

Ernest Cookson School

54 Bankfield Road, Liverpool, Merseyside, L13 0BQ

Inspection dates 22–23 October 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- The outstanding leadership and management of the headteacher, senior team and governing body have brought about rapid improvements in the school.
- Leaders and managers understand the strengths and weaknesses of the school extremely well. They track pupils' progress and the quality of teaching most effectively and use this information to set priorities. Actions are clear and have raised both achievement and teaching. Leaders are fully capable of improving the school even further.
- Following enrolment, all groups of pupils make rapid gains from their very low starting points, particularly in developing their literacy and numeracy skills. Their achievements are outstanding.
- Pupils are given great help from the staff in understanding and changing negative behaviour. Pupils' attitudes to learning are excellent and their behaviour around the school is outstanding.
- The safety of pupils is outstanding. They say that they feel very safe and that they are not bullied or harassed. The quality of the safeguarding of pupils by staff is very high.
- Throughout their time in the school pupils make great gains in their ability to get on with others. They develop greater tolerance for each other and for those from different communities.
- Pupils' personal development is excellent and they are very well prepared for moving on to the next stages of education.
- The outstanding teaching and excellent pastoral work of the staff are instrumental in enabling pupils to do so well. Teachers use a limited range of assessment methods and although they know their pupils very well, occasionally, they do not take sufficient account of pupils' needs when planning activities.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors saw teaching by eight different teachers; some observations were undertaken jointly with the headteacher. They also watched a class reading session and listened to pupils read when they did so as part of their lessons. Inspectors saw pupils working with a group of visiting instructors. They spoke with pupils at break time, lunchtime and during lessons.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, assistant headteachers, and four members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. There were no responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) but inspectors spoke with four parents during the inspection. The views of parents, staff and pupils were taken into account through surveys carried out by the school. The views of staff were sought through discussions.
- An inspector visited two alternative education provisions away from the school site. Information about the outreach service and feedback from some of the schools that use the service was also considered.
- Policies and other important documents were scrutinised concerning the safeguarding of students, their progress and attendance. Records relating to students behaviour, teachers' planning and meetings of the governing body were also studied.

Inspection team

Terry McKenzie, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Kevin Boyle

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Ernest Cookson School is located on a large campus that it shares with other Liverpool schools and a college. It can admit up to 58 boys aged between 5 and 16, but has not admitted any pupils in Key Stage 4 for some considerable time.
- All pupils have a statement of special educational needs in respect of their social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Some have additional learning difficulties and disabilities associated with communication difficulties and autistic spectrum conditions.
- Informal arrangements for mutual support are in place between the school and other education services in Liverpool. Ernest Cookson School offers outreach to other local authority primary and secondary schools and three teachers are employed specifically to undertake this service.
- Pupils can arrive at any stage in their school career up to age 14 and currently the great majority are of White British origin. In excess of 95% are supported by the pupil premium that provides additional funding for children in the care of the local authority and those pupils known to be eligible for free school meals.
- Music, modern foreign languages, cookery and swimming are taught through peripatetic services offered by the local authority. The school employs the services of private visiting instructors with the aim of helping pupils develop their self-esteem and self-confidence. A very few pupils attend part time at two alternative education provisions: Harmonize Academy, and Cornerstone Training.
- The headteacher was promoted from his previous post as deputy in the school in September 2013. The school recently renewed the Basic Skills Quality Mark (2013) and gained the Dyslexia Friendly Award (2014).

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching even further by:
 - widening the range of checks and tests carried out by teachers and ensuring tasks take full account of the individual learning difficulties, needs and abilities of pupils.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are outstanding

- Since his appointment just over a year ago the headteacher has worked relentlessly to ensure the previous good work of school is now consistently outstanding, including the way that pupils are motivated to learn and behave well.
- The headteacher is supported extremely well by the effective work of two assistant headteachers. Roles in middle management are improving and because of the small teaching team more staff take on management roles in leading the subjects taught.
- Leaders and staff work together as a team and share the same high expectations for improvement. When questioned by an inspector about what has changed for the better in recent times one responded: 'Without doubt, it is the quality of communication between the senior team and staff, and communication between school and pupils' homes.' Discussions between inspectors and parents and members of the governing body confirmed this to be a great strength of the recent work of the school.
- Leaders and managers have an accurate view of the strengths of the school and aspects to improve. This is based on information gathered and analysed by senior and middle managers and provides an excellent platform from which to produce plans to further improve the school. Actions are clear and evaluated well to ensure success.
- Teaching is closely checked and has improved in response to extra guidance and training. Leaders and managers understand that the systems that teachers use to check progress are rather limited and very occasionally, parts of the learning undertaken by pupils are not captured and recorded as effectively as they should be.
- There is an excellent range of subjects and opportunities for pupils to learn and succeed so that all are included and none excluded from the life of the school. The school is careful to promote equality of opportunity for all so that each can join in with the learning and have the chance to achieve their best. Courses are based on the National Curriculum so that pupils can, if possible, return or move on to mainstream education. However, there is great opportunity for flexibility, for example in allowing older pupils to follow their interests such as through the use of alternative education provision.
- School managers work closely with those at the alternative education provisions to ensure that pupils attend regularly, are safe and take part in activities that are carefully designed to further their education and maintain an interest in learning.
- Ernest Cookson successfully employs the services of instructors from an organisation that promotes pupils' self-confidence and self-esteem through offering important elements of outdoor pursuits. The emphasis is on working together and gaining social skills. In a brief observation of one activity an inspector watched as Year 9 pupils learned about resuscitation and saving lives. Through these and associated activities, including a wide range of trips and visits, British values are reinforced. Pupils gain tolerance and awareness of others. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding.
- Parents further report that they are delighted with the work of the school, both in the improvement of academic standards for their children and in the success the school has with managing and changing their children's behaviour. Two parents who spoke separately with an inspector reported that the changes instigated at school had made a very great and positive difference to the lives of their children and families at home.
- Leaders and managers at all levels have been included in the decision-making about the pupil premium funding. Almost all pupils in the school benefit from the use of the funding to purchase services that the school describes as 'wrap around'. These include therapeutic and medical services together with targeted support for pupils in respect of counselling and mental health services. Professionals from the police service have worked with pupils, and a paediatric clinic has been set up specifically for the use of hard to reach families and this encourages some parents to come into closer contact with the school.
- The primary funding for physical education has enabled the school to employ a specialist sports coach and to purchase additional swimming lessons. This has promoted the general level of physical activity undertaken by the primary aged pupils through increasing the participation in physical education lessons. It has also given pupils the opportunity to take part in inter-school sports competitions. The consequence of this is that an increased number of pupils of all ages enjoy a healthier lifestyle and better physical well-being. Some pupils are discovering that they have levels of performance in particular physical activities, such as swimming, that were not previously obvious to them or their families.
- The local authority has provided excellent support to the school through the period of change in leadership and management. A school improvement partner employed by the authority works closely with the school and offers expert support and challenge to the headteacher. This work has encouraged recent

positive change in the school, for example, in respect of improving the quality of teaching to be more consistently outstanding.

■ The governance of the school:

- The work of the governing body is outstanding because it holds the leaders and managers of the school fully to account. Members of the governing body demonstrate a wide range of skills and use these effectively to analyse the work of the school. Consequently, they understand well about teaching and the achievements of pupils. Members take nothing for granted, checking all of the information presented by the headteacher very carefully indeed. For example, they look closely at the records relating to teachers' performance and have been fully involved in the annual review of the work of staff including the headteacher. Members have supported the headteacher in rewarding outstanding teaching, promoting staff from within the school and occasionally keeping teachers from moving to the next pay scale. They have approved the use of the funds for primary school sport and pupil premium. Members ensure that all of the requirements for safeguarding are met.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. In all age groups pupils have very good attitudes to their learning in class, almost always settling quickly into their lessons following breaktimes and lesson changes. The inspectors seldom heard a cross word or witnessed challenging behaviour.
- When inspectors were observing pupils learn, they remarked that pupils have extremely positive attitudes to learning. For example, in a design and technology lesson for middle primary aged pupils an inspector was very impressed with the high level of concentration demonstrated by pupils when a teacher showed them how to put marks on wood to guide their cutting. Pupils later recounted exactly what they had to do when working independently.
- All groups of pupils make great gains in their ability to control, manage and understand their own behaviour. As a result they are able, sometimes for the first time in their school career, to come to school and gain positive experiences from it. The evidence of this is that the rate of attendance has risen rapidly since the last inspection, there are no permanent exclusions and the number of fixed term exclusions has been significantly reduced. New methods of managing pupils' behaviour have been adopted by staff that concentrate on the de-escalation of potential difficult situations so that there are now many fewer restraints and serious incidents than in the past.
- Pupils respect the environment of the school and keep it undamaged and free from graffiti. They talk with pride about the school, for example a pupil who spoke to an inspector said: 'it is such a great place to be!'
- During break times and lunchtimes, in the dining room and moving between lessons the behaviour of pupils is exemplary. They are polite and welcoming to visitors and treat each other with great respect. They benefit from the excellent relationships that are promoted actively by the staff, and, they in turn foster positive relationships with each other. These strong relationships between all are instrumental in enabling these previously disillusioned pupils from now taking a full part in all lessons and gaining as much as they can from them.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. Senior staff are very experienced in child protection matters and ensure that all of the requirements for safeguarding are in place. Risk assessments for offsite visits and other activities are of a high quality. Records of serious incidents and restraints are maintained to a high standard.
- Pupils report that they feel very safe. Inspectors spoke with pupils in school and at the alternative education provisions. All reported that they are safe and that there is an insignificant amount of bullying or harassment. Pupils know who to turn to on the staff if they have a problem. When questioned on the playground several pupils reported: 'it is good to know that staff are always there if we need them'.
- Teachers prepare carefully to keep pupils safe in practical lessons. For example, in an art lesson for younger primary pupils the teacher explained and demonstrated how to keep themselves safe when undertaking the activity. The pupils showed that they knew exactly what was required when questioned by an inspector.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

- The records held by the school support the findings of the inspection that the quality of teaching has risen rapidly in the last two years, and that much of the teaching is now consistently outstanding. Furthermore, the findings of the inspection are supported by the school improvement partner who works regularly with the school and agreed with inspectors that staff go about their work in classrooms with skill and enthusiasm.
- Classes are very small and the degree of individual help provided to pupils at all ages is effective in helping them achieve their best. Testing procedures used are rather limited and very occasionally teachers do not take sufficient account of the individual learning difficulties, needs and abilities presented by pupils. This sometimes holds back the rate of progress made by a small number. An example of this was seen by an inspector when pupils were asked to listen carefully to a recording of the sounds that letters make and then to repeat them. An echo in the room made it difficult, or impossible, for pupils to hear and repeat some of the sounds with accuracy.
- Reading is taught successfully. Almost all classroom staff have undertaken training in helping pupils learn to read. As a result, wherever pupils are in the school the support they receive from staff is consistent and effective. For example, during the daily reading sessions pupils often work with other pupils and staff from different classes as paired readers. Whichever member of staff is present will listen to them read, help them correct mistakes, gain confidence and progress.
- The outreach service provided by the teachers who work in other schools in the local authority is greatly valued. Reports indicate that the Ernest Cookson teachers have helped primary and secondary schools meet the needs of pupils who present with challenging behaviour. The service has successfully enabled some pupils to remain in a mainstream school with this support.
- The most significant feature of the school is the way that staff work to overcome the reluctance of pupils to join in with lessons and behave as they should with others in a classroom. Inevitably, it takes some time to achieve this but pupils report that they very much value the efforts of the staff. When asked what is the best thing about the school pupils invariably replied 'The teachers!' Parents echo this view, stating that it is through the skills of the staff that their children have been able to return successfully to full time education, and to enjoy it.

The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- The school ensures that from their very low starting points all groups of pupils including those from each key stage and any with additional learning difficulties or disabilities have opportunities to fulfil their potential. School records indicate that, for the great majority during their time at school, their progress is swift. The evidence for this is through the observations of teaching, the school's own records, the work in pupils' books and folders.
- The most able pupils from all areas of the school make outstanding progress in English and mathematics, as do all other ability groups including those with additional learning difficulties. This occurs because classroom staff are so successful in encouraging all groups of pupils to want to take part in learning.
- Almost every pupil is entitled to the wide range of additional services purchased with the pupil premium. School records and the evidence gained from the inspection indicate that outstanding progress is made by the great majority in every age group throughout a wide range of subjects.
- When very young pupils join the school great care is taken to find out about their existing reading ability. Once this is established individual programmes of learning based on phonics (the sounds that letters make) are put into place. For older pupils up to age 11, the strong focus on phonics continues and teachers ensure that all aspects of literacy and numeracy are promoted through a topic based way of learning. This encourages pupils to develop their skills in speaking, listening, reading and writing in a way that is useful to support all areas of learning. Mathematics skills are taught imaginatively in a very practical way in topics of learning so that pupils become capable, for example, in counting, adding and subtracting through using money.
- Teachers have high expectations of pupils in Key Stage 3. For example, in an English lesson some older students were studying the use of adjectives. The teacher ensured that every pupil in the room had the opportunity to succeed. All were included in the enjoyment of learning, even to the extent of singing an example of the use of description! All of the pupils and staff present had great fun and the progress in learning was very rapid indeed.
- Students of secondary school age leave at the end of Key Stage 3 before they can be entered for examinations. Nevertheless, school records indicate that the excellent progress made in the primary areas

of the school is continued into secondary. Throughout their time here pupils develop extremely well and gain the resources and resilience they need for moving on to the next school.

- All pupils read during a dedicated reading session that takes place each day. Pupils enjoy reading to each other and to staff. Several read to an inspector and although their levels of ability were all very different every one present clearly enjoyed the experience. The headteacher has introduced a 'reading buddy' system in which young pupils are paired to read with older boys. Some training and instruction is given to pupils about how to get the best from paired reading. The result of this venture is that most pupils learn to read aloud with confidence, and all benefit from the development of the social relationships that inevitably strengthen between the different age groups and this also has a powerful influence on behaviour.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	104744
Local authority	Liverpool
Inspection number	447918

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	5–16
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	58
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Smith
Headteacher	Ian Moxham
Date of previous school inspection	12 September 2011
Telephone number	0151 2351350
Fax number	N/A
Email address	ernest-ao@ernestcookson.liverpool.sch.uk

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