

Gade Valley Junior Mixed Infant and Nursery School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117249
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	358114
Inspection dates	11–12 November 2010
Reporting inspector	Selwyn Ward

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	219
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Phil Pennington
Headteacher	Patricia Bandle
Date of previous school inspection	12 November 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors, who visited 22 lessons and observed 12 teachers. They spoke with staff, parents and carers, representatives of the governing body and groups of pupils. Inspectors looked at samples of pupils' work, the analysis of the tracking of pupils' progress, school policies and procedures, school leaders' monitoring records, school improvement planning and risk assessments. They also analysed the questionnaires received from 80 parents and carers.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following.

- To what extent do attainment and rates of progress in mathematics lag behind English in Key Stage 2?
- What is the reason for variation in the rate of pupils' progress between key stages, and how effectively have leaders tackled this?

Information about the school

This is an average-sized school. Children attend the Nursery on a part-time basis. Most pupils are White British, with small numbers coming from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds. There are no pupils at an early stage of learning English as an additional language. At around 10%, the proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is low. Gade Valley has an Activemark award and Healthy School status.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

This is a good school. Attainment in Key Stage 1 has steadily improved and is now significantly above average. Able pupils in Key Stage 1, who previously underachieved, now do well. The initiatives that leaders introduced to achieve this were initially slower to take effect in Key Stage 2, with attainment in mathematics lagging behind that in English. Even now, attainment is above average in English but average in mathematics. Nevertheless, this represents a much improved picture on previous years and shows that pupils have caught up on past underachievement in this subject. Achievement is now good in both Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. It is satisfactory in the Early Years Foundation Stage. This is because children are sometimes overly directed and so do not always get to make their own choices of activities that help them learn through play. More formal whole-class teaching does not always cater fully for the wide range of capabilities of children in the class. When children start school, there is less direct liaison with home than often seen in the Early Years Foundation Stage. This limits opportunities for staff to help children to build on what they have learnt at home.

Pupils make good progress in lessons because their attendance is good, they behave well, and they demonstrate a positive attitude to learning. They also benefit from good teaching. Analysis by school leaders and local authority shows that the quality of teaching has improved this year. This is the result of incisive monitoring of teaching and learning by school leaders and their feedback to staff. Along with the school's accurate self-evaluation, this illustrates Gade Valley's good capacity for continued improvement. Changes to the curriculum have given pupils more opportunities for mathematical problem-solving and have provided more challenge for able pupils, including through a partnership developed with a local secondary school. There remain occasions, however, when the pace of learning for able pupils dips because work is too easy for them. Teaching assistants often provide well-focused support for pupils when they are working in small groups, but these staff are not always utilised to best effect. Sometimes, teaching assistants are merely passive observers during teachers' lesson introductions. There are some examples of marking of an exceptionally high quality, with the teacher and pupils entering into a genuine dialogue that encourages each pupil to think about how to improve their work. This, however, is not a consistent feature of marking and assessment across the school. Although work is marked regularly and all teachers suggest to pupils ways in which they can do better, some marking poses questions that remain unanswered or gives instructions, for example to complete unfinished work, that are not acted upon.

Careful tracking of each pupil's progress ensures that leaders quickly spot any pupil who is slipping behind and put in place additional support. It is not just those who are dependent on this extra help who are given a chance to boost their learning: the school has established support sessions for some of those of middle ability and for more able pupils. Welfare arrangements are another strength, and much appreciated by parents and carers,

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who are pleased that their children 'learn in a safe, happy, stimulating environment'. As a result, pupils say they have a good feeling of safety at Gade Valley. Pupils also demonstrate an impressive knowledge of how to keep healthy and fit. A great many practise what they preach by taking part enthusiastically in the very wide range of sporting clubs on offer.

The governing body is supportive but has not been a key driver of school improvement. It notionally sets priorities by agreeing the annual school improvement plan, but does not use this as a tool to check regularly on the school's progress. This is because it does not incorporate into the plan timescales for each of the steps along the route to achieving the school's targets.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further accelerate pupils' learning, especially in mathematics, by:
 - planning and arranging activities in all lessons that fully meet the needs of boys and girls of different capabilities, so that pupils always extend their learning and work at a brisk pace
 - ensuring that, in all classes, pupils respond to the comments and instructions given by teachers in their marking
 - making full use of support staff during lesson introductions.
- Help children in the Early Years Foundation Stage to get off to a faster start by:
 - giving the children more opportunities to choose activities for themselves that allow them to learn through play
 - ensuring that when activities are planned for the whole class to learn together, these cater fully for children's different capabilities
 - strengthening home-school links so that staff are better able to build on what the children learn at home.
- Strengthen the contribution made by the governing body by ensuring that the school improvement plan sets out clear milestones in each of the school's priorities for improvement.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Pupils start school with skills and capabilities in line with those expected for their age. Their learning is now typically good in Key Stages 1 and 2, and attainment is rising as a result. Pupils' work in lessons shows attainment in mathematics continues to improve. Throughout the school, there are fewer differences in achievement between different groups than were evident in the last inspection. Although there are still occasions when their pace of learning dips in some lessons, able pupils are now making good progress in both key stages. This is evident in the high proportion of pupils now attaining Level 3 in the Year 2 assessments in reading, writing and mathematics. In 2010, the proportion attaining this higher level was twice the national average. Not so many attain Level 5 in the Year 6 tests, but the percentage attaining this level exceeds the proportion that would be expected in relation to the same pupils' Key Stage 1 results. Boys still do less well than girls but the gender gap is narrowing. Pupils with special educational needs and/or

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disabilities make the same good progress as their peers. A number do so well that they are no longer categorised as having special educational needs. Pupils of all abilities enjoy their learning because they are well motivated by teachers. When new topics are introduced, teachers routinely invite pupils to share both what they already know and what they would like to find out. For example, in a Year 5 lesson starting off a new science topic on the Earth, Moon and Sun, pupils enthusiastically generated a plethora of facts and factoids to put up on their 'Working Wall' and check out during the course of their upcoming research.

Pupils are keen to take on responsibility within the school, for example as peer mediators. They also take a growing interest in the world around them. They raise funds for several local, national and international charities. Year 6 pupils, practising their persuasive writing skills in marshalling an argument, were outraged at reading of the number of deaths each year from smoking. Although they greatly enjoyed their trip earlier in the week to Cadbury World, this had not dissuaded them from their health-conscious view that it was inappropriate for a chocolate company to sponsor the 2012 Olympics. Pupils show great mutual respect and interest in different ways of life. Year 4 pupils showed delight in learning about the Hindu festival of Diwali and listened with rapt attention as a classmate shared the experience of his family's celebrations the previous week.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

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How effective is the provision?

Teachers know the pupils well and the good relationships help to motivate the pupils to try their best. Pupils quickly learn to follow the school's orderly routines. As a result, they listen well to their teachers and, in the main, to each other. When working individually or in small groups, the pupils know what they should be doing. They also know what they should be learning. This is because teachers routinely set out learning objectives and success criteria for each lesson. Pupils all have individual targets in writing, mathematics and some other subjects. Along with teachers' marking, these give pupils a clear understanding of how they can move their learning on. Teachers generally plan work that caters for pupils' different needs, but there are occasions when activities offer insufficient challenge. In a mathematics lesson on handling data, for example, the pace of learning slowed when pupils spent too long on low-level activities to generate data, such as deciding on the topics and options on which to survey each other's views.

The curriculum is enhanced through regular themed days that help to make learning fun. Year 3 pupils were fired with enthusiasm by their circus skills day. Learning to balance and juggle objects did not just contribute to their hand-to-eye coordination. It also reinforced mathematical skills as, for example, they were encouraged to correctly use terms such as 'horizontal' and 'vertical', as well as to visualise right-angle triangle and cone shapes to find the best position from which to balance and successfully spin a plate. The school has organised a range of initiatives to support pupils, including a nurture group to help boost pupils' confidence and self-esteem. These contribute strongly to the good achievement, especially of vulnerable pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The consistently good attendance rates owe much to the school's rigour in discouraging avoidable absence.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher and leadership team have a clear vision for moving the school forward that is shared with staff and endorsed by parents and carers. Rigorous monitoring of provision and careful tracking of pupils' progress have together prompted the improvements that have led to the rise in attainment, first in writing and English, and, more recently, in mathematics. School leaders have been successful in improving provision and outcomes for more able pupils and narrowing the gap in performance between boys and girls. This shows the school's good promotion of equality. Community cohesion is also promoted well. The school plays an active role within the local community, including through its biannual fairs and its support for a local homelessness charity. Although the

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school has identified that it would like to do more to broaden pupils' awareness of other cultures in the United Kingdom, pupils are already helped to develop a healthy curiosity about different beliefs and ways of life in Britain and around the world.

The arrangements for pupils' safeguarding are thorough and robust, drawing well on specialist expertise from within the governing body. Governance, however, is satisfactory. The governing body has been through a number of recent changes in its membership. The training that members of the governing body have undertaken has raised their awareness of their roles and responsibilities. They realise that they have not previously had a high enough visibility among parents and carers or staff, and so have instituted new systems to give them more first-hand experience of what goes on in school. Although they approve the school improvement plan, they do not routinely use it as a management tool to monitor performance.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children enjoy their learning as a result of good relationships with staff and each other. As a result, they quickly learn to take turns and work together. Each child's progress is tracked carefully but the sessions when a whole class is taught together do not cater fully for the children's wide range of capabilities. In a session together on money in the Reception class, for example, children's progress was limited by the fact that some of the children were already able to confidently count on and add while others struggled to correctly recognise the numbers labelling the price of each item. The children went on to make much faster progress when they were later engaged in tasks better matched to their different capabilities. Well-resourced provision ensures that children have opportunities for imaginative play and developing their creativity, for instance through painting and the use of colour. The outdoor area is used even in wet weather, with staff developing children's

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knowledge and skills through parachutes, windmills and making kites on a windy day. Children work well together in groups, for instance when making posters about their trip to the forest. However, too much of the time is given to adult-led activities. Children have too few opportunities to make choices for themselves that allow them to learn through purposeful play, with adults limiting their interventions to developing children's skills through questioning.

Parents and carers are generally pleased with the start that their children get in the Nursery and Reception but some say that they would like more involvement when their children start school. Although there are some induction arrangements that involve parents and carers, the school does not, for example, organise home visits to families before their child starts school.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3

Views of parents and carers

Parents and carers express positive views about the school. Some raised concerns over behaviour, but inspectors saw consistently good behaviour in lessons and around the school. Although several wrote to inspectors to praise communications and the accessibility of the headteacher and staff, the main concern raised by parents and carers was that they would like more account taken of their suggestions. Inspectors identified that links with parents of children starting in the Early Years Foundation Stage were not sufficiently well developed.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Gade Valley Junior Mixed Infant and Nursery School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 80 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 219 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	52	66	26	33	1	1	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	51	65	28	35	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	41	52	34	43	3	4	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	43	54	34	43	1	1	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	44	56	33	42	1	1	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	39	49	38	48	2	3	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	44	56	32	41	3	4	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	43	54	32	41	1	1	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	37	47	39	49	3	4	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	39	49	31	39	6	8	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	25	32	43	54	7	9	1	1
The school is led and managed effectively	38	48	38	48	3	4	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	51	65	26	33	2	3	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

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	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on 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 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:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.

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.



15 November 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Gade Valley Junior Mixed Infant and Nursery School, Hemel Hempstead, HP1 3DT

Thank you for being so kind and helpful when we came to visit your school. Many of you told us that you think Gade Valley is a good school. We agree. You benefit from good teaching that helps you to make good progress in lessons. Standards are rising. They are above average in the Year 2 assessments. In the Year 6 tests, standards are above average in English but they are only average in mathematics. That is because you have not always done as well as you should in the past in mathematics.

Staff take good care of you and give you lots of interesting things to learn and do, including through the topics and special days. We were pleased to see how well you all get on together. It was especially good to see such good behaviour in lessons and around the school, and such a strong pattern of regular attendance. We were also impressed with how much you know about the importance of regular exercise and a healthy diet.

Although Gade Valley is a well-run school, we have suggested a way of increasing the involvement of the governing body. We have also suggested some other ways to help make your school even better. We have asked teachers to always be sure that your work challenges and extends you. You can help here by telling your teachers if you are finding things too easy. We have also asked them to make sure all of the marking in the school is as good as the best, and that they make the more use of support staff during lesson introductions. We have asked staff to give the children in the Nursery and Reception classes more opportunities to choose activities for themselves so that they can learn as they play. When the children are learning together, we have asked staff to make sure that the work takes into account their different abilities. We have also asked staff to look at ways of building stronger links between school and home so that the children are better helped to build in school on what they learn at home.

Thank you again for being so friendly and helpful, and our very best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Selwyn Ward

Lead inspector

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