

Elliott Park School

18–20 Marina Drive, Minster-on-Sea, Sheerness, Kent ME12 2DP

Inspection dates

7–9 November 2017

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	Requires improvement
Early years provision	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Leaders' evaluations of the school's strengths and weaknesses are not sufficiently focused on teaching, learning and progress. As a result, priorities for improvement are not identified sharply enough.
- Leaders do not check carefully the quality of teaching within the school. Teachers are not held firmly to account for the difference their work makes to pupils' achievement.
- Pupils do not make consistently good progress throughout their time at the school. While most achieve at least age-related expectations by the end of Year 6, they do not always achieve the high standards of which they are capable, especially in reading and writing.
- The quality of teaching across the school, including across the early years foundation stage, is variable. Opportunities to develop staff expertise through training and support are underdeveloped.
- Although children are typically well prepared physically, socially and emotionally for key stage 1 learning, their literacy and numeracy skills are less well developed by the end of the early years foundation stage.

The school has the following strengths

- Staff and the proprietor are deeply committed to the school and its pupils. They work hard to provide a safe and happy learning environment that encourages pupils to develop as individuals.
- The high quality of provision in the Nursery class provides children with an excellent start to their learning journey.
- Leaders make good use of limited resources to ensure that pupils enjoy a suitably broad and varied curriculum. This prepares pupils well for secondary school and for becoming responsible British citizens.
- Staff know pupils well and care for them effectively. Pupils feel safe and understand how to keep themselves safe.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Develop the rigour and frequency with which leaders, including the proprietor, make checks on the quality of teaching and learning across the school, so that priorities for improvement can be identified and acted on quickly.
- Use systematic and regular training to ensure that the quality of teaching across the school becomes routinely as effective as it already is in some areas of the school.
- Raise standards further, by ensuring that pupils make consistently rapid progress throughout their time at the school.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leaders, including the proprietor, do not have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the academic standards in the school. They have not been sufficiently aware of the raised national expectations put in place since the last inspection, and so have not responded to them rapidly enough.
- Leaders' checks on the quality of teaching, and formal evaluations of staff performance, are in the embryonic stage. This impedes the rate of school improvement, because priorities for development and training are not identified and acted on quickly and strategically.
- The headteacher and her staff are not held effectively to account for the impact of their work. They work closely and supportively together, but do not focus sufficiently on ensuring that their work enables all pupils to achieve as well as they could. Individual responsibilities linked to leadership roles are not always identified clearly.
- Leaders do not have the training or opportunity to take the actions needed to maintain the highest standards in the school. Training to improve and develop the quality of teaching across the school is limited and lacks structure. As a result, good practice evident in some parts of the school is not shared and developed effectively across the board.
- Leaders communicate well with parents. A clear and detailed website supports them in sharing a wealth of useful information. However, sometimes policy documents on the website are not checked carefully enough, so appear to be out of date or to give conflicting information about the school's expectations or processes.
- The headteacher is deeply committed to the school and its pupils. She has plans to help it to continue to improve and is receptive to the limited support and advice that is available to her. Parents typically have confidence in her leadership and the ethos of developing the whole child that is evident across the school.
- Staff work hard and with dedication to look after pupils in the school and help them to grow as individuals. They receive effective safeguarding training, which ensures that they understand and carry out their duties appropriately. The culture of caring is evident throughout the school.
- The independent school standards are met. Leaders, supported by the proprietor, make careful and thoughtful use of available resources. This ensures that the school building and surrounding environment are safe and maintained to the appropriate standards.
- Pupils benefit from a suitably rich and varied curriculum. Staff use their collective expertise well to deliver a broad range of subjects. Pupils value the opportunities to learn music and languages from specialist staff. Staff make good use of local facilities to enhance sports provision.
- Leaders make creative use of opportunities to enrich the formal curriculum. Pupils enjoy participating in a suitably wide range of clubs and extra-curricular activities. They enjoyed representing the school at a recent local mathematics outreach event where they competed successfully against teams from other schools.

- Pupils are prepared well for life in modern Britain. The personal, social and health education programme promotes their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development appropriately. Pupils demonstrate this in their typically thoughtful and accepting interactions with each other and their teachers. For example, during the inspection, pupils talked to inspectors about the remembrance poppies they were wearing and what they represented.

Governance

- The school does not have a governing body. Its work is overseen by a sole proprietor.
- The proprietor does not hold the headteacher to account as effectively as he should for the quality of teaching and the learning outcomes of pupils. His awareness of the independent school standards is limited. Consequently, he does not understand clearly enough the priorities for improvement, or the training that is needed to achieve them.
- The proprietor is dedicated to sustaining the school. He values deeply the opportunities it provides for pupils in being prepared well for their next steps, both in life and in their learning.
- The proprietor provides access to useful practical support that enables the business and premises aspects of the school to function effectively. He visits the school regularly to check how things are going, meeting with the headteacher and gaining feedback from parents.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders ensure that legal requirements for safeguarding are met. Appropriate safeguarding policies support the school's work. These policies are shared openly with parents via the school website. Leaders use careful risk assessments to ensure that pupils can participate safely in activities that stimulate their learning, such as going to the local sports field and swimming pool.
- Leaders make regular checks on adults working in the school, to ensure that they are safe to work with children. All adults, including volunteers, receive appropriate training and support from the designated safeguarding lead. This ensures that they understand this important aspect of their role.
- Staff know pupils very well as individuals. They are perceptive in identifying any changes in a pupil's behaviour that might indicate concerns, which they follow up appropriately, using support from beyond the school when needed. This helps to promote a strong culture of safeguarding.
- Pupils report that they feel safe in school. Staff overwhelmingly support this view, as do the vast majority of parents who shared their opinions via the Parent View survey or through talking to inspectors. Some parents and pupils report that, while staff deal with any concerns they may raise, this does not always result in the issue being dealt with effectively.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching is too variable across the school. Consequently, although pupils typically achieve above national expectations by the end of Year 6, they do not make the consistently good progress across the school that would enable them to fulfil their potential.
- Where teaching is less effective, learning activities do not build precisely on pupils' prior knowledge and understanding. Pupils do not always understand the purpose of the activities they are undertaking, and therefore find it difficult to apply what they have learned to a different context.
- Pupils do not routinely have the opportunity to develop as independent learners. Some are heavily reliant on the adults who support them. As a result, their progress is not as rapid as it could be.
- Pupils do not transfer their skills accurately from subject to subject consistently well. They do not typically write as well across their wider curriculum as they are seen to do in English.
- Although pupils receive helpful feedback about their work, in line with the school's policy, this does not necessarily lead to improvements in learning over time. Mistakes, particularly in the grammatical accuracy of written work, remain in subsequent pieces of work, because pupils have not acted effectively on the feedback they have been given.
- Teachers know pupils well as individuals, and help them sensitively with their learning. However, this careful support is not always directed at those who most need to accelerate their progress. As a result, pupils who are working at lower levels do not catch up quickly enough with their peers in school.
- Pupils develop their phonics skills appropriately over time, which helps them to become good and enthusiastic readers. In Year 1, pupils were seen using their phonics skills carefully to sound out unfamiliar words, then practise writing them accurately. A notable number of pupils read at a level above that expected for their age.
- Leaders have established a successful approach to assessment, which links closely to the curriculum. This enables teachers to know pupils' next steps in learning, and to share this information effectively with parents.
- Where teaching is most effective, teachers use questioning well to probe pupils' understanding and embed key learning skills. Individual support is closely tailored to learning needs, and is effective in moving pupils forward rapidly with their learning.
- The learning environment across the school is typically calm and orderly. Pupils work well together and enjoy engaging in active learning. They are confident in offering their thoughts and ideas, knowing that other pupils will be respectful of them. On the rare occasions that pupils lose focus, teachers intervene appropriately to bring them back to the task in hand.
- Teachers have secure subject knowledge that helps them plan learning that builds over time. They utilise their individual subject-related strengths well to support teaching of foundation subjects such as science, physical education and art. Leaders make effective use of subject-specialist staff in music and languages to complement teaching of the wider curriculum.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are very well cared for. This is a strength of the school. The vast majority of parents reflect very positively on how well staff know their children, and how hard the staff work to meet their needs. Parents describe how well staff help children to grow in confidence as well as academically. One parent captured this particularly vividly, noting how the staff help their children by 'nurturing their personalities'.
- Pupils and their parents say that bullying is rare. School records support this claim. Parents report that any concerns about bullying are dealt with effectively by school leaders. Pupils describe how kindness is evident within the school, with pupils looking after each other at playtime and celebrating each other's successes.
- Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe, including when using the internet. Leaders ensure that pupils develop their online skills safely at school. Pupils have a well-developed awareness of the world around them. Leaders make effective use of visitors and visits, for example to the local senior citizen group, to enrich pupils' wider learning.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils typically conduct themselves well in lessons and when moving around the site. They respond well to teachers when they intervene, for example to calm down lively play at lunchtime.
- Leaders monitor attendance and punctuality carefully. They take prompt and appropriate action when pupils are absent from school. Leaders recognise that some pupils do not attend school as regularly or promptly as they should. Leaders have appropriate plans in place to address these issues, linked to their detailed understanding of individual contexts and challenges. These plans are based reliably on strategies that have been effective in the past.
- Pupils report a more variable picture of standards of behaviour than was evident during the inspection. Leaders' careful records support inspectors' and most parents' views that behaviour is good, and show incidents to be typically low-level and resolved by staff. It is not clear to what extent leaders use these records to inform future actions that might prevent, rather than react to, subsequent behavioural concerns.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Pupils do not make routinely good progress from their broadly average starting points. Consequently, they do not always achieve as well as they could in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of key stage 2. A notable proportion of pupils do not meet at least age-related expectations consistently throughout their time at the school.
- Those pupils who most need to catch up make limited progress as a result of extra help, particularly in literacy. Leaders' performance information suggests that some pupils made

no measurable progress over the course of a year in reading and writing, despite the additional support they had received.

- Work in pupils' books across a range of subjects supports the erratic progress over time that is demonstrated in the school's performance information. Improvements in grammatical and technical accuracy in writing are not sustained over time and across the wider curriculum.
- Leaders discuss pupils' progress regularly with teachers, to identify gaps in learning and establish where extra help is needed within and beyond the classroom. However, these discussions tend to be informal, which limits the impact on rates of progress for those pupils who most need to catch up.
- Teachers are supported well by the assessment systems in place that help them to identify what individual pupils can and cannot do. Leaders and teachers do not typically have an overview of where learning is less successful. Consequently, learning activities and additional help are not targeted as closely on securing previous learning as they need to be. Leaders reflected on this during the inspection, and have taken prompt action to begin to address this issue, looking more widely at patterns in progress information to identify where progress most needs to accelerate.
- Pupils typically achieve at least the standard expected for their age in reading, writing and mathematics by the time they reach the end of Year 6. This represents pupils making expected progress from when they arrive in Nursery or the Reception Year, and prepares pupils appropriately for their next steps in learning. Some pupils achieve a higher standard, particularly in mathematics
- Pupils typically make more rapid progress in mathematics than in literacy during their time at the school. The proportion of pupils who achieve above age-related expectations in mathematics is high. Extra help is more effective in enabling pupils to catch up in mathematics than it is for literacy. Pupils build securely on their mathematical understanding over time.
- When pupils join the school after the early years foundation stage, staff work closely with them to identify gaps in their learning and provide them with appropriate support. Some pupils make rapid progress in reading, writing and mathematics as a result.

Early years provision

Requires improvement

- Children broadly meet age-related expectations when they join the school. By the end of the Reception Year they are no longer routinely working at age-related expectations across all of the main areas of learning, particularly literacy and numeracy. Leaders recognise that pupils who join the school during the Reception Year make less secure progress and are not as well prepared for key stage 1 as those who join the school in the Nursery class. This is because of the variation in the quality of experience they receive across the two years of the early years foundation stage.
- The quality of the learning environment is variable across the early years foundation stage. Opportunities to explore the outside world are not as readily available in the Reception class as they are in the Nursery class, where children have regular access to a safe and inviting outside area. Consequently, opportunities for children to learn about the world around them are not consistently rich.

- Where learning is most effective, staff work closely together to support learning across their classes. Clearly defined roles enable adults to maximise how their time is used in class to stimulate and develop individual children's learning. Leaders recognise that this does not happen routinely across the whole of the early years foundation stage.
- Staff track children's learning carefully against the early learning goals. This enables all staff to know where children's learning is secure and where it is not. Staff meet regularly as a group to review how well children are doing, and to share their expertise effectively when planning future learning activities based on children's identified needs.
- Leaders ensure that safeguarding arrangements in the early years are as effective as for the rest of the school. Staff work closely with parents to identify any instances where children might be deemed to be vulnerable. They support individuals and their families sensitively and effectively, using support from beyond the school when appropriate. This helps children to feel safe and very well cared for.
- The headteacher oversees the early years provision, as well as teaching in the Nursery class. She uses her skills and experience to evaluate accurately this part of the school's work. She ensures that the independent school standards relating to the early years are met.
- Children typically interact well together. Only when their interest in the activities they are participating in wanes do they become more fractious and need greater support to manage their behaviour. During the inspection, this was more evident in the Reception class than in the Nursery class.
- Children in the early years enjoy coming to school. They make notable gains in their personal, social and emotional development. Consequently, they develop the confidence that enables them to be ready to move on to engage with the more challenging learning processes in key stage 1.

School details

Unique reference number	119005
DfE registration number	886/6057
Inspection number	10020908

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Other independent school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	74
Number of part-time pupils	15
Proprietor	Mr Thomas Allsworth
Headteacher	Mrs Colleen Hiller
Annual fees (day pupils)	£5,325
Telephone number	01795 873372
Website	www.elliottparkschool.co.uk
Email address	elliottparkschool@btconnect.com
Date of previous inspection	13–14 November 2012

Information about this school

- Elliott Park School is a small, non-selective independent primary school. It opened in 1985, moving into its current, purpose-built premises in 1986. The nursery class was established in September 2011.
- The school currently has no pupils who have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan.
- The headteacher and deputy headteacher worked at the school when it was last inspected, but were not in their present roles. They took up their current posts in September 2015, when the previous headteacher retired. There have been several changes of staff since the last inspection. Four members of staff joined the school in September 2017.

- There is a sole proprietor, who has been in place since before the last inspection.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors met with a broad range of staff, including the headteacher, deputy headteacher and assessment leader. The lead inspector spoke to the proprietor on the telephone.
- An inspector met with groups of staff and pupils separately to gather their views about the school. Staff views were also considered via 14 responses to the confidential staff questionnaire. Inspectors spoke to pupils informally during visits to lessons and at playtime.
- Inspectors visited all classrooms to observe learning and look at pupils' work. Some of these visits were carried out alongside school leaders. Inspectors also considered further examples of pupils' work by carrying out a book scrutiny across a number of subjects.
- Inspectors reviewed extensive documentation provided by school leaders and on the website, including policies, safeguarding procedures and pupil performance information.
- Parents' views were taken into account via the 32 responses to the Parent View online questionnaire, including six free-text responses. Inspectors also considered a letter received from a parent, and spoke to a number of parents on the playground at the start of the day.
- The lead inspector toured the school with the headteacher to check compliance with the independent school standards.

Inspection team

Kathryn Moles, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Lucy English

Her Majesty's Inspector

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