

Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: Garden Fields Junior Mixed and Infant School

Townsend Drive, St Albans, Hertfordshire AL3 5RL

Inspection dates:

10 and 11 December 2024

Outcome

Garden Fields Junior Mixed and Infant School has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

The headteacher of this school is Paul Sutton. This school is part of Ambition Education Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Alan Gray, and co-chief executive officer, Margaret Chapman and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Deborah Strazza.

What is it like to attend this school?

The school has developed a highly inclusive culture where everyone is welcome. Pupils and staff feel a strong sense of community. The school focuses on nurturing the all-round development of every pupil. The pupils are happy, safe and enjoy learning.

A well-considered curriculum, underpinned by the school's aspirational aims, enables pupils to learn and achieve well. Staff maintain high expectations for behaviour, beginning as soon as children join the school. Children in the early years demonstrate kindness and respect towards others. This continues throughout the school, where pupils act in a calm and respectful manner.

Relationships between staff and pupils are positive and supportive. Pupils know that if they have a worry, they can speak to an adult who will help them. The school provides tailored emotional support groups, fostering confidence and resilience in pupils.

The school cultivates a culture of inclusivity and respect through its ambassador roles. These ambassadors actively promote their focus areas, such as raising awareness of diversity. They also act as role models for younger pupils, demonstrating positive

behaviours and teaching practical strategies for managing conflict and emotions. Through these roles, pupils develop confidence and leadership skills.

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

The school is highly ambitious in ensuring that pupils achieve well and succeed. The curriculum is carefully designed to engage all pupils and make learning meaningful. It supports their achievements through a well-structured approach. For example, in mathematics, children in the early years practise counting numbers and recognising patterns. Older pupils build on this knowledge to help them multiply or recognise equivalent fractions.

Staff nurture pupils' curiosity and love of learning. They identify any misconceptions pupils may develop and respond promptly to address them. This enables pupils to recall subject knowledge with confidence. For example, pupils confidently discuss a variety of sports in physical education, demonstrating their knowledge of ball control. The school recognises that the curriculum in a few foundation subjects is not yet fully embedded. In these subjects, pupils are not always able to make connections between their prior and current learning. As a result, some pupils struggle to remember the subject-specific skills they have learned over time.

Reading is a priority for the school. This starts in the Reception Year and continues through to Year 6. Books are carefully chosen to match the sounds pupils know. The school checks pupils' learning regularly to ensure that they build their phonics knowledge effectively. Pupils who need extra support are swiftly identified and appropriate help is provided. Pupils are enthusiastic about the school and class libraries which play a key role in fostering their love of reading.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are extremely well supported throughout the school. Pupils with SEND are promptly identified, ensuring their individual needs are met effectively. Classrooms are inclusive spaces and pupils are very respectful and understanding of each other's needs. Pupils with SEND are fully included in lessons and receive the effective support that they need to succeed.

The school fosters a calm and purposeful atmosphere both inside and outside classrooms. Staff have high expectations for pupils' behaviour and pupils respond positively. They behave well and show respect for one another. Children in the Reception Year quickly settle into school. Staff support them to develop skills and routines, such as sharing and becoming increasingly independent in their learning and play. The school is tenacious in ensuring that all groups of pupils attend regularly and on time.

The school places significant emphasis on pupils' broader development. Outdoor spaces, such as the wooded learning area and the yurt, provide calm and supportive environments for pupils to thrive. These spaces, along with the school dog welcoming pupils at the start of the day, play a vital role in promoting mental health and well-being. This helps to ensure that pupils feel ready and prepared to learn. Additionally, pupils are taught to respect diverse family structures, religions and individual identities. Through

these experiences, they develop resilience, emotional understanding and the skills needed to become responsible future citizens.

The newly established leadership team, together with governors and the trust, leads improvements decisively. They focus strongly on creating opportunities for pupils to develop resilience and perseverance. This commitment includes prioritising staff well-being, which ensures that staff feel valued. The school benefits from the expertise and support of other schools within the trust, fostering a collaborative culture for ongoing improvement. While some priorities will take time to be fully embedded, the positive impact of the new leadership team, in partnership with governors and the trust, is already apparent.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some foundation subjects, opportunities for pupils to retrieve subject-specific skills over time are not fully embedded. As a result, some pupils struggle to connect new learning with what they have previously learned. The school needs to refine its curriculum approaches in these subjects, ensuring that pupils can connect with and build on previous learning to deepen their understanding and knowledge effectively over time.

Background

Until September 2024, on a graded (section 5) inspection we gave schools an overall effectiveness grade, in addition to the key and provision judgements. Overall effectiveness grades given before September 2024 will continue to be visible on school inspection reports and on Ofsted's website. From September 2024 graded inspections will not include an overall effectiveness grade. This school was, before September 2024, judged to be good for its overall effectiveness.

We have now inspected the school to determine whether it has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at that previous inspection. 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's work has improved significantly or that it may not be as strong as it was at the last inspection, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection. A graded inspection 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 predecessor school, Garden Fields Junior Mixed and Infant School, to be good for overall effectiveness in March 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

Unique reference number	148434
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10345537
Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	5 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	478
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Deborah Strazza
CEO of the trust	Alan Gray
Headteacher	Paul Sutton
Website	www.gardenfields.herts.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school joined Alban Academies Trust in September 2021 which then became the Ambition Education Trust in September 2024.
- The headteacher joined the school in September 2023.
- The school runs its own breakfast club and after-school club.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation 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 have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- The inspector met with all senior leaders, several teaching and support staff, governors and a representative from the local authority.
- The inspector visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- The inspector observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school, and during playtime lunchtime.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspector: reviewed the single central record; 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 considered responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for staff and pupils. They also considered the views of parents and carers using Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View.

Inspection team

Karen Kent, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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