

Garden Fields Junior Mixed and Infant School

Townsend Drive, St Albans, AL3 5RL

Inspection dates 12–13 November 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Garden Fields is a warm and welcoming school. It is well led and managed by a strong senior leadership. Governors provide very effective support.
- Pupils make good progress in all subjects and in both key stages. They achieve standards that are consistently above the national average in English. Standards in mathematics have risen since the previous inspection due to the school's effective improvement strategies.
- Teaching is good and some is outstanding. Activities are well planned based on detailed knowledge of each pupil's ability. Teachers make good use of skilful questioning to promote pupils' understanding and learning. Marking helpfully focuses on how pupils can improve their work.
- Teaching assistants are well-trained and deployed effectively. They provide good extra support for pupils.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school and attendance is above average. They feel safe and cared for well. Pupils cooperate with one another and behave sensibly.
- Relationships are strong between pupils and staff. Pupils like their teachers and find lessons interesting. Children settle into Reception quickly, develop good social skills and build their confidence. They make good progress in all areas of learning.
- Parents are closely involved in the life and development of the school. They are well informed about their children's progress and are given clear guidance on how to help with learning at home.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not enough teaching is outstanding. The marking of written work is inconsistent and in some lessons the pace of learning is slow.
- Pupils make less rapid progress in mathematics than in reading and writing.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 26 lessons or parts of lessons, including four dual observations with the headteacher, and looked at pupils' written work.
- Inspectors spoke to two groups of pupils and informally with other pupils in lessons and around the school. Pupils were heard reading and inspectors talked to them about their reading habits.
- Inspectors examined several of the school's documents. These included: the school's own evaluation of its performance and its improvement plan; information about pupils' progress and the support given to disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs; evidence about the quality of teaching; and records relating to behaviour, safeguarding and attendance
- Meetings were held with: the Chair of the Governing Body and four other governors; the headteacher and other school leaders; and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of 147 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and the views expressed by parents as they arrived at school and three letters and a telephone call from other parents. 25 questionnaires returned by staff were also analysed.

Inspection team

James McVeigh, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Anthony Green	Additional Inspector
Gillian Walley	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is larger than the average-sized primary school. Children start school in the Reception class and there are two classes for each year group.
- The large majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds and the remainder from a wide range of different ethnic backgrounds. There are fewer pupils who speak English as an additional language than seen nationally.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium (extra government funding for specific groups of pupils including those known to be eligible for free school meals and children in local authority care) is below average
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action and the proportion supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs are below the national averages
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of teaching that is outstanding by:
 - making sure teachers mark pupils' written work to the same high standards in all subjects and classes, including giving advice on how to improve and make time for pupils to respond to that advice
 - ensuring that teachers maintain a good pace of learning in all lessons by moving pupils on to the next task promptly and not extending introductions or explanations unnecessarily.
- Accelerate pupils' progress in mathematics by providing regular opportunities in all mathematics lessons for pupils to reflect on the strategies they choose to solve problems and develop their reasoning, resilience and confidence.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Children start school in Reception with knowledge and skills that are slightly above those typical for their age. They quickly settle into school routines and develop good social skills and confidence. Children make good progress in all areas and show strong signs of independence.
- Transition into Year 1 is well organised and pupils adapt to the more formal setting easily. They make good progress and by the end of Year 2, reach higher standards than the national average in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Pupils continue to make good progress in all subjects in Key Stage 2. Effective improvement has taken place to iron out the inconsistencies in teaching over the last twelve months and this has had a positive impact on raising achievement in mathematics but it is still not as strong as in English. The rate of progress that pupils make has been improving over the last three years and pupils leave school in Year 6 with much higher standards in English and mathematics than seen nationally.
- Pupils develop good skills in oracy and speak confidently and articulately. They quickly learn to read fluently because phonics (the sounds that letters make) and comprehension skills are taught well in the daily literacy sessions. Effective, well-targeted support is provided for pupils in danger of falling behind. Pupils in Year 1 performed well above the national average in the most recent phonics screening check in 2013.
- Pupils write and spell well. They have many opportunities to practise writing for a variety of purposes. For example, pupils in Year 6 created strong metaphors when writing poetry about feelings, such as 'happiness is the taste of warm chocolate', and Year 2 pupils used interesting descriptive words when comparing properties of different materials in science.
- Pupils make less rapid progress in mathematics than in English because teachers provide too few opportunities for them to develop their resilience and confidence when choosing the best method for solving challenging problems. Additionally, too little time is made available for them to reflect on how to approach things differently and/or better next time.
- The progress made by pupils eligible for the pupil premium, which is monitored closely by the school, is improving due to the extra effective support they are given, including small group teaching, by experience-broadening trips and when working in nurture groups. In 2013, the majority of the very small group of eligible pupils in Year 6 also had special educational needs. The attainment gap between them and their peers narrowed in mathematics from around five terms to two terms. In English the gap of 6 terms still remained but has closed to around two terms for these pupils in all other years.
- Pupils who are disabled or who have special educational needs are accurately identified. They receive well-planned and timely support from teachers and well trained teaching assistants who know each pupil's learning needs. Parents and, where appropriate, external specialists, are closely involved and kept well informed. Overall, pupils in this group make good progress.
- Pupils who speak English as an additional language are suitably catered for and do as well as their peers in both English and mathematics. Higher ability pupils attain higher standards in English than their counterparts nationally but reach similar standards in mathematics.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teachers have established good relationships with pupils and manage their classes well. They explain what they expect pupils to learn and the steps they need to follow to achieve the lesson's aims. Good use is made of 'partner talk' where pupils share ideas and assess their own work.
- The Early Years Foundation Stage is well led and managed. Teaching is good: brisk, vibrant and highly visual. Provision for learning is good both inside the classroom and outside and children have many opportunities to consolidate learning by choosing from a range of well planned activities. 'Magic Moment' books recording children's key development events and including contributions from parents are used well to supplement staff's regular assessments of children's progress. Next steps for learning are identified clearly for planning activities that stimulate children's interest and curiosity and parents are closely involved.
- Teachers plan activities that interest and engage pupils well and make effective use of their knowledge of each pupil's ability when planning group activities. They expect good behaviour and hard work. However, occasionally activities go on too long or teachers spend too long on explanations so that the pace of learning slows.
- Pupils are encouraged to explain their thinking and teachers often use skilful questioning and generate good discussion between pupils to make pupils think harder and extend their learning. Pupils are confident enough to challenge one another's ideas, including the teacher's. However, this strategy is not so successful in some mathematics lessons where less time is devoted to this aspect of learning.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and can develop concepts clearly for pupils. They usually make good use of pupils' own assessment of their learning to reshape the lesson. They mark pupils' written work in mathematics and English regularly and in detail. Comments indicate what pupils have done well and sometimes what they need to do to improve, but this is not consistent across all years and subjects.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils like their teachers and enjoy learning. They usually find lessons interesting. For example, pupils in a Year 6 information technology lesson were totally engrossed in investigating how to draw shapes using a series of commands in a software programme.
- The playgrounds are securely supervised and well equipped with climbing equipment and resources for playground games. Play leaders from Year 6 take their roles in organising games for younger children seriously. 'Buddy Benches' are available for any one with no-one to play with and pupils say they would ask anyone on the bench to play with them if they saw them there.
- Pupils have a good range of other extra responsibilities they are proud to take on, such as junior leadership team membership, house captaincy or eco ambassador.
- Pupils respond well to their teachers and little time is lost correcting behaviour. Pupils know that their behaviour affects their progress. They say that lessons are rarely disturbed by inappropriate behaviour. Pupils collaborate well in groups, particularly when they are sharing

ideas during 'partner talk.'

- Pupils are very polite and courteous as they move around the school. They know about the behaviour management system and are keen to show 'behaviour for learning' in lessons. Occasionally pupils become distracted and fidget when they are not participating actively enough in lessons.
- Pupils understand what bullying is and know the different forms it can take. They state that bullying is uncommon and are confident that teachers tackle it quickly and effectively.
- Pupils know about healthy diet and the benefits of regular exercise. They have learned about such things as road safety, 'stranger danger' and the potential dangers when using the internet from visits by police officers.
- Governors, staff, pupils themselves and parents agree that pupils' behaviour is good. School records show that there have been few incidents of misbehaviour in recent times and they have been handled effectively. The school promotes good attendance very well. Attendance has been above the national average for several years.

The leadership and management are good

- Governors and the senior leadership team have high expectations and, with staff, parents and pupils, share the vision of 'a happy, inspiring and caring community which respects and values everyone - empowering lifelong learning'. The school creates a friendly and purposeful learning atmosphere in which everyone strives to do the best they can.
- Garden Fields operates smoothly and is well led. The inspirational headteacher is a very good role model for pupils and staff alike: professional, enthusiastic, caring and a highly effective leader. Parents speak of him knowing the children well and making a 'big difference' since his arrival. He is well supported by other senior leaders and there is a group of developing effective subject leaders.
- The senior leadership team is relentless in its drive to improve the quality of teaching. Teachers' progress towards challenging targets is regularly checked through rigorous monitoring of their planning, the quality of their teaching and the progress each pupil makes. Teachers and teachers' assistants, including those new to the profession and those with leadership roles, have good opportunities to improve their skills through in-school training, mentoring, sharing expertise and well-targeted external courses.
- Subject leaders are given responsibility and support to enhance their leadership roles. For example, some teachers are following a mathematics specialist teaching course to help drive up standards still further or pursuing a national qualification in school leadership, including being trained in assessing the quality of teaching.
- Senior leaders have accurately judged the school's strengths and areas for further development, and use this information to plan a well-focused programme of actions to meet challenging targets for improvement.
- The school has recently introduced a broad and balanced range of subjects in a well-planned and innovative way, which has a strong impact on pupils' behaviour and eagerness to learn. Topics are introduced with 'wow' events, such as a trip to the Tower of London or visiting theatre groups to bring history alive, and pupils celebrate and share what they have achieved

with parents. Pupils' experiences are very well enhanced by, as one parent said, 'an amazing range of activities', such as outdoor learning in the Forest School and numerous clubs for sports, technology and the creative arts.

- The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. For example, pupils visit different places of worship, celebrate the major religious festivals and visit a French school and write to 'pen pals'. The school ensures equality of opportunity for all and effectively discourages all forms of discrimination.
- The school engages very well with parents. They feel listened to and well informed about their children's progress. There are good opportunities for them to learn about the school's work and how they can help their children at home, through well attended workshops and the school's website. Parents support the school as volunteers by helping with reading and sports and as visiting 'experts', such as a veterinary surgeon explaining how to look after pets or a police officer showing pupils a squad car.
- The sports funding for primary schools is being used to raise pupils' participation in sport. The well-conceived plan is up and running and includes developing the school's expertise in teaching a wide range of sporting skills through high quality training, providing exposure to a wider variety of sports opportunities and involvement in competitive and non-competitive sporting events.
- The local authority provides a useful external view of the school's performance and training to improve teaching.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Governance is a strength of the school. The well organised governing body has a strong professional background and relevant skill set. Governors are knowledgeable about the school and its performance through reports from the headteacher and subject leaders and their own focused visits, including speaking to pupils, parents and staff. Training to understand school information and the role of governors is undertaken readily and governors are well equipped to both support and challenge senior leaders in their constant drive to ensure the school keeps moving forward.
- The governing body is closely involved in evaluating the work of the school and planning for improvement. Governors make sure money is well spent when allocating school finances, for example, that the pupil premium has a positive impact on achievement, and that teachers are rewarded appropriately for the quality of their practice. Supported by the local authority, they set robust targets for the performance of the headteacher and ensure safeguarding arrangements fully meet statutory requirements.

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	117139
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	428857

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	415
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Clare Milner
Headteacher	Chris Jukes
Date of previous school inspection	8 March 2012
Telephone number	01727 759280
Fax number	01727 759281
Email address	admin@gardenfields.herts.sch.uk

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