also the chair of the local governing body.
- There is a lower-than-average proportion of pupils with SEND at the school. However, the proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan is in line with the national average.

Information about this inspection

- I held meetings with the principal, deputy principals, the special educational needs coordinator, the family worker and leaders with responsibility for early years.
- I spoke with the chief executive officer, the chief operating officer and three members of the local governing body, including the chair of governors. I also had a telephone conversation with a trustee.

- I did deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematic and history. In each subject, I spoke with curriculum leaders, teachers and pupils. I visited lessons and scrutinised pupils' work.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, I reviewed school policies and procedures. I spoke with the principal and designated lead for safeguarding. I reviewed the school's records for the recruitment of staff. I considered the views of parents and pupils.
- I considered the 57 responses and free-text comments that parents submitted to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. I spoke with parents to gather their views at the start of the school day.
- I evaluated the 22 responses to Ofsted's survey for staff and the 134 responses to the pupil survey.

Inspection team

Kim Hall, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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