

Elmstead Primary School

Address: Elmcroft, Holly Way, Elmstead Market, Colchester, Essex, CO7 7YQ

Unique reference number (URN): 149972

Inspection report: 23 June 2026

Exceptional	
Strong standard	
Expected standard	
Needs attention	
Urgent improvement	

Safeguarding standards met

The safeguarding standards are met. This means that leaders and/or those responsible for governance and oversight fulfil their specific responsibilities and have established an open culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and concerns are actively identified, acted upon and managed. As a result, pupils are made safer and feel safe.

How we evaluate safeguarding

When we inspect schools for safeguarding, they can have the following outcomes:

- **Met:** The school has an open and positive culture of safeguarding. All legal requirements are met.
- **Not met:** The school has not created an open and positive culture of safeguarding. Not all legal requirements are met.

Strong standard ●

Early years

Strong standard ●

Leaders in the early years have a clear vision that children should feel safe, happy and engaged in their learning. Staff support this vision through consistent routines, high expectations, positive relationships with children and families, and a commitment to learning through play. Children access a broad range of activities and engage with them for sustained periods, demonstrating concentration and enjoyment in their learning.

Children have positive relationships with staff and receive high-quality care. Staff respond sensitively to children's needs and provide effective support when required. For example, when children feel unsettled in the morning, staff use their knowledge of individuals' needs to help them settle quickly and confidently. Children respond well to adult interactions, which extend their learning and encourage deeper thinking.

Staff teach language and communication very effectively. They explicitly teach vocabulary and provide activities where children can use it appropriately. For example, during one activity, children practised positional vocabulary while looking at pictures and creating their own sentences, such as 'The teddy is on the sofa.' This enables children to apply new language confidently in appropriate contexts.

Children are well prepared for learning in Year 1, including children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who are disadvantaged. Staff identify barriers to learning quickly and put appropriate support in place to help children succeed.

Personal development and wellbeing

Strong standard ●

Leaders place a high priority on personal development, using enrichment opportunities to build pupils' confidence, independence and wider success. The school has a very well-structured curriculum in place, including relationships and health education. This is enhanced by a range of supporting resources that provide a well-rounded offer for all pupils.

Pupils develop a strong awareness of how to keep themselves safe. Recently, they have used the on-site swimming pool to develop their swimming ability and understanding of water safety. Visits from the police and fire service have further strengthened pupils' knowledge of personal safety. Pupils understand how to stay safe online because staff teach this regularly and reinforce key messages through 'Safer Internet Day'. The school also provides additional guidance for parents and carers about online safety through newsletters.

Pupils demonstrate tolerance and respect for the differences of others. They approach diversity with maturity and sensitivity, recognising that everyone has the right to be themselves. This helps create an inclusive environment and develops open-minded, respectful and compassionate young people.

Pastoral support is well considered. Staff know pupils well. This enables any support to be tailored to individual needs, delivered at a targeted group or at whole-class level.

Careers Week raises pupils' aspirations by exposing them to a range of future opportunities. For example, pupils have learned from an Olympian. They also had the opportunity to influence the programme by choosing careers they would like to explore further, including that of a magician.

Pupils thrive on the wide range of opportunities available to them. They develop their talents and interests through sporting fixtures and tournaments, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Pupils also attend a variety of clubs, including chess, science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), choir and a range of sports clubs. Leaders carefully monitor participation and ensure that they ensure equitable access, particularly for disadvantaged pupils.

Expected standard

Achievement

Expected standard

Pupils are generally well prepared for the next stage of their education. Over time, they develop the knowledge and skills they need to succeed. Historically, pupils have achieved less well in mathematics. However, recent improvements are evident. Pupils speak confidently about key mathematical concepts, including arithmetic, Roman numerals, statistics, coordinates and shape. Pupils also discuss their learning across the curriculum with confidence. They recall knowledge accurately and use subject-specific vocabulary appropriately. For example, they explain concepts related to the solar system and describe scientific skills such as prediction.

Most pupils apply their phonics knowledge effectively when reading and writing. They generally construct sentences accurately and use punctuation correctly. Staff provide timely and effective support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. As a result, these pupils keep pace with their peers and make progress from their starting points.

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard

Pupils' attendance has continued to improve this year, including for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and disadvantaged pupils. Leaders have adopted an even more rigorous approach to maintaining high attendance. Staff monitor individual attendance regularly and address any decline swiftly, ensuring appropriate support is in place. The school celebrates regular attendance through assemblies and newsletters. Recognition is personalised to each pupil, allowing individual improvements to be highlighted, particularly for those who find regular attendance challenging. These pupils receive tailored support from the school, helping them overcome barriers and attend more regularly over the academic year.

The school's behaviour management approaches are clear. Staff and pupils understand them well, which supports positive relationships. Pupils are polite, respectful and confident. They generally focus well in lessons. However, a small number of pupils do not meet leaders' high expectations of behaviour. Leaders address any behaviour concerns quickly, including incidents of bullying. When appropriate, they work closely with parents and carers

to support pupils. For example, when pupils use derogatory language, staff reinforce why such language is unacceptable and build on learning from the curriculum. This helps pupils understand the impact of their words and supports the development of a respectful school culture.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Leaders have established a clear, well-sequenced curriculum that supports pupils' learning effectively. The curriculum is age-appropriate and enables pupils to develop the knowledge and skills expected for their stage of development. Most pupils access the curriculum successfully and make clear progress in reading, writing and mathematics, as well as in their vocabulary development.

Pupils develop early reading skills through the effective teaching of phonics. They are taught to identify sounds and blend them accurately, which provides a secure foundation for becoming confident and fluent readers. In mathematics, teachers use a range of resources effectively to support pupils' learning. As a result, pupils demonstrate increasing accuracy when solving problems and completing calculations. Teachers are now placing more emphasis on teaching pupils to have fluent handwriting. They are focusing more closely on teaching letter formation, which is enabling pupils to have more engagement with writing tasks and supporting them to produce longer pieces of writing.

Staff demonstrate secure subject knowledge, which enables them to deliver the curriculum effectively. They adapt learning successfully to meet pupils' needs, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and disadvantaged pupils. As a result, these pupils can access the curriculum and participate fully in learning alongside their peers.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

All pupils' needs are identified quickly when they join the school. Where barriers to learning are identified, leaders ensure that appropriate strategies are implemented to reduce their impact, supporting pupils to succeed.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, along with disadvantaged pupils, access learning alongside their peers. Where necessary, pupils receive tailored adaptations, including specialised equipment and planned movement or sensory breaks. A range of targeted activities helps pupils address gaps in their learning and develop the knowledge and skills needed to access the curriculum successfully.

Pupils' progress is tracked carefully. Where pupils' progress is less than leaders expect, targets and support strategies are reviewed and adapted to meet pupils' needs more effectively. However, some of this work has been introduced recently and is still becoming embedded.

The school's pupil premium strategy is evidence-informed. Leaders ensure that support is targeted effectively to address identified barriers to achievement. That includes staff being well trained to meet the needs of all pupils.

The school has clear systems in place for using alternative provision. Staff visit regularly to monitor pupils' learning and ensure that agreed targets remain a shared priority. This ensures that pupils benefit from the use of alternative provision.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Leaders have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and are equally reflective about the areas that require further development. They work collaboratively across the trust, actively exploring and adopting innovative systems and processes. They ensure that they have the greatest potential to improve pupils' outcomes, experiences and wellbeing. Leaders' commitment to continuous improvement ensures that decisions remain focused on securing the best outcomes and experiences for all pupils.

Those responsible for governance receive a comprehensive range of information that gives them a detailed understanding of the school. This enables them to provide effective support and challenge. They ask insightful questions and contribute strategically to the school's ongoing development. As a result, governance is well informed, constructive and focused on maintaining standards across all aspects of the school's work.

Staff are positive about the professional development they receive. Training is practical, relevant and applicable within both the classroom and the playground. The school works closely with other schools within the trust to share effective practice. This enables teachers, especially those at the early stages of their careers, to visit other settings, broaden their experience and further develop their expertise.

Staff know that leaders prioritise their workload and wellbeing. A range of measures supports staff to maintain a healthy work-life balance and look after their wellbeing. Leaders regularly recognise and value the contribution staff make to the school community.

Parents' and carers' feedback is sought regularly and acted upon. For example, a recent survey highlighted communication as an area for refinement. Leaders responded promptly by making appropriate adjustments, further strengthening relationships with families.

What it's like to be a pupil at this school

Pupils enjoy coming to school and are well prepared for the next stage of their education. From the early years onwards, pupils develop a love of learning, independence and resilience. These qualities strengthen as they move through the school. Pupils are eager to share their achievements, taking pride in what they have learned and created.

Pupils show a strong sense of responsibility and community. For example, Year 6 pupils built a den that is open for everyone to use. They set high expectations for how the space should be treated and ensure that everyone uses it respectfully. In Reception, children built a boat and invited others to join them on an imaginative voyage to Australia. These experiences encourage creativity, cooperation and inclusion.

Relationships between pupils and staff are warm and positive. Pupils know who they can talk to if they have a concern and are confident that adults will address any issues quickly and effectively. Bullying and unkind behaviour are rare. Pupils feel safe and supported. During lessons, pupils generally listen carefully to one another, build on each other's ideas and contribute thoughtfully to discussions. Clear routines help pupils stay focused and engage fully in their learning.

Staff understand pupils' individual barriers to learning, particularly for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. They use effective strategies to ensure that pupils are ready to learn and can access learning successfully.

Pupils benefit from a wide range of opportunities beyond the classroom. Recent improvements to the playground provide space and resources for pupils to explore play with their friends. They enjoy den building, playing games and quieter activities. Weekly assemblies celebrate these experiences. They give pupils opportunities to share, reflect on and develop their ideas further. This helps to build pupils' confidence and develop their sense of belonging within the school community.

Next steps

- Leaders should continue their work to evaluate the effectiveness of strategies they put in place for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities so that they can ensure these are revised and adapted to help all pupils make the best possible progress.
- Leaders should continue to prioritise the teaching of handwriting to ensure that pupils develop fluent and consistent handwriting skills over time.
- Leaders should ensure that the small number of pupils who sometimes do not meet the school's high expectations for behaviour during lessons are supported to do so.
- Leaders should continue to ensure that pupils' attainment in mathematics continues to rise and that the improvements made are sustained.

About this inspection

This school is part of Penrose Learning Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Sarah Skinner, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Dave Smyth.

Inspectors carried out this full inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Following our renewed inspection framework, all inspections are now led by His Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

Inspection activities:

Inspectors spoke with the headteacher, acting deputy headteacher, senior staff, teachers, support staff, pupils and some parents during the inspection. They also spoke to representatives from the academy committee and trustees.

The school makes use of one alternative provision, which is unregistered.

Headteacher: Ian MacDonald

Lead inspector:

Katie Devenport, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Ania Vaughan, Ofsted Inspector

Rebecca McCutcheon, Ofsted Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

The data was used by the inspector(s) during the inspection. More recent data may have been published since the inspection took place.

 This data is from 23 June 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

211

Close to average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils currently at this school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 272

School capacity

208

Below average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils who can attend the school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 300

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

19.43%

Close to average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years.

National average: 26.3%

Pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan

3.32%

Close to average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan. This covers pupils with more support than is available through special educational needs support.

National average: 3.5%

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

14.22%

Close to average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with reported special educational support needs at the school.

National average: 15%

Location deprivation

Below average

What does this mean?

Based on the English Indices of Deprivation (2019) and the school's location, we have calculated whether the school is located in a more or less deprived area.

Resourced Provision or SEND Unit (if applicable)

No resourced provision

What does this mean?

Whether school has Resourced Provision or SEND unit (if applicable).

All pupils' performance

Pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics

The percentage of pupils meeting the expected standards in a combined reading, writing and mathematics measure.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average		61%	
2024/25 (final)	47%	62%	Below
2023/24 (final)	43%	61%	Below
2022/23		60%	

Pupils reaching the expected standard in reading

The percentage of pupils meeting the expected standard in reading.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average		74%	
2024/25 (final)	88%	75%	Above
2023/24 (final)	70%	74%	Close to average
2022/23		73%	

Pupils reaching the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing

The percentage of pupils meeting the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average		72%	
2024/25 (final)	69%	72%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	70%	72%	Close to average
2022/23		71%	

Pupils reaching the expected standard in mathematics

The percentage of pupils meeting the expected standard in mathematics.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average		73%	
2024/25 (final)	63%	74%	Below
2023/24 (final)	67%	73%	Close to average
2022/23		73%	

Disadvantaged pupils' performance

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after.

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average		46%	
2024/25 (final)	33%	47%	Below

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	50%	46%	Close to average
2022/23		44%	

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in reading

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in reading.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average		62%	
2024/25 (final)	89%	63%	Above
2023/24 (final)	83%	62%	Above
2022/23		60%	

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average		59%	
2024/25 (final)	67%	59%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	67%	58%	Close to average
2022/23		58%	

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in mathematics

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in mathematics.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average		60%	
2024/25 (final)	33%	61%	Below
2023/24 (final)	50%	59%	Close to average
2022/23		59%	

Disadvantaged pupils' performance gap

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after. The school disadvantage gap is the difference between the performance of the school's disadvantaged pupils compared to the performance of all non-disadvantaged pupils nationally.

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics, including the disadvantaged gap.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
Latest 3 year average		68%	
2024/25 (final)	33%	69%	-36 pp
2023/24 (final)	50%	67%	-17 pp
2022/23		66%	

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in reading

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in reading and the disadvantaged gap.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
Latest 3 year average		80%	
2024/25 (final)	89%	81%	8 pp
2023/24 (final)	83%	80%	4 pp
2022/23		78%	

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing and the disadvantaged gap.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
Latest 3 year average		78%	
2024/25 (final)	67%	78%	-12 pp
2023/24 (final)	67%	78%	-11 pp
2022/23		77%	

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in mathematics

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in mathematics and the disadvantaged gap.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
Latest 3 year average		80%	
2024/25 (final)	33%	81%	-47 pp
2023/24 (final)	50%	79%	-29 pp

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2022/23		79%	

Absence

Overall absence

The percentage of all possible mornings and afternoons missed due to absence from school (for whatever reason, whether authorised or unauthorised) across all pupils.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (3 term)	5.5%	5.2%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	5.5%	5.5%	Close to average

Persistent absence

The percentage of pupils missing 10% or more of their possible mornings and afternoons.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (3 term)	12.8%	13.0%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	14.3%	14.6%	Close to average

Our grades explained

Exceptional

Practice is exceptional: of the highest standard nationally. Other schools can learn from it.

Strong standard

The school reaches a strong standard. Leaders are working above the standard expected of them.

Expected standard

The school is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standard set out in statutory and non-statutory legislation and the professional standards expected of them.

Needs attention

The expected standards are not met but leaders are likely able to make the necessary improvements.

Urgent improvement

The school needs to make urgent improvements to provide the expected standard of education and/or care.

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