

# The Gordon Children's Academy, Junior

Gordon Road, Strood, Rochester, Kent ME2 3HQ

## Inspection dates

7–8 February 2017

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>
Effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>Good</b>
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	<b>Good</b>
Outcomes for pupils	<b>Good</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school

- Leaders have a clear vision and ambition for the school and wider community. Shared leadership with the infant school ensures continuity for pupils and families.
- Leaders have a very clear understanding about what is working well and what could be even better.
- Leaders' actions to make improvements and ensure consistency across the school have been successful. As a result, standards have risen sharply since the school opened.
- Attainment at the end of Year 6 in reading, writing and mathematics is now in line with national averages.
- Current pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, are making good progress from their starting points in reading, writing and mathematics.
- The rapid, extensive and sustained improvements in behaviour since the school opened have been recognised and welcomed by pupils, parents and staff.
- Pupils behave well in classrooms and on the playground. They enjoy their learning and are overwhelmingly positive about their school.
- Governance is effective. The regional governing body knows the school well and understands its role within the trust's governance arrangements.
- Leaders' non-negotiable expectations have led to improvements in teaching, which is now good.
- Safeguarding is effective. Leaders from the school and trust ensure that every possible step is taken to keep pupils safe.
- Since September, more pupils are coming to school regularly, including disadvantaged pupils. However, attendance levels for disadvantaged pupils remain low.
- Pupils are given rich and varied opportunities to write across the curriculum.
- Leaders have accurately identified that pupils need more opportunities to solve mathematical problems. Leaders have begun to address this but know there is more work to be done.
- Leaders recognise that not enough pupils are challenged to make the faster progress of which they are capable and reach a higher standard in reading and writing.
- In some lessons, pupils, including the most able, are not given sufficiently challenging work quickly enough.

## Full report

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further accelerate progress for all groups of pupils so that a greater proportion of pupils achieve the higher standards at the end of key stage 2, by:
  - strengthening teaching so that teachers monitor the progress of pupils in lessons and move them on to more challenging work quickly
  - reviewing the mathematics curriculum so that pupils have more opportunities to solve problems and develop their reasoning skills in mathematics.
- Leaders should sustain the current improvement in pupils' levels of attendance and ensure that more pupils who are disadvantaged come to school regularly.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

**Good**

- The headteacher is ambitious for the pupils in her care and has built a team that wants to achieve the best for them. As one parent wrote, under her leadership 'the school conveys a real sense of commitment and a drive to continually raise standards'.
- Since the school opened, standards have risen each year and behaviour has improved remarkably, both in lessons and around the school. As one staff member wrote: 'The school has a buzz unlike any other I have worked in, there is a shared determination that is picked up by all the children. I love it.' These kinds of comments were not uncommon among the staff and parents who recognise the sustainable improvements that have been made.
- The acting headteacher and acting deputy headteacher have maintained the momentum of improvement and are very astute in their judgements about the quality of teaching in the school. They know the school's many strengths but are not complacent about what still needs improving further.
- Teaching has improved and is now consistently good because leaders have not compromised on their expectations about what learning should be like at Gordon. Leaders' lists of their 'non-negotiable' requirements have been instrumental in improving teachers' performance. However, leaders rightly recognise that some teachers now need more freedom to develop even stronger practice.
- Leaders provide good support for teachers who are new to the profession. Teachers value and benefit from the opportunities they receive to work with and learn from each other, school leaders and other staff across the trust. As a result, teachers new to the profession are meeting the school's high standards.
- Teachers are given additional responsibilities and training to allow them to develop as middle leaders. For example, teachers have responsibility for aspects of the school such as reading, promoting British values, and physical education. These new leaders are already demonstrating that their actions are leading to improved provision and progress in their areas of responsibility.
- The curriculum is interesting and makes good links between subjects through exciting topics such as 'bottoms, burps and bile' that engage pupils well. The development of writing is a key focus of the curriculum and is leading to improved standards in this important area. Leaders have adapted the mathematics curriculum to ensure that pupils catch up, such as through higher expectations around calculation. However, they recognise that this means that problem-solving and reasoning opportunities are not currently as well developed as they should be.
- Pupils and parents appreciate the wide range of enrichment activities such as visits to museums and the variety of extra-curricular clubs that pupils can attend.
- The school's core values of achievement, aspirations, community and responsibility are clearly demonstrated by pupils around the school. Older pupils could explain how the school's values sit seamlessly with modern British values such as tolerance and democracy, giving relevant examples of how these are demonstrated at Gordon. As some particularly eloquent pupils explained, 'It does not matter where you come from

or what your religion is; we set aside our differences and treat each other with respect.'

- Pupil premium funding is used effectively. As a result of successful additional teaching, some disadvantaged pupils are making accelerated progress in writing and mathematics, helping them to catch up. Elsewhere, funding is used well to support disadvantaged pupils' emotional and social needs so that they feel good about themselves and are ready to learn.
- Additional funding to support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is used effectively. Leaders work closely with parents and other professionals to identify the needs of individual pupils. Additional support is provided to meet some pupils' more specific needs such as those relating to medical conditions. Consequently, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress from their starting points. However, the required information report for parents about the effectiveness of the school's special educational needs policy is not complete.
- Sports premium funding is used effectively. The proportion of pupils taking part in the wide range of sports on offer has increased over time. Consequently, over half of the pupils now take part in at least one sporting club. Activities that take place before school, such as table tennis and dodgeball, help to encourage pupils to arrive at school on time.
- The academy trust provides effective support for school leaders.

## **Governance of the school**

- The regional governing body knows the school well. Governors know what is working well and what could be even better. They do not rely solely on what leaders tell them. Governors use visits to the school to see for themselves the work that leaders are doing. Governors are able to use published performance information about the school to ask the right questions. Members of the regional governing body fully understand their role within the trust's overall leadership structure.
- The board of directors holds executive leaders to account effectively. The board is given detailed and wide-ranging performance information and members ask searching questions. As a result, the board has a clear understanding of the strengths and areas for development within the school.

## **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders ensure that all staff, including those who are working at the school on a short-term basis, know and understand the school's processes for recording and sharing concerns about pupils' well-being. The culture in the school is that everyone works together to keep pupils safe. Staff with responsibility for safeguarding keep clear and comprehensive records of every meeting and conversation they have. Leaders put pupils' needs first and are not afraid to challenge other agencies they work with to secure what is best for the most vulnerable.

- The trust undertakes regular checks in the school to ensure that agreed processes and procedures are followed. Leaders value this additional scrutiny. Staff with responsibility for safeguarding are reflective about their work. Consequently, they make minor changes to systems that are already effective where they believe they can be even better. Staff are very careful to assess possible risks to pupils both around the school site and when pupils are out on trips. Consequently, staff take necessary precautions to ensure pupils' safety.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

**Good**

- Since the school opened, teaching has improved and is now good. Leaders' high expectations about what teachers should include in their lessons have led to a consistent approach to teaching, learning and assessment across the school.
- Older pupils consistently confirm that teaching has improved and that their work is now more challenging in a variety of subjects. Pupils appreciate the clear guidance they are given about their work which sets out the quantity and quality of work and standard of presentation required. Pupils have frequent opportunities to apply their writing skills in other areas of the curriculum.
- Teachers have well-honed questioning skills which they use effectively both when teaching the whole class or working with small groups or individuals. These questions frequently require pupils to think deeply about their learning. This sometimes leads to pupils asking challenging questions of their own. Pupils recognise that making mistakes is a key part of the learning process.
- Assessment information is used accurately to plan activities that match the needs of pupils and allow them to achieve in line with national expectations. Pupils appreciate the consistent feedback they receive on their work. Teachers consistently apply the school's marking policies, succinctly telling pupils how to focus on basic requirements, consolidate their learning or challenge themselves with more difficult tasks.
- Pupils learn well, regularly selecting challenges to move their learning on quickly, and acting promptly on the instant verbal feedback they receive.
- Teaching assistants contribute well to the progress that pupils make. Some teaching assistants go over and above their role, inspiring pupils to read widely and often and making excellent recommendations about authors and books.
- Occasionally, time is not used productively and pupils are not moved on to more challenging tasks when they are ready. This slows pupils' progress and potentially restricts them from achieving higher standards.
- Teachers help pupils to develop mathematical fluency in their work, particularly with number. As a result, those pupils who have previously fallen behind in mathematics are quickly catching up. For example, Year 6 pupils can correctly add, subtract and multiply fractions. However, opportunities to solve mathematical problems are less well developed. As a result, pupils are not developing their ability to explain and reason as well as they could.

**Personal development and welfare**

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- The vast majority of parents are confident that their children are happy and safe at school.
- One pupil explained that 'bullying is a thing of the past'. However, pupils understand that bullying can take many forms and are wise about preventing it from happening, including online. Pupils are confident that adults in school would help them to deal with any problems or worries, however big or small.
- Pupils enjoy the wide range of responsibilities that they can apply for such as head boy and head girl, personal assistants to the leadership team, and buddies. Older pupils told inspectors they feel they have 'a voice' in the school and are able to contribute to some decision-making.
- Vulnerable pupils are given a high level of sensitive and effective support. Sporting clubs before school together with the breakfast club provide a calm start to the day, promote healthy lifestyles and ensure that pupils arrive on time for school.
- Where teachers have slightly lower expectations, the quality of pupils' presentation suffers and they take less pride in their work.

**Behaviour**

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Leaders have introduced high expectations and clear procedures that have had a positive impact on improving behaviour in class and around the school. Pupils talk about the positive changes that have happened in the last two years. Pupils say they can now learn uninterrupted in lessons.
- Exclusions have reduced significantly, and pupils who find it more difficult to manage their behaviour have been given support to do so. When pupils make mistakes they are asked to reflect on their actions.
- Pupils say they 'love school'. They also enjoy their breaktimes, and spending time with friends and adults they trust.
- Attendance levels are improving. Over the previous two years, attendance levels were not good enough. This year, more pupils are coming to school regularly, including those who are disadvantaged. Leaders recognise that this improvement needs to be sustained. The attendance levels of disadvantaged pupils need to improve further.
- Where learning is not challenging or interesting enough, there is some occasional off-task behaviour.

## Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils throughout the school are currently making good progress from their differing starting points in reading, writing and mathematics. The school's own detailed assessment information and work in pupils' books support this view.
- Additional teaching support funded by the pupil premium, together with consistently good teaching in class, is enabling many of the current disadvantaged pupils to make accelerated progress. This is proving successful in diminishing any deficits in their previous attainment.
- The most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, are making good progress from their higher starting points. For example, they read fluently with good expression and accurate comprehension, while in mathematics they clearly explain their understanding of mathematical concepts when carrying out calculations.
- Specific programmes are successful at helping those pupils who have fallen behind to catch up. For example a programme to accelerate progress in reading is being used effectively with identified groups of pupils throughout the school.
- Attainment in reading, writing and mathematics in national assessments at the end of Year 6 has improved year-on-year since the school opened. In 2016, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics matched, or was better than, the national average. This improved performance meant the majority of pupils were well prepared for secondary school when they left Gordons.
- Published assessment information shows that pupils who left the school in 2016 made less progress in reading and writing through key stage 2 overall than pupils nationally. However, these pupils had made accelerated progress in the last two years since the school opened to make up for their previous underachievement.
- More pupils reached the higher standard in the mathematics test in 2016 than in the reading and spelling, punctuation and grammar tests. Current Year 6 pupils are making stronger progress towards developing deeper skills and knowledge in these areas and are helped by having far more opportunities to read and write in different areas of the curriculum.
- Pupils develop secure scientific knowledge and skills, as well as deep understanding and empathy in religious education, due to the prominence given to these subjects in the curriculum. Other subjects, such as history, geography, design technology and computing, are taught in an interesting way that allows pupils to apply their literacy skills. However, this sometimes results in pupils' specific skills in these curriculum areas being underdeveloped.

## School details

Unique reference number	140606
Local authority	Medway
Inspection number	10024489

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	7 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	337
Appropriate authority	Academy trust
Chair	Lee Round (regional governing body)
Headteacher	Jennifer McGuigan
Telephone number	01634 719971
Website	<a href="http://www.gordonchildrensacademy.org.uk">www.gordonchildrensacademy.org.uk</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:office@gordonacademies.medway.sch.uk">office@gordonacademies.medway.sch.uk</a>
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

## Information about this school

- The junior school is federated with the infant school. The schools share the same site, senior leadership team, governance arrangements and policies and procedures.
- Both schools opened as academies on 1 March 2014 sponsored by The Thinking Schools Academy Trust.
- At the time of the inspection the school was led by the deputy headteacher who was acting headteacher while the substantive headteacher was on maternity leave. However, the substantive headteacher was present during the inspection as part of the trust's 'keeping in touch' days.
- The school is larger than the average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is greater than found nationally.
- The majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below



that found nationally.

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school does not comply with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish about their policy for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- In 2016, the school met the government floor standards that set out the minimum expectations for primary schools.

## Information about this inspection

- The federated infant school was inspected at the same time.
- Inspectors observed learning throughout the school, often with senior leaders. Inspectors looked at pupils' work during lessons and spoke to pupils about their learning. Inspectors, together with senior leaders, also looked at additional examples of pupils' work.
- Meetings were held with senior leaders and middle leaders, members of the regional governing body, and the executive leadership of the trust. Documents relating to governance were reviewed.
- Parents' views were considered through 46 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and in conversations with parents at the beginning of the school day. The views of staff were considered through the 22 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and through meetings.
- Pupils' views were heard through meetings and by talking to pupils around the school. Inspectors heard a group of pupils from each year group read.
- Inspectors considered a wide range of documents, including leaders' evaluations of the school's effectiveness, improvement plans, and leaders' analyses of the quality of teaching. Inspectors also evaluated pupils' progress, behaviour and attendance.
- Inspectors reviewed safeguarding records and the central record of recruitment checks on staff.

## Inspection team

Lee Selby, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Linda Taylor	Ofsted Inspector
David Meades	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

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E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
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