

Inspection of Elm House School

15 Mill Road, Cheadle, Stoke on Trent ST10 1NG

Inspection dates: 8 to 10 March 2022

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection Not previously inspected

Does the school meet the independent school standards? **Yes**

What is it like to attend this school?

At Elm House, staff help pupils to get back on track with their education. Pupils learn to come to school regularly and on time. They are given clear, fair and simple rules to follow. However, they also have a say in what happens at school.

Pupils also learn how to manage their feelings and behaviour in positive ways. Staff notice and reward good behaviour and step in quickly if there are any problems. Pupils are not worried about bullying because they feel secure and safe in class and on the playground. They know that adults will look after them and do the right thing.

Each week, pupils study lots of different subjects. Whatever their starting points, staff make sure that work is pitched at the right level. They give pupils lots of praise and help them a lot with their reading, writing and number work.

Teachers encourage pupils to join after-school clubs and every pupil has a special job to do at school. Pupils usually enjoy school and value the regular routines that happen each week. If anything upsets them, then staff give them the time and space they need to calm down.

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

Most pupils who attend this school have missed education in the past and have gaps in their knowledge and skills. All pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders are determined to support pupils to return to mainstream education.

The curriculum is well planned and sequenced across all subjects. When pupils join the school, teachers use a variety of assessments to find out what pupils know and can already do. Teachers then map out the knowledge and skills that pupils need to learn over time. Teachers have adequate subject knowledge for the subjects that they teach. As a result, pupils gradually start to catch up and fill the gaps in their learning.

At times, teachers do not make sure that pupils are aware of when they have misunderstood something in their learning. This makes it harder for them to learn from mistakes. Teachers provide frequent help to pupils and give them worksheets to complete. Pupils work hard and get a lot done. However, they do not necessarily build up stamina for longer tasks. Nor does this approach support pupils to write or set out their work independently.

Leaders have ensured that good resources for reading are available across the school. They use a well-sequenced reading programme that provides books at the right level for pupils' different needs. Pupils have effective phonics lessons every day and frequent opportunities to practise reading. Older pupils are proud of their developing reading skills and of reading their first 'chapter book'. Teachers read

stories to younger pupils every morning when they come into school. Pupils enjoy this and love joining in with familiar words and phrases. Consequently, they develop their knowledge of words. This valuable morning activity promotes an enjoyment of books. It supports pupils to start the school day in a predictable and positive way.

Teachers make sure that pupils know right and wrong. They also help them to socialise and to think about other people. For example, pupils sent Christmas cards to residents in the local care home. Pupils learn about contributing to their local community and to the wider world. For instance, pupils made cakes to sell to staff in aid of 'Children in Need'. Pupils learn about keeping fit through healthy eating and exercise.

Teachers work hard to encourage pupils to try new things. Pupils learn about different religions. For example, they have learned about Christianity and Islam. They have seen a video of a Gurdwara. They cooked Mexican and Chinese food and shared it with the staff. In this way, teachers make sure that pupils develop a good understanding of diversity and an acceptance of difference.

Pupils learn about fundamental British values. They begin to understand about democracy through the school council. Every morning, pupils take part in a 'Newsround' activity. This helps pupils to learn about the wider world and to take an interest in others. Pupils take on responsible jobs that are meaningful and help the school to run smoothly. Teachers make sure that pupils know that, however different, people are all equal. Leaders have ensured that pupils receive effective relationships and sex education. Through personal, health, social and economic education, staff support pupils to think about positive choices and their future careers.

The school communicates extremely effectively with a variety of other agencies. The work of the school's clinical team has a significant impact on pupils' improving mental health.

The work of the proprietor has a strong impact on the quality of the school's provision. Leaders plan to ensure that, across the company, there is specific expertise in teaching every subject of the curriculum. They intend for this increased expertise to increase the subject knowledge of the teachers at Elm House. Staff appreciate the regular support that leaders provide for their career development. They are thankful for the way that leaders care about their workload and well-being. Leaders know their statutory duties and have ensured that all the independent school standards are met.

The school is compliant with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have a detailed understanding of pupils' complex needs. Staff are highly alert to any indication that pupils may be at risk from harm. Leaders and staff work closely with outside agencies to ensure that pupils receive the support they need to keep them safe. Teachers make sure that pupils know about internet safety, so that they themselves are alert to any dangers.

Staff are well trained in all aspects of safeguarding. Leaders are very careful to follow guidelines for the safe recruitment of staff. The safeguarding policy is displayed on the school website and complies with government regulations.

What does the school need to do to improve?

- Pupils do a lot of work in class, but it is heavily supported by worksheets and other scaffolds. Over the longer term, this does not help pupils to build stamina towards working independently on longer tasks. Looking to the future, and as pupils settle into the school, leaders should aim to give pupils more opportunities to set out their own work and develop greater independence. Teachers should support pupils to get into good habits and routines that will help them if they move back into mainstream school.
- Sometimes, teachers do not pick up on pupils' mistakes in work. This means that some errors or misconceptions go unchecked. This does not help pupils to learn from their mistakes and build resilience. Leaders and staff should make sure that they respond to errors in pupils' work in an accurate and timely manner.

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The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

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

School details

Unique reference number	148133
DfE registration number	860/6069
Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	10192415
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	5 to 14
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	4
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Halliwell Homes Ltd.
Chair	Karen Mitchell-Mellor
Headteacher	Georgina Fletcher
Annual fees (day pupils)	£29,250
Telephone number	01615492325
Website	halliwellhomes.co.uk
Email address	georgina.fletcher@halliwellhomes.co.uk

Information about this school

- Elm House School is one of six schools in the Halliwell Homes group.
- Elm House is located in the town of Cheadle to the east of Stoke-on-Trent. The school is situated in the extension wing of a former guest house.
- The school provides full-time education for pupils with SEND. The majority of pupils have social, emotional and mental health needs. Most pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The school does not have a religious denomination or ethos.
- Leaders do not use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

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

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The headteacher was not present during the inspection because she was on sick leave.
- Inspectors met with the lead teacher, the director of education for Halliwell Homes and the English curriculum leader as well as other teachers and teaching assistants. The lead inspector spoke with the chair of the proprietor board, the clinical director for Halliwell Homes, as well as three social workers and a manager.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in English, mathematics, computing and early reading. For each deep dive, these included discussions about the curriculum with subject leaders, visits to lessons and scrutiny of pupils' work. The inspectors also met with pupils to discuss their learning in these subjects and talked about the books they were reading.
- The lead inspector observed teachers and teaching assistants listening to pupils reading and observed morning story time in one classroom.
- Inspectors also talked to pupils more generally about their experiences in school. They observed pupils at breaktimes and saw them at work in a range of lessons.
- Inspectors talked with staff to discuss how they are supported to develop their skills, knowledge and understanding and to discuss their workload.
- A range of documentation was scrutinised including school policies, curriculum documents and the school website.

- In checking safeguarding, inspectors scrutinised documentation, looked at the school processes for reporting concerns and the checks that leaders make on staff prior to employment. They spoke to staff about their knowledge of safeguarding.
- Checks were made relating to the independent school standards, including checks of the school's premises.

Inspection team

Mary Maybank, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Martin Pye

Her Majesty's Inspector

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