

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



20 March 2018

Mr Andrew Farrugia
Garden Fields Junior Mixed and Infant School
Townsend Drive
St Albans
Hertfordshire
AL3 5RL

Dear Mr Farrugia

Short inspection of Garden Fields Junior Mixed and Infant School

Following my visit to the school on 8 March 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in November 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

You provide strong leadership in partnership with your deputy headteacher. Since the previous inspection, you have provided a programme of training with opportunities for teachers to work alongside each other and share good practice. This is having a positive impact. You are determined to provide consistency in the quality of teaching and learning to sustain and improve outcomes for all pupils. You and your leadership team have a clear vision, which is shared by all staff, governors and parents. You have an accurate view of the school's performance and have identified the right areas for development.

The school has begun its expansion to become a three-form entry school. You have identified changes in the catchment area, with an increase in the number of pupils attending your school who speak English as an additional language or have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. You recognise that these pupils require specific support to allow them to make good progress, particularly in developing their language skills. You have been quick to provide this support so that their needs are being met.

Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about their children's experiences at Garden Fields Junior Mixed and Infant School, and this is reflected in the large number who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. One parent summed up their views by writing, 'Garden Fields is more than a school, it is a fantastic, caring and inspiring community.' Many parents acknowledge the inclusive

aims of the school. One parent, speaking for many, said: 'I was drawn to Garden Fields because of its inclusive and nurturing atmosphere. It clearly embraces children from all backgrounds and races, and offers them equal opportunities.'

The school is a happy and stimulating learning environment which celebrates pupils' achievements. Pupils are excited about learning through the broader curriculum with 'wow' moments to stimulate their interests and enrichment days which involve the whole school community.

Pupils behave well, are welcoming and show good manners. Pupils have positive attitudes to learning, particularly when they have the opportunity to take an active role in lessons. They work together to share ideas and to help each other to improve their work. One pupil described how they look out for each other at playtime too by saying, 'When someone is lonely or sad we help them to join in.' Pupils spoke enthusiastically about their extra responsibilities. For example, they have the opportunity to be part of the junior leadership team, a sports leader or a music captain to name but a few.

Governors bring a wide range of experience and skills to their role. They deploy these skills effectively in providing support and challenge to the leadership team. They have specific roles and responsibilities and are dedicated to their work. Governors have a good understanding of the key school priorities and of the actions that leaders are taking to address them. Governors complete regular monitoring of the school's work in order to evaluate the impact of initiatives and gain the views of both pupils and parents.

The local authority provides a useful external view of the school through the Hertfordshire Improvement Partner programme and training to develop middle leaders.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders, including governors, place the highest priority on keeping pupils safe and providing strong pastoral care. There are five members of staff trained as designated safeguarding leads, which means that there is always a member of staff in school to deal with any potential safeguarding concerns.

Safer recruitment processes are extremely robust. Appropriate checks are carried out to ensure that adults employed are suitable to work with pupils. Records are meticulously kept in a very systematic way to ensure that statutory requirements are met. These records also include staff training, supporting leaders in ensuring that staff are fully inducted into their roles. Training includes first aid, child protection and how to protect pupils from radicalisation and extremism. Staff have been trained to deal with a wide range of medical needs and the school has purchased its own defibrillator.

My discussions with pupils showed that they know how to keep themselves safe. They know who to speak to if they have concerns. There are clear systems in place

to log and monitor any issues with behaviour and potential bullying. This ensures that incidents are fully investigated and appropriate pastoral support provided. Pupils value the support they are given if they visit the 'butterfly room' where they can discuss any worries.

The site manager has been active in addressing any issues raised through the action plan of a recent local authority health and safety audit. Regular site walks, including termly checks, are completed so that any concerns can be quickly addressed.

Inspection findings

- I explored a number of key lines of enquiry during the inspection. My first two key lines of enquiry focused on mathematics and reading. In 2017, there was a dip in standards for some groups of pupils in key stage 1 compared to 2016. In key stage 2, while attainment remained above national averages, pupils made less progress across the key stage compared to 2016 in both mathematics and reading.
- I wanted to review how you were developing pupils' reasoning skills, resilience and confidence in mathematics. This had been identified as an area for improvement at the previous inspection.
- The mathematics leaders have provided staff training with a focus on developing reasoning skills. The school's involvement in the Hertfordshire Essential Mathematics programme has supported the development of mathematics, particularly in key stage 1, by providing a clear teaching sequence to develop pupils' number fluency and reasoning at greater depth. Leaders complete regular monitoring to measure the impact of initiatives and identify areas for further development. This is supporting improvements to teaching across the school.
- Teachers model ideas and provide additional support and challenge to pupils through their skilled questioning. For example, in Year 5 pupils were challenged to explain the strategies that they had used to solve multiplication and division problems.
- Pupils are developing their mathematical language, which they use effectively when explaining their reasoning. This was evident in Year 6, where pupils were working with their partners to find the dimensions of a cuboid, using any different method to calculate this. They were challenged to explain their chosen strategy and develop it further. Less-confident pupils were willing to 'have a go'.
- Pupils are excited about learning in mathematics and talked about a recent mathematics week which included a 'Spy Mission' and a 'wow' day of real-life problem-solving. Parents value the workshops provided for them to develop their confidence in being able to support their child at home.
- We saw examples of good progress in pupils' books. Expectations are high and there is consistency in the school's approach to teaching mathematics. There are many examples of pupils applying their skills to problem-solving and developing their reasoning through explaining their thinking. Tasks are matched to the

needs of pupils with an appropriate level of challenge.

- I also wanted to find out how effectively pupils are being supported to make expected and better progress in reading from their starting points. Reading has a high profile and pupils describe how they are encouraged to develop a love of books and reading by their teachers or through visiting the school library, where they can choose books from a wide variety of texts. This is further supported by visits from authors and 'book challenges' within the school community.
- There are strong links between the development of reading skills and writing. Pupils enjoy reading books linked to their topic themes. They were observed using their reading skills to retrieve and interpret information to use to develop their cross-curricular writing. For example, Year 4 pupils were highly engaged in discussing the text as they planned to write a story about a boy in the rainforest who became a shaman. The teacher supported this activity with high-level questioning.
- Programmes have been introduced to link spelling to reading and to support pupils who have specific learning difficulties so that they can access their learning more easily. It is too early to fully measure the impact of these programmes.
- My final key line of enquiry was to evaluate how effectively leaders monitor the impact of their actions for school improvement in all subject areas.
- Subject leaders are developing their roles and have written their own action plans linked to school improvement. They complete termly monitoring where they review teaching and learning through learning walks and a review of pupils' work. This ensures that teachers are developing key skills, knowledge and understanding within their subjects.
- We agreed that while leaders can demonstrate the impact of their actions through their monitoring of teaching and learning, the development of assessment for the foundation subjects is in its early stages.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they build on the work to support pupils who have specific learning difficulties in accessing their learning
- they continue to develop the assessment of foundation subjects so that subject leaders can monitor pupils' progress across the broader curriculum.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Hertfordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Pauline MacMillan
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

We discussed the key lines of enquiry for this inspection, the school's internal evaluation of its performance, plans for future improvement and information about current pupils' progress and attainment. During the inspection, I held meetings with you, members of the leadership team, three subject leaders, six governors, administrative staff, the site manager, the pastoral support team and a representative from the local authority. I gathered a range of evidence to evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Together, we undertook joint observations of teaching and learning in all classes, including the early years provision. I looked at a sample of pupils' current work across all subjects and across a wide range of abilities in lessons. I spoke informally to a number of pupils in classrooms about their learning, and met with a group of pupils to talk about their school experience. I scrutinised the school's safeguarding and child protection procedures, including the management of health and safety, and the records of checks leaders make on the suitability of staff to work with children. I considered the views of parents through 220 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire 'Parent View', one letter received during the inspection and 124 free-text messages.