

Garden Fields Junior Mixed and Infant School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	117139
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	379356
Inspection dates	8–9 March 2012
Lead inspector	Norma Ball

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	414
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Clare Milner
Headteacher	Christopher Jukes
Date of previous school inspection	25 September 2006
School address	Townsend Drive St Albans AL3 5RL
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

Inspection team

Norma Ball	Additional inspector
Janev Mehmet-Christofides	Additional inspector
David Gutmann	Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors visited 22 lessons and observed a range of small teaching groups withdrawn from classes. A total of 16 teachers were observed, and short observations were made of learning support assistants teaching small groups. Inspectors made visits to classes to look at displays and observe individual pupils and groups at work, and to listen to pupils read. Parents and carers were met informally during the inspection. Meetings with the headteacher, teaching staff, members of the governing body and pupils also took place. The inspectors took account of the responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the school's work and scrutinised samples of pupils' work, teachers' planning, the school's systems for tracking pupils' progress, and documentation relating to management, curriculum and safeguarding. In addition, the inspectors took account of responses to questionnaires from 229 parents and carers, 35 staff and 150 pupils.

Information about the school

Garden Fields is a very large primary school. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds. The proportions of pupils from minority ethnic heritages, and those who speak English as an additional language, are broadly average. The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is much lower than average. A very small minority of pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals. There are two Reception classes in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The school meets the government's current floor standard for academic performance. The school has achieved the Arts Mark and National Healthy School Status. The headteacher has been in post since September 2010 and the deputy headteacher since September 2011, and there have been a number of recent changes to the teaching staff.

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	3
Achievement of pupils	3
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	3
Leadership and management	3

Key findings

- Garden Fields is a satisfactory school. Despite good provision and outcomes in the Reception classes and Key Stage 1 and clear improvements since the arrival of the current headteacher, the school is not yet good because the new leadership team have not yet ensured that teaching or pupils' achievement are consistently good in Key Stage 2.
- Achievement is satisfactory. It is good from Reception through to Year 2, but a legacy of staff disruption has led to inconsistencies between classes and subjects in Years 3 to 6. Attainment is above average overall in English, but higher in reading than writing, and average in mathematics.
- Teaching is good in the younger classes but planning does not always take sufficient account of pupils' levels of attainment or set high enough expectations of what pupils can achieve and this slows pupils' rates of progress, especially in Key Stage 2. Carefully planned support for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs ensures they make progress at least in line with their classmates, and sometimes better.
- Behaviour has improved and was mostly good in the lessons observed and around the school, although some parents and carers still report some inappropriate behaviour. Pupils have positive attitudes to learning and say they feel safe.
- The headteacher's evaluation of the school's strengths and areas for improvement is accurate. Restructuring of the leadership team is leading to more systematic monitoring of teaching and learning. Weaknesses have been identified, especially in writing, and appropriate plans to improve performance are showing early signs of success. The curriculum provides well for pupils' personal development, and opportunities for pupils to practise their literacy and numeracy skills in different subjects are developing.
- Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- By the end of the summer term 2012, accelerate progress in English and mathematics by:
 - ensuring all teachers use assessment information carefully to match activities to the learning needs of pupils of different ability
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to use their writing and mathematical skills across different subjects.

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good or better, by:
 - building on existing expertise to ensure that lessons are consistently planned with high expectations of what pupils can achieve in their work and their behaviour
 - providing clear and succinct lesson introductions and appropriate time for pupils to work on their independent tasks
 - marking pupils' work clearly to show how and where it can be improved.

- By the end of the summer term 2012, improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by ensuring that all leaders and managers:
 - have assumed their roles and responsibilities
 - contribute fully to the regular and rigorous monitoring of all developments to improve pupils' achievement further.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Most parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire survey were pleased with the progress their children were making and all indicated that their children enjoyed school. This view is accurate for younger pupils, but those in Key Stage 2 are not fulfilling their academic potential.

Children enter the Reception Year with skills and understanding broadly at the levels expected nationally for their age. They make a good start to their learning and do particularly well in communication, language and literacy, elements of number and knowledge and understanding of the world. Children's learning is closely monitored and recorded in their profiles. Good provision, especially in learning to blending sounds to match letters, is having a positive impact on the development of early reading and writing skills. Learning at home is supported well, and parents and carers are kept well informed of their children's development. Good progress continues in Key Stage 1. The close integration of reading and writing skills in all classes underpins pupils' good achievement.

The lessons observed and pupils' books seen during the inspection confirmed that pupils' attainment is above average in English and average in mathematics by Year

6. Attainment in reading is above average throughout the school because pupils are provided with interesting and structured reading material and have regular opportunities to read to adults in school. Any pupils identified as falling behind in their reading receive additional and effective support, in small groups or individually. The majority of pupils achieve two levels of progress in reading over Key Stage 2 but progress in writing is slower. Rapid and effective action is being taken to address this throughout the school as writing opportunities are now being developed progressively through lively and engaging tasks. Pupils' achievement has been adversely affected by the variable quality of teaching in the past. Of particular significance has been the impact of staff changes and also the inconsistencies in planning and expectations of what pupils can achieve, both in writing and in mathematics. Close monitoring of teaching and learning, the introduction of a sequentially planned learning programme for reading and writing, the development of problem-solving skills in numeracy, and a well-structured range of support for pupils falling behind in their learning are beginning to have an early impact on raising achievement.

Early identification and well-planned support for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs have improved as a result of recent changes in the senior leadership team and they make progress that is at least in line with their peers. The few pupils who speak English as an additional language also make progress in line with their peers because of the lively and well-planned additional support they receive.

Quality of teaching

During the inspection, teaching was good in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 but more variable in Key Stage 2. Parents, carers and pupils indicated that they were pleased with the quality of teaching but this was at variance with the inspection findings and the school's own accurate evaluations. Where it was good, pupils made good progress because work was challenging and matched well to their ability. In a Year 2 numeracy lesson, for example, good pace and challenging little time problems led to good progress in pupils' understanding of digital and analogue times. Pupils knew what they were expected to learn and had ample time to work on their tasks in small groups or independently. By contrast, in a Year 6 English lesson, too long was spent on the introduction task of reviewing a number of pieces of written work to see how they could be improved. The pace of the lesson was slow and pupils had too little time to practise and improve their own creative writing, which limited their progress. In the Early Years Foundation Stage good teaching enables pupils to settle quickly and enjoy the exciting range of activities that cover all areas of their learning well.

Through the regular monitoring of lessons and feedback to staff, school data indicate that the quality of teaching is improving. However, there is too much variation in the quality of teachers' planning and in the pace of lessons, especially in Key Stage 2. The range of ability is not sufficiently well catered for in all classes and this results in some underachievement, especially for older pupils. The progressive development of reading and writing skills, beginning with careful guidance on blending sounds and letters, is gaining pace as it develops through the school. However, the reinforcement of basic learning skills, especially writing, through subjects other than

English is still variable. Pupils' progress is tracked accurately but the resulting information is not used well enough in all classes to plan lessons with a high level of challenge for all groups of pupils, or to set targets for pupils in English and mathematics that move them on to the next steps of their learning effectively. The recently introduced marking policy is providing a sharper focus for teachers to note and direct pupils to ways in which they can improve their work. However, the policy is not consistently applied.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils showed positive attitudes to learning and good behaviour in most of the lessons observed, although they sometimes became inattentive where the pace of learning slowed or the introductions to lessons went on too long before they were assigned learning tasks. During the inspection a very small number of past incidents of bullying, including cyber bullying relating to distressing e-mails, were reported. All incidents are fully investigated and dealt with appropriately by the school. Nevertheless, these and name-calling episodes result in some pupils feeling vulnerable and hurt. A clear behaviour code with progressive sanctions is helping to improve behaviour. It is embedded throughout the school and pupils know they can report any incidents that make them feel vulnerable to staff. Pupils, parents and carers expressed concerns about behaviour, but also noted that it has improved as a result of the actions taken by the headteacher and consistent reinforcement of the school code in assemblies and personal, social and health education lessons. Attendance is above average and there are no persistent absentees. Pupils feel safe in the school, which has the necessary policies and procedures to ensure this continues.

Leadership and management

Effective and rapid action has been taken by the headteacher to address the key areas for development, which have been accurately identified. New strategies to improve attainment, especially in English, are now integrated through the school. The recruitment of the deputy headteacher in September 2011 and the development of the role of the inclusion manager are important steps in this process of driving improvements through the school. Monitoring of teaching and learning, carried out efficiently by the headteacher, is gradually devolving to all members of the senior team to support him in his drive to improve the quality of teaching and the achievement of all groups of pupils. This is increasing the regularity and rigour with which monitoring takes place and beginning to extend good practice through the school. The tracking system is effective in identifying quickly any pupils falling behind in their learning. Well-planned, flexible support is provided for these pupils, as well as for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs.

All pupils are treated fairly and equally throughout the school with well-tailored care to meet their needs, especially at times of transfer between key stages and when moving to their secondary schools. Safeguarding arrangements meet requirements, are supported by good policies and procedures, and regular training for staff. There is a shared vision evolving through the school as new staff settle into their roles, helping to improve the quality of teaching and learning further. Clear signs of success of the strategies adopted to raise achievement are evident in the school's

own careful tracking and in pupils' work. The governing body fully share this ambition and the school has a satisfactory capacity to improve further.

The curriculum provides an appropriate range of experiences for pupils of all ages, and is enhanced by the addition of visits and visitors to the school that enrich learning beyond the classroom. There is a wide range of well-attended clubs and the school enjoys good success in local sports fixtures. Links between subjects to make learning more exciting for pupils, and to provide an avenue for further development of their basic skills, are developing appropriately through themes such as the 'Castle of Muiden'. The school recognises that such links are not yet systematically planned and monitored, especially in writing, but also in mathematics, well enough to support the drive to improve pupils' achievement. The curriculum makes a positive contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Other faiths and cultures are valued, and parents and carers are invited to share their cultures and languages. Pupils' moral and social skills are developed in lessons and assemblies, including the need to treat others fairly and kindly, and linked to the behaviour policy to eliminate bullying and ensure that behaviour continues to improve. The vast majority of parents and carers have positive views of the school and feel well involved in their children's education through regular progress meetings and good information about the curriculum.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



12 March 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Garden Fields Junior Mixed and Infant School, St Albans, AL3 5RL

Thank you for making us so welcome when we visited your school. We enjoyed seeing how you work in lessons, talking to you and reading the questionnaires some of you completed. The bring and buy sale that some of you had organised to support deaf children in Uganda showed how much you care about others.

We think your school is providing you with a satisfactory education. You enjoy learning and know a lot about being safe and healthy. You do well in Reception and Key Stage 1 thanks to good teaching, but your progress is variable in Key Stage 2 and we think you could do better in writing and mathematics. Most of you behave well and are polite to each other and all adults, but a few of you can sometimes be careless about how you treat others and need to think carefully about how what you say and do can be hurtful. We have asked the teachers to improve some important things to make your progress even better:

- use what they know about how well you are doing to plan work at just the right level to speed up your progress in learning, and give you lots of chances to improve your writing and mathematical skills across different subjects - this will also help to make your learning even more interesting
- share all the good things they do to plan lessons that really stretch you, and at the beginning of each lesson set out quickly what you are to do, leaving plenty of time for you to work on your own tasks - they should also mark your work clearly so you know exactly how to improve it
- make sure that the teachers in charge of subjects work together with the headteacher to improve the way they share responsibility for keeping a very close watch on all that is happening in the school, so it continues to improve.

You can help by working hard and always doing your best in your work and behaviour. We wish you ever success for the future.

Yours sincerely

Norma Ball
Lead inspector

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