Inspection of Elm Academy

Holloway Avenue, Bournemouth, Dorset BH11 9JN

Inspection dates:	7 and 8 January 2025
The quality of education	**Good**
Behaviour and attitudes	**Good**
Personal development	**Outstanding**
Leadership and management	**Good**
Early years provision	**Good**
Previous inspection grade	Outstanding

The principal of this school is Jo Wakeman. This school is part of the Authentic Education Group, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Fay MacRitchie, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Alison Beane.

Until November 2020, the school was exempt from routine inspection because it was judged as outstanding for overall effectiveness at its previous inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The school has not been inspected under section 5 of the Act since April 2014. Since September 2024, schools have not been awarded an overall effectiveness grade.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils at Elm belong to a caring and welcoming community. The school's 'EPIC' values of enjoyment, potential, inclusivity and community encourage pupils to work together and aim high. Pupils are motivated and curious to learn. They respect and value difference. This makes for a happy school where everybody, regardless of need or ability, can shine.

The school sets high expectations for pupils' learning, including for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). It is determined that pupils achieve academic success, as reflected in the positive outcomes achieved by Year 6 pupils in the 2024 national tests.

Pupils behave well and live up to the expectations adults set for them. They are keen to earn house points and raffle tickets for their efforts. Pupils feel confident talking to an anti-bullying ambassador or using the 'I wish somebody knew' box if they have any concerns.

The school meticulously plans many rich and purposeful experiences to broaden pupils' horizons. These experiences include multiple residentials, talent shows and fundraising events. Pupils proudly take on responsibilities, such as sports ambassadors, head boy and girl and school councillors. They make a tangible difference to the school, such as reducing plastic use in school lunches.

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

The school has carefully constructed a well-sequenced curriculum that begins in the early years. It has identified the specific knowledge and vocabulary pupils need to know and remember. In many subjects, pupils discuss their learning well. For example, in Year 6, they can explain the concept of invasion in the Second World War and how it builds on their learning about the Romans in Year 4. Pupils in Year 1 use their knowledge of planting seeds in Reception and understand that plants need water and sunlight to grow.

Teachers have secure subject knowledge. They present information clearly and tailor learning and resources so that pupils with SEND learn the same curriculum as their peers. Teachers use checks in lessons to help the important knowledge stick in pupils' memory. For example, in mathematics, '10 a day' questions recap previously taught content. Despite this, the school does not consistently use the information from these checks to shape future learning. As a result, in a few subjects, misconceptions go unnoticed and persist in pupils' work.

The school prioritises reading. Staff choose literature to develop pupils' vocabulary and enrich the subject curriculums. Children in the Nursery Year enjoy retelling familiar stories and rhymes. Older pupils build empathy from the books they read about evacuees. Staff share their reading recommendations with pupils. This inspires them to read widely. Pupils of all ages wear the reading champion badges they have earned with pride.

The school has strengthened its approach to early reading. Staff now teach the phonics programme with fidelity. This starts in the early years. Staff support children well in blending sounds to read words. They provide extra help, such as 'priority reading', for pupils who fall behind. The impact of the school's work can be seen in the improving outcomes of the Year 1 phonics screening check in 2024.

The quality of older pupils' writing is consistently high. However, from the early years and into key stage 1, too many children and pupils do not secure effective pencil grip and accurate letter formation. In these phases, the school has not yet decided on the specific methods for teaching handwriting. This slows the pace at which pupils become fluent writers.

Pupils are polite and well mannered. Staff identify the needs of pupils with SEND accurately. They support pupils who struggle to manage their behaviour very well. Suspensions have greatly reduced. The specialist 'hub' provision successfully meets pupils' specific academic and social needs.

The school promotes pupils' personal and character development exceptionally well. Pupils' service to the wider community is commendable. For instance, the choir sings at an elderly care home, and the dance group performs at a national event. Assemblies on beach awareness reinforce water safety. Pupils learn about important issues, such as gender inequality and racism. Visits from female construction workers and the Royal Navy introduce pupils to future career possibilities. Building zip wires and trying new activities on residential visits develop pupils' resilience and teamwork.

A strong team spirit exists. Staff are positive about working at the school. Teachers appreciate how leaders help to manage their workload when introducing new initiatives to improve learning. Trustees and the local academy board understand the school's priorities. They offer effective support and challenge to improve the quality of education for pupils.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school does not prioritise the teaching of early transcription, including letter formation, with sufficient rigour. This hinders the quality of pupils' early writing skills. The trust should ensure that the school revisits its approach to handwriting and gives greater focus to letter formation and pencil grip so that pupils gain the necessary knowledge to become proficient writers.
- Occasionally, the school does not use its awareness of pupils' knowledge gaps and misconceptions to inform future learning. When this happens, some errors go unnoticed and persist in pupils' work. The trust should ensure that the school uses

appropriate checks to help pupils build and recall their knowledge securely in all subjects.

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	138990
Local authority	Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole
Inspection number	10344650
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	363
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Alison Beane OBE
CEO of the trust	Fay MacRitchie
Principal	Jo Wakeman
Website	www.elm-academy.org.uk
Dates of previous inspection	24 and 25 April 2014, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Authentic Education Group multi-academy trust. In the past year, the trust has experienced changes in leadership and governance.
- The school offers internal 'hub' provision for a small number of pupils with SEND.
- The school does not currently use alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth-form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024 will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- 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. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors held discussions with the principal, the vice-principals and other school staff. The lead inspector met with the chair of the local academy board and a trustee. He also met with the CEO of the trust and executive leaders.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, science and geography. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also considered the curriculum in other subjects.
- Inspectors listened to some pupils in Years 1, 2 and 3 reading to an adult.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: met the designated safeguarding lead; checked the single central record of adults working in the school; took account of the views of 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.
- Inspectors viewed a range of school documentation, including the school's self-evaluation documents and minutes of governance meetings.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and during breaktime and lunchtime. They spoke with pupils and staff about behaviour.
- Inspectors spoke with a range of staff to discuss how the school supports their workload and well-being.
- Inspectors spoke to parents at the start and end of the school day. They considered responses to Ofsted's online survey for parents, Ofsted Parent View, including free-text comments. They also considered responses to Ofsted's staff survey.

Inspection team

Dale Burr, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Jo Hicks	Ofsted Inspector
Jyotsna Paranjape	Ofsted Inspector

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