Inspection of Elm Tree Primary Academy

Friar Park Road, Wednesbury WS10 0TB

Inspection dates:	20 and 21 May 2025
The quality of education	**Good**
Behaviour and attitudes	**Good**
Personal development	**Good**
Leadership and management	**Good**
Early years provision	**Good**
Previous inspection grade	Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

The headteacher of this school is Beth Barnsley. This school is part of the Victoria Academy Trust which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Sharron Philpot, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Gurinder Josan CBE.

What is it like to attend this school?

At Elm Tree Primary Academy, neurodiversity is celebrated, and every pupil is valued for their unique strengths. The whole staff team, together with the support of parents and carers, has created an environment where pupils flourish. The school delivers a rich, high-quality education tailored to pupils. It helps pupils to feel confident, capable and empowered.

High expectations are embedded throughout, and structured routines ensure pupils feel secure and ready to learn. Lessons help children grow and succeed from an early age, equipping them with the skills and confidence to reach their full potential. Strong family partnerships provide consistent support, with staff working closely with parents to nurture progress and celebrate success.

Relationships form the heart of the school's ethos, fostering trust, understanding and emotional security. Staff have a deep understanding of sensory regulation, utilising expert strategies to help pupils remain calm, focused and engaged in learning. Every child is encouraged to communicate in the way that suits them best, whether through assisted technology, signing or alternative methods.

Beyond the classroom, pupils enjoy enriching experiences that enhance their learning and independence. The school offers therapeutic interventions, swimming lessons, exciting trips, and hands-on activities at theatres, museums and places of worship. These experiences help pupils develop essential life skills in a safe, supportive environment.

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

Since opening three years ago, inspirational leaders, caring staff, trustees and academy council members have worked tirelessly to create a unique provision for neurodiverse pupils. This is a school proud to be doing things differently. This community is proud of its journey and committed to making things even better in the future.

When pupils join the school, staff quickly build strong relationships with them. The school offers regular updates through online platforms, which parents value. Parents feel heard and involved in shaping their child's provision, particularly in the early years, where parental input helps define the curriculum and ensures children's unique needs are understood.

A strength of the school is its ability to identify and assess pupils' precise needs. All pupils have a range of needs in addition to a diagnosis of autism. Staff work closely with various external services, such as speech and language therapists and occupational therapists, to understand what each pupil needs to learn.

Lessons are carefully sequenced to help pupils build knowledge over time. Sequences of lessons are created and implemented through a strong collaborative effort involving specialists like speech and language therapists, occupational therapists and peripatetic music teachers. This teamwork ensures every aspect of a pupil's needs is considered. For

example, the refreshed writing curriculum integrates expertise from early years staff, sensory specialists and occupational therapists to teach writing and develop the foundational skills needed to hold a pencil or pen.

The school places a significant emphasis on developing pupils' communication and language. Leaders provide support to staff, including through modelling and coaching. Overall, pupils benefit from the school's strategies to promote their communication development. However, there are occasionally inconsistencies in the implementation of these strategies. This sometimes affects how well pupils learn and engage.

Reading is a key focus in the school, with a thoughtful approach to phonics, comprehension, and early skills like attention and sound recognition. Some staff use communication strategies to support pupils, particularly those who are not yet using spoken language. For those pupils, staff observe pupils' reactions to text and track their eye movements while reading to ensure they are following along. They provide phonics matching games to test that pupils can recognise sounds spoken to them. Staff are skilled at using assisted language displays to encourage responses and lively discussions about reading.

Pupils are eager and excited to attend school. Before arriving at Elm Tree, many had missed long periods of school due to factors beyond their control. When attendance becomes difficult due to external factors, staff work closely with families and support services to overcome barriers. As a result, rates of pupils' attendance are high.

When needed, pupils access a range of interventions to help them regulate their emotions or maximise their learning in school. These include play-based activities, drawing and talking therapy and sensory sessions. Sensory circuits and rebound therapy further enhance students' well-being, while Toffee, the therapy dog, offers valuable emotional support.

Lessons in personal, social, health and economic education are carefully considered. These focus on what pupils need to know to succeed in life. Pupils benefit from a range of opportunities to visit museums and places of worship. Many pupils are new to the school, so lessons are currently helping them prepare for visits to the local community, where they can practise skills like shopping and road safety. However, pupils who have been at the school longer and have already learned these skills in lessons have not yet had the chance to use them in real-life situations.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Staff do not consistently implement the communication systems pupils need to access in the curriculum. While a broad and robust offer exists for developing staff knowledge and skills in this area, some staff do not consistently ensure pupils are supported with the appropriate spoken language, symbols or signing. This means that some pupils do not learn as well as they could. The school needs to ensure that all staff members apply the training to adapt the curriculum and provide the necessary skills to meet the pupils' receptive, processing and expressive needs.
- While visits to cultural and religious sites are valuable, some pupils do not yet consistently experience opportunities that develop practical life skills, such as shopping and road safety, in the local community. This limits their ability to practise their learning in real-life situations with members of the world around them. The school should ensure that all pupils have regular opportunities to practise their newly gained learning in various situations in the local community.

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	149156
Local authority	Sandwell
Inspection number	10378289
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	90
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Gurinder Josan CBE
CEO of the trust	Sharron Philpot
Headteacher	Bethany Barnsley
Website	elmtree.victrust.org
Date of previous inspection	16 June 2022, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- This is the first inspection of the school completed under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The school opened in 2022 as part of the Victoria Academy Trust.
- The school caters for pupils who are neurodiverse, including such needs as autism spectrum conditions, learning and cognition needs and communication and interaction needs.
- The number of pupils on roll has significantly increased from 18 in the first year to 90.
- The school moved into its current building in September 2023.
- The school does not currently use any form of 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 judgement 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.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, 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.
- During the inspection, inspectors completed deep dives in the following subjects: early reading, mathematics, communication and physical development and sensory regulation. In these subjects, they visited lessons, looked at pupils' work, and interacted with pupils and staff about how these subjects were taught.
- Inspectors observed informal times to evaluate safeguarding and pupils' behaviour.
- An inspector met with the school council to evaluate their experience in school. Members of school staff supported pupils' communication in these sessions.
- Inspectors held formal meetings with the headteacher, senior leaders, subject teachers, members of the academy council and pupils. They also talked informally with parents and carers and staff to gather information about school life.
- Inspectors spoke to staff and sampled the provision for a group of pupils in depth to understand the quality of identification, assessment and provision for pupils. An inspector also spoke with the parents of this sample group.
- An inspector spoke with a representative of the local authority.
- An inspector also spoke with representatives of the multi-academy trust.
- An inspector took account of responses to the Ofsted Parent View questionnaire, including the free-text responses.

Chris Pollitt, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Rachel Perks	Ofsted Inspector

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