



Garden Fields Junior Mixed and Infant School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 117139
Local Authority HERTFORDSHIRE
Inspection number 290735
Inspection date 25 September 2006
Reporting inspector Mrs. Joyce Cox

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Townsend Drive
School category	Community		St. Albans
Age range of pupils	4-11		Hertfordshire AL3 5RL
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01727 759280
Number on roll (school)	361	Fax number	01727 759281
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Dr. Janice Norwood
		Headteacher	Mrs. Theresa Clift
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector over one day.

Description of the school

This is a larger than average size primary school. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is lower than average. An average number of pupils have learning difficulties or disabilities and a below average number have a statement of special educational need. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is higher than average as is that of pupils whose first language is not English. A few pupils are at an early stage of learning English. When children start in the Reception classes their abilities are generally similar to the expected level for their age. As part of the school's commitment to improvement it has secured Investors in People status. It is currently working towards an information and communication technology (ICT) Mark and preparing to submit for a Healthy Schools Award.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school with outstanding features. Good teaching ensures that all pupils achieve well. Reception children get a really good start due to experienced, confident teaching and highly effective support. Most children attain at least the expected levels on entry to Year 1. Lively teaching in the infant classes, where learning is made fun, with excellent use of computer technology, results in pupils achieving well and attaining above average standards at the end of Year 2. Good teaching and progress continue in the junior class, where highly skilful planning makes sure that all pupils receive challenging and interesting work. As a result, Year 6 pupils attain above average standards by the time they leave the school. Staff keep meticulous records of how well pupils are doing, making it easy to track pupils' progress through the school. Most teachers, when marking pupils' work, clearly indicate how pupils can improve but this is not true in all cases. Parents correctly believe that their children are getting a good education. One writes 'We are delighted with the academic teaching, the moral values, respect for children and parents and the very caring environment.' There is a happy, purposeful and calm ethos based strongly on clear aims and values, which means that pupils' personal development is outstanding. They flourish and do well in lessons and grow into confident and active learners who enjoy the nourishing school meals and the very good variety of sports available. Pupils are exceptionally well cared for because staff go the extra mile to ensure that all pupils' personal and learning needs are met. Pupils feel very safe and thrive, saying that their views are always listened to and acted upon if possible. Older pupils are very involved in all aspects of school life, happily supporting younger children at breaktimes and they make a real difference through being house captains, monitors and school council members. All pupils enjoy the interesting and stimulating curriculum and in particular using computers, attending the many clubs, musical events and visits. The school provides good value for money. Good leadership and management and governance, with excellent leadership provided by the headteacher results in the school having a very accurate view of its own effectiveness. The school's capacity to improve is excellent because senior leaders carefully examine all aspects of the school's performance and take effective action to improve. This has led to very good improvement since the last inspection, particularly recently, in terms of providing more challenging work for higher attaining Year 2 pupils, much improved results in national tests and considerably improved accommodation.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make sure that all teachers' marking clearly tells pupils what they are doing well and how they can improve their work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement and standards are good because of the effective teaching and curriculum and the excellent care that the school provides for each pupil. Reception children make

good progress from a broadly average starting point and most attain at least the expected levels for children of this age on entry to Year 1. Between the years 2001 and 2005 Year 2 pupils attained broadly average standards in the Year 2 teacher assessments indicating satisfactory achievement. However, sensitive and decisive action by senior leaders resulted in staff changes, improved assessment and consequently much improved results in 2006. Pupils now make particularly good progress in the infant classes and attained above average standards in the 2006 Year 2 teacher assessments. These standards represent especially good progress and achievement for the pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities and those at an early stage of learning English who receive high quality support. The considerable time and care taken to plan work to meet the needs of individual pupils in both the infant and junior classes means that all pupils are challenged and make good progress in their learning. Year 6 pupils reach the challenging targets set. Inspection evidence agrees with school results that pupils attain high standards in English and mathematics by the time they leave. Pupils attain exceptionally high standards in science due to specialist teaching and a sharp focus on investigating and exploratory work.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development is outstanding. They have excellent relationships with staff and one another. The school is a very happy and caring place where all pupils make good progress in acquiring the numeracy, literacy and social skills to help them in later life. Pupils learn effectively how to stay safe. They say that there are many people they can go to in school if they are worried and can raise concerns for themselves or others via the 'Worry Box.' They love coming to school and this is reflected in the high attendance figures. Behaviour is excellent and pupils have good manners and learn to respect themselves and others. Pupils take on healthy and safe lifestyles exceptionally well. They know that it is important to eat healthy food and to take regular exercise such as popular 'Walk to School' weeks. Older pupils sensitively support younger children so that newcomers settle quickly. Pupils have a say in the school community which effectively develops life skills. The school council is really well organised and currently excitedly involved in devising questions to ask prospective deputy headteacher candidates. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. They flourish in this warm, supportive environment where their achievements are valued, recognised and praised.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good, enabling all pupils to achieve well. One pupil commented: ' Our teachers are great, they really encourage us to do our best.' Relationships and behaviour are excellent, resulting in happy, interesting classrooms

where pupils learn a good deal. Pupils have challenging targets for improvement and teachers encourage pupils to evaluate how well they are doing for themselves. All staff plan work very carefully to match pupils' various abilities. Teachers are exceptionally skilled at using and making sure pupils use computer technology in lessons. The talented learning support assistants make a very good contribution to all pupils' learning and in particular pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities. Those at an early stage of learning English make good progress because teachers skilfully make sure they and all pupils understand new vocabulary used in lessons. Staff diligently record the standards achieved and the progress that pupils make, but the quality of marking varies throughout the school and does not always tell pupils how to improve their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Staff successfully make sure that curriculum planning effectively meets the needs of all pupils. They are currently correctly adapting their planning to link various subjects to make pupils' learning more relevant and enjoyable. Improved ICT provision and use have a positive impact on learning. The curriculum is skilfully adapted to meet the needs and abilities of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities. The accommodation for Reception children has been enlarged since the last inspection and children get off to a really good start because they learn through a wide variety of practical experiences. Successful specialist weeks in subjects such as geography and history enrich the curriculum. Excellent links with other local schools and agencies enliven the curriculum through shared resources, expertise and experiences in music, ICT and French. A good range of enticing enrichment activities is provided, such as Spanish, Urdu, computer, sports and musical clubs. These, together with a good number of visits and visitors, bring pupils' learning to life and have a very positive impact on their personal and social skills.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school takes outstanding care of its pupils and this contributes effectively to their good progress, sense of well-being and to their great enjoyment of school. Procedures to ensure that pupils are kept safe and secure, including those relating to child protection are established. Very good induction procedures help newcomers to settle quickly and happily. Pupils talk warmly of how their teachers 'care for them and help them learn' and they really appreciate the sports, music and other activities organised outside the school day. Pupils' academic progress is tracked carefully and they say their literacy and numeracy targets remind them of what to focus on in lessons. The school makes very good use of help and advice from outside agencies to support vulnerable pupils and those who have learning difficulties or disabilities.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher's leadership is outstanding and she has calmly led the school through many changes over the last few years. Her strong leadership is appreciated by staff and most parents and the school has a very good reputation in the local community. Staff and governors share her clear vision and a wholehearted commitment to school improvement. Consequently, all staff go out of their way to ensure that all pupils, whatever their background, gender, ability or disability, achieve well and are included in all school activities. The school has successfully tackled the issues for improvement from the last inspection. Consequently it is extremely well placed to carry on improving. The school has good systems for checking how well it is doing which results in a clear and detailed school improvement plan outlining priorities and how these will be tackled. Monitoring of teaching and learning has been very successful in improving teaching. The way leadership and management is now organised results in all staff being very involved in reflecting on what is going well and what could be improved. The school regularly seeks and acts upon the views of parents and pupils through surveys and pupil questionnaires. A small minority of parents feel that communication between school and home could be improved. For instance they would welcome the opportunity to meet their children's class teachers at the start of the academic year. Governors are very supportive of the school and effectively check pupils' performance and confidently ask staff challenging questions when necessary.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

26 September 2006 Dear Pupils Garden Fields Junior Mixed and Infant School, Townsend Drive, St Albans, Hertfordshire AL3 5RL I enjoyed my visit to Garden Fields very much. I discovered a great deal about your school by talking to you and watching you learn. I thought that you would like to know what I liked about your school and how I thought it could be improved even further: - You made me feel very welcome and greeted me with lots of smiles. - You love coming to school because you feel safe and you really like your teachers. - You are very polite, get on well together and really care about each other. - You work hard, behave exceptionally well and standards are very high by the time you leave the school. - You feel teachers encourage you to do well, run many exciting clubs and keep you safe at school. Your headteacher runs the school very well and your parents are right to think that you go to a good school. What I have asked the school to do now to make it even better is: - To ask all teachers to make sure that when they mark your work they tell you what you are doing well and how you can improve your work. Keep working hard and enjoying life at Garden Fields. I wish you all the very best in the future. Yours sincerely Joyce Cox Lead inspector