

# Inspection of a good school: Garden City Academy

Radburn Way, Letchworth Garden City, Hertfordshire SG6 2JZ

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Inspection dates: 5 and 6 June 2024

## Outcome

Garden City Academy continues to be a good school.

The headteacher of this school is Samantha Ruck. This school is part of The REAch2 Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Cathie Paine, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Gavin Robert.

## What is it like to attend this school?

Garden City Academy is a happy school. Pupils speak proudly of the 'GCA way'. They say confidently that, 'This is the way we do it here.' They respond well to the school's high expectations of their behaviour and achievement. In the Nursery and Reception classes, children settle into routines quickly. They learn to share and to take turns with the supportive guidance from adults. Pupils of all ages enjoy rhymes, stories and reading. Break and lunchtimes are sociable events. Pupils play and dance to music, together with school staff as well as with their peers. Staff are kind and helpful if pupils worry.

Pupils like the access to the range of experiences beyond the classroom, including the highly valued '11 before 11' opportunities, such as 'sleeping under the stars', hiking and the residential trip to France. In-school elections for pupil parliament representatives are competitive and taken seriously. Parliament members serve their school community very well. Ideas, such as for increased sustainability and the 'diversity diner', which celebrates different cultures, are carefully thought out and effectively implemented. Pupils are typically well prepared to move into secondary education at the end of Year 6.

## What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The school's broad and ambitious curriculum is securely focused on ensuring that all pupils achieve well in this small and inclusive school community. In recent times, significant staffing changes interrupted aspects of ongoing improvement planning. The trust acted swiftly with support to keep the quality of education on track. Well-considered developments, for example, to address historically weaker outcomes in reading and writing for pupils at the end of key stage 2 are proving successful. Important aspects of

writing are specifically taught and regularly revisited. Ensuring that pupils read well is a priority.

Across year groups, pupils' achievement is improving. Some pupils join the school at different stages, including late in Years 5 and 6. These pupils often make good progress from when they join the school, but sometimes they are less successful in national tests.

Many staff, including some subject leaders, are new. This means that, in a few subjects, the curriculum is still developing as the school evaluates what is working well and what needs to continue to improve. Occasionally, there is a mismatch between the intended learning and the activities teachers set. When this happens, pupils sometimes do not learn as much, or as deeply, as they could.

Promoting a love of reading is at the heart of the school's curriculum for pupils of all ages. In the Reception class, children sound their letters with pride and enthusiasm. Regular practise, using books matching the sounds that children know, helps pupils to secure reading accuracy and fluency over time. Pupils who need it get help to catch up. The school's 'book nook' provides a quiet space for pupils to read and to select books to read at home.

Teachers make regular checks on pupils' learning. They correct misconceptions quickly. The high proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are well supported. The special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) makes sure that staff have the information and guidance required to meet pupils' needs effectively. Teaching staff adapt tasks, for example, using smaller steps, so that pupils with SEND access a similar curriculum to their peers.

Most pupils behave well. Children in the Nursery and Reception classes work and play together cooperatively. Where sometimes pupils struggle to manage their feelings, extra support helps them to improve. Respectful relationships are the norm. Pupils are supportive and encouraging to each other. They enjoy school and typically attend regularly. However, a few pupils do not attend school as often as they should. This is despite the school's determined efforts to continue to reduce absence. Where pupils are persistently absent, they fall behind and miss the rich experiences beyond the classroom.

Pupils' personal development is well catered for. They learn about other cultures and the importance of healthy relationships. Opportunities for educational visits and to hear from visiting speakers, such as authors, artists and scientists enhance their learning experiences. Pupils are proud of their leadership responsibilities, which contribute well to the whole school community.

Staff appreciate the support from leaders, including from the trust and the local governing body. They work collaboratively with leaders, taking advantage of the professional development on offer. The focus on continuous improvement is strong. Ensuring that staff's workload is manageable, and the security of their well-being, are leadership priorities.

## Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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

### (Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- A period of significant staffing changes has disrupted plans to embed improvements to leaders' ambitious curriculum in a few subjects. New subject leaders are still developing their skills in checking the quality of provision in their areas of responsibility. As a result, there is sometimes a mismatch between the planned learning and the activities teachers set. Where this happens, pupils do not learn as much as they could. The school should ensure that any further staff training should be completed quickly, so that pupils achieve well in all aspects of their learning.
- Some pupils do not attend school as often as they should. This limits the learning of these pupils, and they miss the range of wider opportunities available to them. The school should continue to strengthen its efforts to secure the regular attendance of all pupils.

## Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in October 2018.

## How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

## Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	138389
<b>Local authority</b>	Hertfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	10323723
<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Academy sponsor-led
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3 to 11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	188
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Board of trustees
<b>Chair of trust</b>	Gavin Robert
<b>CEO of the trust</b>	Cathie Paine
<b>Headteacher</b>	Samantha Ruck
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.gardencityacademy.co.uk">www.gardencityacademy.co.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	9 and 10 October 2018, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- There have been several changes in leadership and staffing since the previous inspection.
- The current headteacher joined the school in September 2023.
- While the number of pupils on the school's roll overall has reduced, the number of pupils with SEND has increased significantly since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The school occasionally uses one registered, local authority approved, alternative provision.
- A high proportion of pupils join the school at different stages of their education, including in Year 6.
- The school offers a breakfast club for pupils as part of its strategy to continue to improve attendance.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and has taken that into account in the evaluation of the school.
- The inspector conducted deep dives in the following subjects: English, including early reading, mathematics and history. To complete each deep dive, the inspector discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, and spoke with teachers. She also listened to pupils reading to a familiar adult, spoke with pupils about their learning and looked at samples of their work.
- A wider sample of curriculum was considered beyond the deep dives, including in science and geography.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspector looked at safeguarding policies, the school's record of pre-employment checks on new staff and a sample of child protection files. She took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- The inspector spoke with two members of the local governing body. Meetings were held with the headteacher, trust and other leaders, including leaders with oversight of support for pupils with SEND, behaviour and attendance.
- A range of documents were checked, including behaviour logs, attendance records, minutes of governors' meetings, school improvement plans and school policies.
- There were 44 responses to the online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View, which were considered alongside 44 free-text responses from parents. The inspector also considered the 20 responses to the questionnaire for school staff. The views of parents and pupils expressed in the school's own surveys were also considered.

## Inspection team

Christine Dick, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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