

Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: Elstow School

Abbey Fields, Elstow, Bedford, Bedfordshire MK42 9GP

Inspection dates:

25 and 26 February 2025

Outcome

Elstow School has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

The principal of this school is Sarah Ciantar. This school is part of Advantage Schools Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Stuart Lock, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Mark McCourt.

What is it like to attend this school?

Very high expectations of behaviour underpin everything at Elstow. Pupils successfully follow the consistent and well-established routines of the school day. They always display commendable behaviour.

Pupils are proud of their school. They show great empathy and respect towards each other. They listen carefully and value their classmates' contributions to discussions. Bullying is very rare. Most pupils never experience it. When it does occur, the school addresses it promptly. It does not happen again. Pupils are very happy and feel safe in school. They know that if they do have any worries, the staff will help them.

Pupils learn an ambitious curriculum in all subjects. In lessons, they carefully follow every instruction. They work hard and always try their best. Pupils achieve well because the school consistently sets the very highest expectations. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) successfully build their knowledge and skills over time.

There is a wide range of afterschool clubs, including crochet and choir. These help to develop pupils' talents and interests. A range of educational visits extend and enhance the curriculum. For example, pupils in Year 5 travel to London to visit a modern art museum.

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

Staff receive regular and effective training. This helps to build their expertise in all areas. School and trust leaders are relentlessly focused on ensuring all pupils learn as well as possible. For example, the school has improved the mathematics curriculum. Teachers are skilled at adapting mathematics lessons to meet the needs of their pupils. This starts in early years and is consistent across all year groups.

Pupils learn well because teachers present new learning clearly. They consistently check pupils' understanding. Pupils respond immediately to any feedback given. This helps them to embed and deepen their learning. On some rare occasions, there are instances where teachers do not fully align with the school's established expectations. When this occurs, opportunities for pupils to rehearse and practise may not be fully optimised.

The school has adopted a well-sequenced phonics curriculum. Children quickly learn the sounds they need to know. Leaders provide training for staff that helps them to teach phonics effectively. Staff use accurate checks to identify swiftly anyone falling behind in reading. This includes any older pupils who may not know all their sounds and those pupils with SEND. These pupils receive effective, additional support to help them to catch up.

In the Reception Year, children get off to a great start. There are very high expectations for learning and behaviour. This supports children to learn the routines of the school day. Children pick up the excellent learning behaviours that are a feature of the school. For example, children show great care and respect for all the resources. They learn key facts that they can recall and build upon in Year 1 and beyond. In less-structured learning time, children play and learn together positively and happily. They are being prepared well for Year 1.

The school, with the support of the trust, has transformed the culture of attendance. It has implemented a range of effective strategies. It has put a strong emphasis on celebrating improvements in attendance with pupils and parents. As a result, pupils attend very regularly. Persistent absence is rare.

There are unwaveringly high expectations for pupils with SEND. Teachers make effective adaptations. For example, well-developed support helps pupils with SEND to improve their writing. Pupils with SEND access their learning with growing independence as they progress through the school.

Pupils feel secure and happy when at school. They listen attentively to their teachers. They know exactly what is expected of them and they know what to expect in the structure of their lessons. A calm and purposeful atmosphere can be felt throughout the school. Pupils are always focused and engaged in lessons. They are motivated and independent learners. They share and take turns with their peers without adult support.

The school has planned well for pupils' personal development. Leaders have carefully mapped out extra-curricular opportunities that enrich pupils' experiences. Pupils value the

opportunities they have to represent the school in competitive sport. These opportunities help to improve their self-esteem and confidence.

Trustees and governors are knowledgeable and diligent in the actions they take. They support and challenge the school effectively because they know the school well. Their unwavering focus on taking decisions in the best interests of all pupils guides all their actions. Staff are appreciative of the way leaders take careful account of their workload.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- On rare occasions, there is some variation in the consistency of checks on pupils' learning, which may mean that opportunities for practise and rehearsal are not always fully maximised. The school should enhance and strengthen professional development to further support staff in confidently and consistently implementing the school's ambitious curriculum.

Background

Until September 2024, on a graded (section 5) inspection we gave schools an overall effectiveness grade, in addition to the key and provision judgements. Overall effectiveness grades given before September 2024 will continue to be visible on school inspection reports and on Ofsted's website. From September 2024, graded inspections will not include an overall effectiveness grade. This school was, before September 2024, judged good for its overall effectiveness.

We have now inspected the school to determine whether it has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at that previous inspection. 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's work has improved significantly or that it may not be as strong as it was at the last inspection, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection. A graded inspection 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 second ungraded inspection since we judged Elstow School to be good for overall effectiveness 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 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	144039
Local authority	Bedford
Inspection number	10366664
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	418
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Mark McCourt
CEO of the trust	Stuart Lock
Principal	Sarah Ciantar
Website	www.elstowschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	8 January 2020, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school does not use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and has taken that into account in his evaluation of the school.
- The inspector met with leaders, including the CEO, chief education officer, director of maths, principal, deputy headteacher, a range of other leaders and a group of trustees and governors.
- The inspector visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.

- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspector: 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 inspector reviewed a range of school documentation, including behaviour records.
- To gather the views of staff, the inspector took account of responses to Ofsted's staff survey and held discussions with them.
- The inspector also considered the views of parents through their responses to Ofsted Parent View.

Inspection team

Mark Sim, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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