

Garden City Academy

Radburn Way, Letchworth Garden City, Hertfordshire SG6 2JZ

Inspection dates

7–8 June 2016

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Improvement since the previous inspection has been too slow. Despite recent improvements, teaching across the school is still not consistently good and pupils do not make the progress that they should.
- Too many pupils are working below the standards expected for their age in reading, writing and mathematics.
- The quality of learning is not good enough because some teachers do not address pupils' misunderstandings quickly enough.
- Teachers are not ambitious enough in planning work that extends pupils' learning. As a consequence the most able pupils, in particular, are not adequately challenged.
- Pupils have not developed positive attitudes to learning. Some pupils become disinterested, lose concentration and start to misbehave, particularly when learning is slow-paced.
- Attendance is not high enough. Too many pupils are absent during the school term-time.
- Middle leaders are not effectively leading school improvement because many of them are new to the school and their role.

The school has the following strengths

- Senior leaders know what needs to improve and are tenaciously tackling weaknesses. Their high expectations of teaching and learning are beginning to raise standards.
- Parents have positive views about the school and value the recent improvements.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported and are making good progress.
- Assessment systems accurately track pupils' progress and are used to provide targeted, additional support to individuals and groups of pupils.
- Pupils are well cared for and kept safe. There is a school culture based on strong relationships and a nurturing ethos.
- Children in the early years are well prepared for the next phase in their education.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning in all year groups so that pupils' work reaches the standard expected by:
 - planning work that stretches and challenges pupils, including the most able pupils
 - making sure that pupils' misunderstandings are identified and corrected
 - making sure that the pace of learning is sufficient to hold pupils' interest
 - ensuring that teachers have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and apply the school's behaviour policy consistently.
- Improve pupils' personal development and behaviour by:
 - embedding the effective behaviour strategies in all classes, with all pupils
 - ensuring that low-level disruption to lessons is addressed and pupils respond quickly to teachers' and teaching assistants' instructions
 - ensuring that pupils attend regularly.
- Strengthen leadership and management by:
 - continuing to monitor the quality of teaching, learning and assessment regularly and tackle underperformance quickly
 - setting challenging targets that create aspiration for teachers and pupils alike
 - enabling middle leaders to develop teaching and learning within their areas of responsibility.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The headteacher, supported by the senior leadership team, is taking decisive action to support the expectation that all teaching and learning should be at least good and that pupils make good or better progress. The majority of strategies have been in place for less than a year, but already impact positively on pupils' achievements.
- Regular checks on the quality of teaching and pupils' achievements mean that senior leaders have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. This understanding is bringing about rapid improvement to the quality of teaching and learning.
- School leaders are creating an inclusive, happy and purposeful school, where pupils are encouraged to celebrate their successes and strive for excellence. This culture is new to the school and has not yet had time to have the full impact on all pupils.
- Assessment systems are effective and allow senior leaders and teachers to check how well the curriculum is being delivered, and pupils' progress in different subjects. Assessment information is used to challenge and support teachers and allocate additional provision where pupils are in danger of falling behind.
- Staff and parents praise the many changes happening at the school since the arrival of the new headteacher and feel confident that the pupils will flourish under the new leadership arrangements. Typical comments at the parents' open meeting were 'brilliant' and 'I love it!'
- Leaders have created an inclusive culture by restructuring staffing to accommodate a team that successfully supports the needs of more vulnerable pupils and their families. A positive result of this is that persistent absence of some pupils has fallen significantly.
- Performance management targets are challenging and staff are supported to meet them by accessing training and other professional development opportunities. Teachers value the investment in their professional development and are eager to improve as practitioners.
- A broad and balanced curriculum is taught, with many subjects being linked back to the development of the core skills of reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils are offered enriching activities and experiences both through the school day and at after-school clubs. These include archery, trips to the seaside and to the theatre to see a Shakespeare play, and a birds of prey visit.
- The school exudes social, moral, spiritual and cultural learning. The 'marvellous me' rewards system allows pupils to recognise many aspects of social, moral and spiritual behaviour and celebrate them with their peers. Cultural learning is evident throughout the school and is seen in daily events such as the steel pan band and pupils' artwork from the recent 'art week'.
- Pupils have an age-appropriate understanding of British values which is supported by activities in the school such as the celebration of the Queen's birthday, rewards for demonstrating respectful behaviour and democratic elections for school councillors.
- The system of 'motivator' rewards is already showing a positive impact on the behaviour of the majority of pupils and the number of fixed-term exclusions has fallen significantly. Even so, behaviour in some lessons is still not good enough.
- Subject leadership is not effective enough. Several middle leaders are overly reliant on guidance and support from senior leaders to develop their areas of responsibility. Many of the middle leaders are new to the school and have not had time to develop their roles.
- The additional support for disadvantaged pupils funded by the pupil premium is making a difference to the achievement of this group of pupils. The majority of interventions are successful in accelerating their achievements, and leaders track the impact of the interventions closely.
- The physical education (PE) and sports premium funding has been used to improve the quality of teaching in PE and provide pupils with improved resources and a broader range of activities, thus enabling more pupils to engage in physical activity.
- **The governance of the school**
 - The current arrangements for governance are in a period of transition. The new chair and vice-chair of the governing body have an accurate view of the school. The task of regularly challenging senior leaders has only recently become the responsibility of the new governing body, having been overseen in the past by the multi-academy trust. It is therefore too early to judge the effectiveness of its work in this area.

- Systems to support continued improvement are established and new governors are currently undertaking rigorous training to ensure that the full governing body is adept at leading school improvement and holding leaders to account.
- Procedures for staff performance management and budget management are in place, but a full annual cycle has not been completed under the current governance arrangements.
- Governors from the multi-academy trust work very closely with school governors and ensure that procedures are effective and pupils' outcomes continue to improve.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Pre-employment checks are exemplary and all staff receive training to enable them to be vigilant in identifying any concerns. Robust systems and procedures ensure that the reporting of concerns and liaison with outside agencies are effective. A small team of staff are trained to comprehensively support pupils' overall well-being and work with families to enable their children to better access education. This team is being used to tackle poor attendance.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement

- Over time, the quality of teaching has not been good enough and pupils have not achieved well enough in reading, writing and mathematics. As a result, too many pupils reach standards that are below those expected for their age.
- Teaching is not ambitious enough. Teachers do not consistently provide pupils with activities that challenge them and extend their learning. This is most evident with the most able pupils who make limited progress despite having the ability to achieve more.
- Some teachers do not routinely check pupils' understanding throughout the lesson and cannot respond to their misconceptions quickly enough. This limits pupils' ability to make good progress.
- In some instances during the inspection, the content and speed of delivery of the lesson did not meet the learning needs or interest levels of pupils and, as a result, behaviour deteriorated and learning was limited.
- Classroom behaviour management strategies, as set out in the school's policy, are not applied consistently throughout the school. As a result, pupils are distracted by a small minority who misbehave.
- Classroom and school displays are of a consistently high standard and promote learning and celebrate pupils' achievements. The learning environment is ordered and well resourced, and pupils are confident in accessing resources independently.
- Marking and feedback are in line with the school's policy and promote pupils' next steps for improving their learning. Some pupils use teachers' feedback to improve their work but this is not consistent in all classes. Some teachers use questioning very effectively to consolidate learning and challenge pupils of different abilities.
- Teachers have a strong subject knowledge across the full curriculum. In some instances, such as music and PE, specialist teachers are used and class teachers seize this as a professional development opportunity and observe the lesson.
- The teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters represent) has improved since the last inspection and resulted in better attainment in pupils' early reading skills.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities generally make good progress as a result of teaching and support that directly addresses their learning needs. The impact of all support is monitored and provision is altered if necessary.
- Teaching assistants are used well to support learning in all year groups. The majority of teaching assistants are trained in specific programmes and take responsibility for interventions within their area of expertise.
- Homework is used well to embed pupils' understanding and increase their opportunities for extended collaborative learning within their family. Parents and pupils said they enjoy the home-learning tasks and see the benefit of the individual oral presentations to their class.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- Pupils are starting to develop a pride in their work and are persevering with tasks. However, they are less proud of being part of their school community and they are keen for their school to be better.
- The characteristics of a successful learner are not shared regularly enough for pupils to know how to improve their attitude and approach to learning.
- Whole-school displays support improving pupils' self-confidence. The WAGOLL – 'what a good one looks like' – displays in each class demonstrate to pupils what is expected and what can be achieved.
- There is a whole-school focus on working collaboratively and showing respect for others. The assembly on friendship and the compliments display support an improvement in pupils' social and emotional well-being.
- There is strong provision for supporting the most vulnerable pupils and those who need to overcome more significant barriers to regulate their behaviour.
- Pupils are taught well to recognise different types of bullying and know how to stay safe.
- Pupils are aware of the need for physical activity to stay healthy. Groups of pupils are participating in regular morning running events to stay fit and healthy.
- Pupils recognise their vulnerability when using social media, and older pupils can clearly describe the risks and what they need to do to stay safe.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- A small minority of pupils struggle to work collaboratively with their peers and disrupt the learning of others. This is most evident when the pupils' learning is slow-paced, unchallenging or ineffectively managed.
- Pupils do not always respond promptly to teachers' instructions and have to be reminded regularly of the school's agreed classroom etiquette. This slows the pace of learning for others.
- Attendance levels remain below the national average although the number of persistent absences has fallen. Senior leaders are tackling this tirelessly and some impact is being seen.
- Parents, pupils and staff commented on a marked improvement in behaviour and the effectiveness of the positive behaviour policy and rewards system.

Outcomes for pupils require improvement

- Outcomes for all pupils throughout the school, in English and mathematics, have remained too low for several years and require improvement. Nationally published data indicates that pupils at Garden City Academy do not reach the expected standard or make sufficient progress. Pupils' progress through key stage 1 and key stage 2, since the start of this academic year, has greatly improved on previous years. There is strong evidence of a culture of higher expectations and greater accountability for pupils' achievement throughout the school. Work in pupils' books, together with work on display and leaders' assessment information, confirms that pupils now make steady progress in all subjects, including English and mathematics.
- Progress of the most able pupils remains too slow. The proportion of pupils working at greater depth within their year group is too low and teachers do not challenge this group sufficiently for their progress to be accelerated.
- Disadvantaged pupils are well supported and their progress is broadly in line with all pupils at the school but below that expected of all pupils nationally.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress. Recognition of a pupil's special educational needs and/or disabilities has been significantly improved this academic year. This allows leaders to accurately target the pupil's needs with a specific intervention or support plan and track the impact of this more directly.
- Pupils who speak English as an additional language achieve well and exceed other pupils at the school in English, while being broadly similar in mathematics.

- Assessment of pupils' phonics attainment has shown a marked improvement for this academic year, although it remains below that expected of all pupils nationally. This improvement is as a result of improved teaching of phonics and a greater priority for this subject in the timetable.
- Children now get off to a good start as a result of good provision in the early years. All groups of children, including the most able, are well prepared for transition into Year 1. A much higher proportion of children in the early years are reaching the expected standard and this judgement is supported by external professionals who observe children's learning and check their assessments regularly.
- Accelerated progress for pupils in Year 6 means that they are better prepared than in the past for their transition to secondary school. However, weaknesses in their literacy and numeracy put them at a disadvantage when faced with the secondary curriculum.

Early years provision

is good

- Leadership in the early years is good. The leader has a very clear vision for improving learning in the provision and is tireless in her pursuit of providing relevant learning opportunities for the children. The staff have created an environment that stimulates and inspires children, while planning activities that are based on children's interests. The recent pirate topic supported children with purposeful writing activities in the form of ransom letters and 'wanted' posters. It also encouraged their development of shape, space and measure, by supporting them to build a square-rigger from 3D shapes, labelling the shapes as they did so.
- The curriculum is planned in response to accurate assessment data and allows for children to access all areas of the early years curriculum. Where assessment information has indicated that groups of children require additional support, a broader range of activities is offered with carefully targeted teaching. Close monitoring of children's progress ensures that all activities and interventions impact positively on children's attainment.
- Achievement in the early years is rapidly improving and is now broadly in line with all children nationally. This indicates good progress as it is recognised that children enter the setting working at a level below that typical for children of their age.
- The most able children are given opportunities to further develop and receive additional support from elsewhere in the school. As a result, the most able children flourish.
- Teaching in the early years is good and all staff work to support children in all aspects of their learning. Activities are designed to enable children to independently access all areas of the foundation stage curriculum. Their positive attitudes to learning and their ability to collaborate with each other are encouraged well.
- Behaviour is good. Staff work unfailingly to support children's communication, language and personal, social and emotional development. This was evident during the inspection when the most vulnerable children happily engaged with the inspection team describing their learning and sharing their achievements.
- The safety and well-being of children are well considered. Daily risk assessments and a high ratio of adults ensure that children remain safe. There is a nurturing ethos that allows children to express concerns freely and feel confident that staff will respond positively.

School details

Unique reference number	138389
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10011864

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	236
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rachel Moss
Headteacher/Principal/Teacher in charge	Jenny Redgrove
Telephone number	01462 621800
Website	www.gardencityacademy.co.uk
Email address	admin@gca.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	24–25 June 2014

Information about this school

- Garden City Academy is an average-sized primary school.
- The school became a sponsor-led academy in September 2012.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the additional pupil premium funding is significantly above the national average. The pupil premium funding is to support pupils who are, or have been, eligible for free school meals at any time in the last six years, and children who are looked after by the local authority.
- Over one fifth of pupils are from a variety of minority ethnic groups, but few pupils speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is significantly greater than that found nationally. The proportion of those pupils who have an education, health and care plan is lower than in other schools nationally.
- There have been significant changes to the senior leadership team and governing body since the previous inspection.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school does not meet the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 6.

Information about this inspection

- The team of inspectors gathered a range of evidence to judge the quality of teaching over time. This included observing learning in all classes at least once and visiting 26 lessons or parts of lessons. Four observations were carried out jointly with the headteacher or deputy headteacher.
- Inspectors looked at pupils' work, children's learning records and in-school tracking data, listened to some pupils read and talked to pupils about their work.
- Meetings were held with governors and representatives from the multi-academy trust.
- A meeting was held with pupils to discuss their views on school life. The inspection team spoke to pupils throughout the school day, including at breaktime and in the lunch hall.
- Policies, procedures and school logs were considered, along with other documentation that covered the curriculum, pupils' performance and the quality of teaching. The school's self-evaluation was reviewed along with reports provided by the multi-academy trust and local authority.
- The views of parents were considered at an open meeting, in discussions with parents on the playground at the start of the day, through text correspondence with Ofsted directly and through the 23 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher and other senior leaders, the executive principal and vice-chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, middle leaders, class teachers, a teaching assistant, the school business manager and pupils.
- Views of staff were taken into account during discussions and through the 26 responses to Ofsted's own staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Deborah Pargeter, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Parveen Qureshi

Ofsted Inspector

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