

Elmley Castle CofE First School

Address: Main Street, Elmley Castle, Elmley Castle CofE, Pershore, Worcestershire, WR10 3HS

Unique reference number (URN): 116808

Inspection report: 14 April 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.

Expected standard

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

Attendance and behaviour are significant strengths of the school, underpinned by leaders' clear expectations and effective systems. Pupils enjoy school. This is reflected in their regular attendance. Leaders have taken decisive and well-targeted action to improve attendance. They use information intelligently to identify the causes of absence and work closely with families and external agencies to reduce persistent absence. Attendance is now above the national average, including for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Behaviour expectations are communicated consistently to staff, pupils, parents and carers. A recent review of the behaviour policy has strengthened the consistency with which staff apply routines and consequences. As a result, pupils conduct themselves well in lessons and around the school. Pupils demonstrate positive attitudes to learning, listen attentively and interact respectfully during social times. This contributes to a calm and friendly environment where they feel safe.

Incidents of poor behaviour are rare but are managed effectively when they occur. Pupils understand the consequences of their actions. Bullying is not tolerated and leaders respond swiftly to any concerns. Staff make appropriate adjustments for pupils who struggle to regulate their behaviour, ensuring they can participate successfully.

Early years

Expected standard 

Leaders have made early years development a key priority. Their ambition for children to make a strong start is evident in both provision and outcomes. Support from the local authority and senior leaders has strengthened practice. Partnership working with parents and carers also ensures that learning is reinforced effectively at home.

Staff place a firm emphasis on communication and language. They use high-quality interactions to build vocabulary and deepen understanding. Children experience a broad, engaging curriculum, including high-quality forest school sessions that promote independence, teamwork and language development.

The mixed pre-school and Reception curriculum is thoughtfully designed. Leaders strike an appropriate balance between whole-class learning and targeted, age-specific teaching, such as phonics. The curriculum is well sequenced and identifies the essential knowledge and skills children need to be ready for Year 1. Early reading is rightly prioritised. Pre-school children benefit from rich exposure to stories and rhymes. Reception children apply their growing knowledge of early phonics confidently in their early writing.

Across activities, children show confidence, curiosity and resilience. They are supported by adults who skilfully extend learning and encourage purposeful play. Consequently, children achieve well and demonstrate the secure foundations needed for the next stage of their education.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Leadership and governance remain effective despite significant staffing changes since the previous inspection. Governors have managed these challenges skilfully, ensuring minimal impact on pupils' learning and wellbeing. Working closely with newly appointed senior leaders, they make decisions firmly rooted in the best interests of pupils, with particular attention to the most vulnerable. Leaders are highly ambitious and maintain a clear, forward-looking focus on school improvement.

Governors are well informed and experienced. They understand the school's strengths and have an accurate view of areas requiring further development. They fulfil their statutory duties diligently and provide robust challenge and support, holding leaders fully to account.

Staff benefit from well-planned training and induction. This includes those new to the school or teaching. Leaders are highly focused on staff wellbeing and workload. Staff appreciate the consideration and support they receive. Leaders foster high morale through supportive professional development. External support from the local authority and diocese is used appropriately, reflecting the school's vulnerability during periods of staffing change.

Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive, praising staff for going 'above and beyond'. Leaders remain committed to strengthening curriculum delivery and ensuring that pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

Leaders have established a well-structured and coherent personal development programme that makes a significant contribution to pupils' wider growth. Pupils are taught to reflect on their own beliefs, respect the views of others and engage thoughtfully with moral and ethical issues. They develop confidence and social skills through collaborative learning and active participation in school life. A growing appreciation of cultural diversity and democratic principles is nurtured through collective worship, curriculum content and enrichment experiences. Consequently, pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.

The breadth of opportunities offered by the school adds to pupils' character development. Many pupils enjoyed the visit to 'the moon' at the space dome. Clubs, such as netball and football, and the opportunity to play an instrument in a rock band enable pupils to develop their skills and interests beyond the classroom. Guest speakers supplement the curriculum with talks about their faith or their careers, to raise pupil aspirations. Leadership roles, such as pupil parliament and sports leaders, further strengthen pupils' sense of responsibility and ability to consult and make decisions.

An age-appropriate relationships, and sex education and health education programme equips pupils with the knowledge they need to be aware of risks to their physical and mental wellbeing, including online. Pupils understand the dangers of using the internet and the importance of reporting any incidents which may pose risks to their safety and wellbeing.

Pastoral systems are effective, with strategies such as 'worry boxes' enabling pupils to share concerns discreetly. Disadvantaged pupils, those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those known to children's social care are supported effectively to access the

full range of opportunities offered and be fully included in school life. The school's active involvement in village events reinforces a harmonious, community-centred culture that reflects leaders' commitment to pupils' personal development.

Needs attention

Achievement

Needs attention 

Work in pupils' books indicates inconsistent achievement across subjects and year groups. While some pupils make secure progress from their starting points, others do not develop the depth of knowledge needed to access the curriculum confidently. Gaps in subject knowledge and weaknesses in writing limit pupils' ability to apply learning with accuracy and independence. This has a negative impact on their readiness for future learning.

Outcomes for disadvantaged pupils, those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those known to social care are variable. Although additional support is in place, leaders do not evaluate its impact robustly, meaning ineffective strategies may not be identified or refined. As a result, pupils' work does not consistently reflect the ambition or expected depth of the curriculum. In contrast, pupils achieve well in phonics and mental arithmetic, where targeted support is well structured and enables those who struggle to catch up and perform in line with their peers.

Curriculum and teaching

Needs attention 

The quality of curriculum implementation is inconsistent. This limits the overall impact of the school's otherwise progressive, broad and balanced curriculum. While the curriculum clearly identifies what pupils should learn and when, teaching does not always translate this intent into effective practice. At times, instructions lack clarity and learning is not adapted well enough to match pupils' prior knowledge. Where this variability occurs, pupils struggle to recall key content, which weakens their ability to build the breadth of knowledge and skills required in some subjects. Although most teachers routinely check pupils' understanding during lessons, they do not consistently assess retention over time or identify common misconceptions evident in pupils' books. This reduces opportunities to address gaps before they widen.

Leaders have an accurate view of these weaknesses. They have begun to refine curriculum expectations and teaching approaches to ensure that all pupils' needs are met. Improvements in reading and mathematics demonstrate leaders' impact in securing change. Phonics is now a strength. Targeted support enables weaker readers to catch up quickly. In mathematics, children in the early years develop robust number sense through practical activities. However, writing remains an area requiring development to ensure that pupils secure the skills needed to meet age-related expectations.

Leaders are committed to inclusion, but their actions are not yet consistently effective. They understand the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), those who are disadvantaged and those known to children's social care. However, provision to meet the needs of these pupils is still developing. Pupils are identified early, but temporary leadership of this area has reduced the school's capacity to evaluate the consistency and impact of systems in place and support provided. For example, personalised learning plans lack precision and are not reviewed routinely to show progress over time.

Staff apply inclusive practices with varying success. In some lessons, pupils benefit from well-chosen resources and supportive adults. This enables most to access learning successfully. However, staff's ability to adapt teaching to reduce barriers to learning for all pupils is yet to be applied consistently.

Pupils with SEND are well supported by partnerships with external professionals that benefit them significantly when needed. For these pupils, the school support and external guidance make a positive contribution to pupils' academic success and personal development.

Leaders use additional funding effectively. Disadvantaged pupils are few in number but benefit from the opportunities and support the school provides to enhance their learning and wellbeing.

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

Children who join the early years, as well as those who arrive mid-year, are welcomed warmly and quickly become part of the school community. Staff and pupils are proud of their nurturing small school, which sits at the heart of its village and values every child. Each day begins calmly and purposefully. Pupils attend regularly and arrive promptly. They settle straight into activities and are greeted by adults who know them well. Parents and carers speak positively about the support they receive and appreciate the regular communication from leaders.

Pupils enjoy their learning, particularly the opportunities offered through forest school. Here, their imagination and sense of adventure thrive. For example, creating 'chocolate sauce soup' in the mud kitchen or climbing into small dens.

In reading and mathematics, pupils build their knowledge securely from the early years onwards, and many achieve well. Writing, however, is less well developed. Some pupils struggle to write accurate sentences independently because they have not secured the skills needed.

In some subjects, teachers do not always address misconceptions or gaps in pupils' understanding. Occasionally, work is not clearly explained or matched closely to what pupils already know. This includes pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. This limits the progress some pupils make and affects how well prepared they are for the next stage of their education.

Across the school, behaviour is positive. The climate for learning is calm and focused. Pupils show great attitudes to learning. They feel safe because adults are vigilant, approachable and trusted. Bullying and discrimination are not tolerated, and any issues are dealt with swiftly. Pupils learn about equality, respect and responsibility through a well-designed personal development programme. This prepares them well for life in modern Britain.

Leadership roles, trips, visitors and community events, including Maypole dancing, enrich their experience and help them grow into confident, considerate young people.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that leadership of special educational needs and/or disabilities, the systems in place and support provided are effective in having a positive impact on pupils' learning and development.
 - Leaders should ensure that the curriculum is implemented consistently across the school so that pupils achieve as well as they should across all subjects.
 - Leaders should ensure that that misconceptions and errors in pupils' work are addressed swiftly and that regular checks are made to identify gaps in learning and inform future planning.
 - Leaders should support staff to raise pupils' achievement in writing by strengthening the teaching of grammar, punctuation, spelling and handwriting so that it is delivered consistently across all year groups.
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About this inspection

The co-chairs of the board of governors in this school are Emma Robinson and Paul Cornish.

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 Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

Inspectors spoke with the executive headteacher, head of school, the special educational needs and/or disabilities coordinator and a range of teaching and non-teaching staff. They also spoke with governors, including the co-chairs of governors, and representatives of the diocese and local authority. They also spoke to a wide range of pupils throughout the school during the inspection.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school is registered as having a Church of England religious character. It is in the Diocese of Worcester. The most recent section 48 inspection of this school took place in

March 2022.

The school does not currently make use of any alternative provision.

The school has undergone significant change since the last inspection. The executive headteacher and head of school joined the school in January 2026. Two teaching staff and the special educational needs coordinator also joined the school at the start of this calendar year. The head of school has been appointed as permanent headteacher with effect from September 2026.

Head of school: Natalie Harbron

Lead inspector:

Heather Simpson, Ofsted Inspector

Team inspector:

Lynda Townsend, 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 14 April 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

88

Well below 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

120

Well 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)

5.95%

Well below 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

3.41%

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

9.09%

Below average

What does this mean?

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

National average: 15%

Location deprivation

Close to 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).

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 (2 term)	4.4%	5.2%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	6.3%	5.5%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	6.3%	5.9%	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 (2 term)	11.3%	13.3%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	13.3%	14.6%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	19.7%	16.2%	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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