

Garden City Academy

Radburn Way, Letchworth Garden City, Hertfordshire SG6 2JZ

Inspection dates

9–10 October 2018

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher is ambitious and has high expectations for the school, staff and pupils. Alongside other leaders, there is an unwavering commitment to ensuring that all pupils achieve well.
- The trust works closely with school leaders and the local governing board. Together, they have addressed the priorities from the last inspection successfully so that the school is good and continues to improve.
- Leaders have a secure understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Self-evaluation is accurate. Plans for improving the school identify the areas that need to be tackled correctly. However, planned actions are too broad and lack target dates for completion to bring about rapid improvement.
- Pupils achieve well in reading and mathematics. Their attainment in writing is not as strong, especially in key stage 1.
- Pupils with low prior attainment make good progress. Teachers ensure that pupils receive well-targeted support to help them catch up.
- Leaders are addressing the barriers to learning for disadvantaged pupils, who make strong progress from their starting points.
- Teachers plan interesting lessons that stimulate pupils' interests and motivate them to learn. First-hand experiences provide an exciting start to their learning. Pupils make good progress in a wide range of subjects.
- Leaders place a high priority on safeguarding. This has created a strong culture across the school. Pupils are confident that they are safe in school.
- Pupils are keen to do well. They behave well in lessons and have good attitudes to their learning.
- The early years provides children with a good start to their education. Staff provide good opportunities for children to develop their speaking and listening skills. This prepares them well for Year 1.
- Teaching is mostly good. Even so, in key stage 1, the teaching of writing skills is not as effective. Too little emphasis is placed upon pupils' accurate use of spelling and punctuation. Handwriting skills are not developed well.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by providing clear and focused actions that are time-limited to secure rapid improvement.
- Strengthen the consistency of teaching in key stage 1 and improve outcomes in writing by:
 - equipping teachers with the knowledge of the expectations for pupils' writing in the year groups they teach
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to develop their spelling, punctuation and handwriting skills
 - ensuring that the most able pupils practise their writing skills across a range of subjects.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher, ably supported by senior leaders, is committed to providing every opportunity to help pupils succeed in their education. The school motto, 'believe and achieve', is reflected through the headteacher's drive to provide pupils with the best teaching.
- The trust has provided essential stability during a period of staff turbulence. Working closely with governors has ensured that key priorities from the last inspection have been addressed and that improvements are sustained.
- Leaders know their school well. The checking of teaching is well planned and links to the areas that leaders have identified for improvement. This has led to staff receiving helpful training and support, including that provided through the REAch2 Academy Trust. Consequently, teachers use consistent approaches that contribute well to pupils' good progress. Staff are overwhelmingly positive about the development opportunities they receive.
- Systems for checking pupils' progress are thorough. Leaders are able to quickly identify those pupils who fall behind in their work. The school's chosen approach of focused groups provides well-targeted support to address gaps in pupils' learning. This ensures that progress is substantial, especially for lower prior attaining pupils.
- Additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is used well. Actions are precisely targeted to meet a range of needs. Leaders frequently check the progress of disadvantaged pupils using different measures. This ensures that targeted actions are effective. For example, measures used to show the impact of support provided by an art therapist demonstrate how well pupils' social and emotional needs are being met. Differences between the progress of disadvantaged pupils and other non-disadvantaged pupils nationally are diminishing rapidly.
- The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) has a thorough understanding of the needs of pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. The SENCo uses her knowledge effectively to train staff, equipping them with the skills to meet the needs of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. This contributes well to the inclusive practice of the school. Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities receive effective extra teaching in class so that they make good progress from their starting points.
- The curriculum is planned carefully so that it is relevant to the school community. Pupils successfully develop their knowledge across a broad range of subjects. Each planned topic begins with a 'spectacular start' to spark pupils' interest. First-hand activities give pupils memorable experiences, such as planning and preparing a meal at a local pizza restaurant or receiving a visit from a Viking and re-enacting life during those times.
- The physical education and sport premium has been used well. Leaders have extended the range of sports clubs and activities. New sports have been introduced to provide wider access and motivate pupils' participation. Pupils benefit through improvements to their fitness and health.

- Pupils talk enthusiastically about the enrichment opportunities that enhance their learning. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is interwoven through the school's curriculum. This prepares pupils well for life in modern-day Britain. For example, ideas of democracy were shared during one class activity, so that pupils could have a constructive debate.
- Many parents and carers who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, or who spoke to inspectors during the inspection agree that they receive good information about how their child is doing at school. One comment, typical of others, said, 'The teachers are very approachable and keep us informed about our child's progress.'
- Leaders' plans for improvement are not precise. Many actions are identified but timescales are too vague. It is not clear in which order priorities are being addressed. This slows down improvement.

Governance of the school

- The local governing board shares the ambition and aspirations of school leaders. It understands which aspects of the school's provision need improvement. Governors make effective use of the information they receive to question school leaders and hold them to account. This means that their time is used well to check the effectiveness of improvement.
- Members of the local board have a good range of skills. They keep their knowledge up to date through regular training events. This means that they carry out their statutory duties diligently. They work closely with the trust to evaluate the progress of the school.
- Governors place an emphasis on the importance of safeguarding. All have received training in safeguarding and the dangers of radicalisation and extremism. Regular safeguarding checks are made of the school's policies and procedures. Whenever governors visit the school, they check that these are applied and understood by all staff.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders ensure that there is a strong culture of safeguarding across the school. Three staff members are trained as designated leaders for child protection. Staff are frequently updated with new information, keeping them alert to recognising any signs of risk to pupils. New staff starting at the school are informed by way of a thorough induction process. Leaders keep detailed records and liaise effectively with outside agencies to ensure that the needs of vulnerable children are met in a timely way.
- Appropriate staff employment and vetting checks are carried out and accurately recorded. This reflects the school's robust approach to ensuring that only suitable staff are employed to work with children. The headteacher and safeguarding governor check regularly that the single central record is appropriately maintained.
- Pupils are well cared for and safe at school. Pupils say that they would be confident to discuss any concerns with teachers. When responding to Ofsted's online

questionnaires, an overwhelming majority of staff and parents agree that pupils are safe at school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers use assessment effectively to plan activities that are well matched to pupils' abilities. Activities stimulate and capture pupils' interests. For example, in one class, pupils were making plague masks, which helped to deepen their understanding of key historical events.
- Teachers have high expectations of how pupils behave in class. Strong relationships foster respect between adults and pupils. Pupils respond quickly to adults' direction, promoting good attitudes to learning.
- Teachers and teaching assistants work well together. Teaching assistants are well trained and provided with the information about pupils' learning to carry out their roles effectively. They ask good questions to help address pupils' misconceptions. Teachers deploy teaching assistants well to check for gaps in pupils' learning, ensuring that progress is sustained.
- Phonics is generally taught well. Teachers check pupils' understanding of letter blends by reviewing the sounds they represent. Pupils are taught to read whole sentences using their phonic knowledge to break words down into smaller sounds to read them. However, teachers do not provide clear models of handwriting. As a result, pupils do not form letters accurately from the sounds they are learning.
- The teaching of mathematics is good. Resources are used well to improve pupils' fluency and solve calculation questions accurately. Teachers' questions check that pupils understand mathematical concepts by probing their responses. Work in pupils' books shows how they are challenged through reasoning activities and solving worded problems correctly. Pupils make strong gains in their learning in mathematics.
- Books that the whole class reads together support pupils' enjoyment of reading. Texts are linked to the topics they study, exposing pupils to a range of new and unfamiliar vocabulary. This is improving pupils' confidence and reading abilities. Careful checks on pupils' reading ensures that books are well matched so that pupils make good progress.
- The teaching of spelling, punctuation and handwriting is not consistently strong in key stage 1. Teachers do not provide pupils with clear approaches to forming letters correctly. Pupils do not apply their writing skills consistently across other subjects. Consequently, progress in writing is not as strong as it is in other subjects.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.

- Leaders know their pupils well. The school provides a caring and nurturing environment where pupils feel respected and well looked after. Adults model appropriate behaviours and this is reflected by pupils in the positive relationships they enjoy with their peers.
- The school's positive virtues help to equip pupils with skills to enable them to be successful members of the community. The virtues are displayed in school corridors and explained in class assemblies. Pupils use them through their work. For example, in a key stage 2 class, pupils considered statements about what is fair, listening and commenting appropriately on each other's views.
- Systems and routines are well established. This makes the environment orderly and calm. Pupils use the systems well to change from different activities. This means time is used productively to maximise learning and progress.
- Pupils understand what bullying means. When asked by inspectors, they provided clear explanations. They know how to keep themselves safe when using the internet. Pupils understand what to do if they encounter concerns while using computers or other devices. Pupils say that bullying sometimes occurs. However, they are confident that adults will help them if they are concerned.
- Leaders ensure that pupils have access to a range of extra-curricular activities. This contributes well to pupils' personal development. Additional sporting activities are provided by sports coaches during lunchtimes to improve pupils' health and levels of fitness. Wider experiences are planned as part of the school's 'eleven by eleven' strategy. This ensures that pupils are able to participate in a number of visits and activities to enhance their social and emotional development.
- The breakfast club provides a welcoming and safe place before the school day begins. Pupils enjoy the breakfasts provided, ensuring they make a good start to the day.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Leaders' determined efforts have resulted in sustained improvements in pupils' behaviour. Approaches used by adults are consistent and pupils understand what is expected of them. Most of the time, they respond positively, but occasionally pupils require clear reminders to sustain their attention. A small minority of parents expressed concern with pupils' behaviour. However, evidence gathered by inspectors during the inspection found that pupils behave well when at school.
- Pupils are polite and move sensibly around the school. They learn and play happily together, showing consideration for one another. At breaktimes and lunchtimes, pupils take turns to share equipment and their games.
- Staff are successful at meeting the needs of the small number of pupils who have difficulty in managing their behaviour. They are well trained and understand how to support these pupils so that they participate in school activities.
- Leaders use a range of strategies to ensure that pupils attend school frequently. Parents are alerted when their child's attendance dips. Meetings are held with parents to discuss concerns and provide support. Weekly prize draws and opportunities for a class pizza party are strong incentives for pupils to attend regularly. As a result,

attendance for all groups is close to average and improving and persistent absence has continued to decline.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- In 2018, provisional data shows that pupils' attainment and progress at the end of key stage 2 have improved substantially, especially in reading and mathematics. The proportion of pupils who attained the expected and higher standards in reading and mathematics was above the national average. They are well prepared for the next stage of their education.
- Pupils achieve well in phonics. In 2018, the proportion of pupils who achieved the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check was well above the national average.
- In-school assessment information and work in pupils' books show that current pupils are making strong progress in both reading and mathematics. Pupils are encouraged to read widely and develop their language skills through exposure to different genres. Work in mathematics books shows how pupils apply their knowledge to solving different problems. Pupils' increasing confidence with calculation skills contributes to their strong progress.
- In key stage 2, pupils' writing in books shows that they are making good progress. The activities pupils complete build their writing skills. For example, in a Year 3 class, pupils investigated different aspects of reports before completing their own factual accounts about wild animals. Leaders have ensured that pupils have opportunities to write across the curriculum for different purposes. Pupils practise and apply their writing skills in a range of contexts. This has been effective in motivating and improving pupils' confidence as writers.
- In key stage 1, pupils do not make consistently good progress in writing. Work in pupils' books shows that teachers do not have high enough expectations of how pupils develop their handwriting skills. Pupils do not apply their knowledge of punctuation consistently. Opportunities to write across the curriculum are limited. As a result, pupils are not challenged to produce their best work.
- Disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities make good progress from their individual starting points. Leaders regularly check on the progress that disadvantaged pupils are making and address the gaps in their learning. The SENCo ensures that tailored support and teaching are adapted appropriately to effectively meet the needs of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities.
- Pupils learn and develop skills across a range of subjects because of the well-planned curriculum. They make links and apply the knowledge they have learned in one subject to other areas. This means that pupils make good progress in developing their creative, scientific and technical skills.

Early years provision

Good

- When children join the early years provision, their development is typically low for their age. Some children's communication and language skills are particularly weak. Staff

improve children's speech and language skills through good learning opportunities. This ensures that children with lower starting points catch up quickly.

- The development of children's language has a high priority within the provision. Adults seek out opportunities to encourage children to talk about their learning. Key words are introduced into each activity to develop children's knowledge and vocabulary. For example, the words provided for a craft activity were made from the textures they represent. Children used the words to describe the pictures they were making.
- Outcomes are improving in early years. The school's own assessment information shows that by the end of the 2017/18 academic year, the proportion of children achieving a good level of development had improved and was above the national average. Consequently, children are well prepared for Year 1.
- Leaders ensure that children's starting points are quickly and accurately identified. They use this information effectively to plan the focus for each child's learning to support their progress towards achieving the early learning goals. Leaders discuss their plans so that all adults are knowledgeable about how to use activities with children purposefully. This ensures that children make sustained progress.
- Parents are well supported in understanding how they can help their children at home. They are readily invited into the early years provision to work with their children. For example, 'funky fingers' helps parents to support their children's development of early writing skills. Leaders make use of media devices to keep parents informed about their children's progress. This ensures that relationships between parents and the school are effective.
- Children make good use of the learning environment in both the Nursery and Reception classes. They demonstrate good levels of confidence and resilience. For example, boys persevered to find the right solution to how they could fix signs to their bikes.
- Safeguarding is effective. Adults ensure that the environment is safe and secure. Leaders have ensured that staff are well trained in safeguarding, and legal requirements are met.
- Children play well together. They share equipment and take turns. Routines for behaviour are well established and adults sensitively remind children about being kind to one another when necessary.

School details

Unique reference number	138389
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10058678

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

Type of school	All-through primary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	244
Appropriate authority	The board of trustees
Chair	Linda Meredith
Headteacher	Jenny Redgrove
Telephone number	01462 621800
Website	www.gardencityacademy.co.uk
Email address	head@gca.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	7 June 2016

Information about this school

- Garden City Academy is an average-sized primary school.
- The school became a sponsor-led academy of the REAch2 Academy Trust in September 2012.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the additional pupil premium funding is significantly above the national average.
- Over one quarter of pupils are from a variety of minority ethnic groups, but few pupils speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is significantly greater than that found nationally. The proportion of pupils who have an education, health and care plan is similar to that in other schools nationally.
- Further appointments have been made to the senior leadership team since April 2018, with an additional deputy headteacher and an assistant headteacher.

- Five new teachers started at the beginning of this academic year.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning across the school in a range of subjects. Some of these observations were carried out jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors scrutinised the quality of pupils' work in all classes and undertook additional scrutiny of work in pupils' books. Inspectors spoke to pupils and listened to some key stage 1 pupils read.
- Discussions were held with senior leaders, representatives of the trust, members of the local governing board, the SENCo, the early years leader and teachers.
- Inspectors examined a wide range of documentation, including that relating to attendance and behaviour, school improvement planning, assessment information, monitoring of teaching, minutes of governing body meetings and school documentation relating to safeguarding.
- Inspectors spoke with parents as they brought and collected their children from school. Inspectors considered 40 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and 31 free-text comments. Inspectors also considered 27 responses made on the online staff survey.

Inspection team

Steve Mellors, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Sean Powell

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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