

Garden City Academy

Radburn Way, Letchworth Garden City, Herfordshire, SG6 2JZ

Inspection dates 24–25 June 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Although standards are improving, they are not high enough in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Teaching has not ensured pupils' good progress across subjects or year groups.
- Teachers' marking and feedback do not always help pupils to improve their work, especially in mathematics and writing.
- Pupils are sometimes given work which is either too hard or too easy for them and their progress slows.
- Poor behaviour by a small minority of pupils across the school has a negative impact on their progress and on the behaviour and progress of their classmates.
- Leaders have not made sure that improvements are rapid enough to improve achievement and teaching.
- Judgements made by leaders about the quality of teaching are not consistently accurate.
- Although governors manage finances well and are strongly committed to the academy's improvement, they have not yet effected better achievement and teaching quality.

The school has the following strengths

- All senior leaders and governors have a clear understanding of what the school needs to do next to improve further.
- Children make good progress in the Nursery and Reception classes because of good teaching.
- Pupil's personal development is at the heart of the school's work, and there are warm, caring relationships between staff and pupils. Pupils feel safe in school and their attendance has improved.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted through the broad and rich range of learning opportunities the school provides.
- Parents speak highly of the school and the care that their children receive.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs receive exceptional personal support and care from school staff.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited 22 lessons or parts of lessons, including two joint observations with the acting headteacher. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in all classes, but the majority of Year 6 pupils were on a school trip during the inspection.
- Inspectors looked at pupils’ work in books and on classroom displays. They listened to pupils reading.
- Inspectors met with groups of pupils and talked to them at breakfast club, during lessons, in the playground, in the dining hall, and as they moved around the school.
- Although absent from illness, the headteacher came into school to attend meetings during the two days of the inspection. Meetings were held with the headteacher, the acting headteacher, subject leaders and governors. Inspectors also gathered views from the executive principal of the sponsor academy, Reach2.
- Inspectors took account of the 16 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and spoke informally with parents and carers at the start of the day. They also took into account returns to the school’s own recent parental questionnaire and the emails and letters received during the inspection.
- Questionnaires completed by five members of staff were taken into consideration.
- Many school documents were reviewed. These included: development plans, policies, the school’s own judgement of its strengths and weaknesses, monitoring, safeguarding and planning records, information for families and governing body documents.

Inspection team

Ruth Dollner, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Heather Housden

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Garden City Academy is a smaller-than-average primary school.
- The school became a sponsor-led academy in September 2012.
- Most pupils are from a White British background.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium is well-above average. This is additional government funding for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those in care.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is slightly below average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is well-above average.
- During the inspection the headteacher was on sick leave and the deputy headteacher was also, temporarily, unavoidably absent, although both made themselves available to inspectors. The acting headteacher had just taken up post. The executive principal of the academy trust has worked in partnership with the school for one term.
- The academy's Parent Teacher Association runs a breakfast club.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching to accelerate pupils' progress and raise their attainment by ensuring that teachers:
 - set work that is challenging for all pupils and use marking to better support pupils' learning
 - develop their skills and knowledge of teaching letters and sounds (phonics) so that pupils improve their progress in writing
 - implement the new calculation policy effectively to improve the teaching of mathematics and the progress pupils make in this subject.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by making sure that:
 - plans for improvement focus more sharply on the key priorities to improve the teaching of mathematics and writing
 - teachers have the skills and necessary support to ensure all pupils behave well in lessons so that learning proceeds smoothly and all pupils enjoy it and achieve well
 - leaders monitor the quality of teaching accurately and provide helpful feedback to staff on areas for improvement and ensure that the guidance given is acted upon.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- Standards in reading, writing and mathematics were broadly average in Key Stage 2 in 2013 and are, currently, improving. In the current Year 6, pupils are on track to achieve at least in line with last year's performance.
- Children generally start school with skills which are, typically, considerably below those expected for their age. They make good progress in the Nursery and Reception classes because of good teaching but, because of their low starting points, they join Year 1 with attainment which is below average, particularly in literacy and mathematics.
- Attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 in 2013 was well-below average in reading, writing and mathematics. The school's own data and the work in books show that attainment is improving and pupils are on track to achieve in line with the latest national averages.
- Rates of progress are not consistently good as pupils move through year groups, because teaching ranges from inadequate to good. In particular, progress in writing and mathematics varies too much across the school. The slower progress is because not all teachers are confident to teach phonics or number skills effectively.
- The work pupils are given is, sometimes, too hard or too easy for them. This adversely affects their behaviour and the progress that they make. For example, in a Key Stage 2 writing lesson, many pupils misunderstood the task because it was not explained clearly to them. Misunderstandings were not dealt with and pupils left the lesson confused.
- The more-able pupils do not always work hard or complete their work because, sometimes, it does not interest or challenge them. The least-able pupils are often supported well by teaching assistants to make a start on the task set. However, in a Key Stage 2 writing lesson seen, the work set was not at the right level for the least able to develop their writing skills successfully.
- Progress in reading across the school is stronger than in mathematics and writing, and is improving. Fewer pupils achieved the national average in the Year 1 phonics screening check in 2013 than in most schools. However, more pupils are on track to achieve better standards this year. Some teachers and teaching assistants lack confidence and subject knowledge in the teaching of phonics. This has an adverse impact on the quality of teaching and the progress pupils make.
- In 2013, the attainment of pupils supported through additional funding was almost two terms behind other pupils in mathematics, over two terms behind in reading and three terms behind in writing. The attainment of eligible pupils has improved since then and this gap is narrowing. Some of this improvement is because additional teaching staff have been employed to provide extra lessons for these pupils. Eligible pupils are currently making similar progress to that of their classmates.
- The progress of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is similar to that of their classmates because the support they get is helpful to them. The support they receive at a personal level is particularly helpful to their personal and social development.
- Primary sports funding has paid for specialist sports coaches to develop teachers' skills in teaching sports. Due to the careful targeting of resources by a recently appointed coordinator for physical education, more sports clubs and activities are currently available to pupils, who are benefiting from better physical fitness and well-being.

The quality of teaching requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement because it has not helped pupils to achieve well. There are examples of good teaching and good progress in the school, but these are not consistent in all year groups and in all subjects.
- All teachers are marking work regularly – in line with school policy – and check pupils' books regularly. However, marking does not consistently tell pupils what to do next to improve their work and, where guidance is given, there are very few examples of pupils having had the time to respond to the guidance given and improve their work. Some comments made in books are inappropriate for the age of the pupils. For example, in a writing book of a pupil at the very early stages of representing sounds with letters, the marking comment was 'not enough work'. Many pupils say they have targets for improvement in their books, but do not understand what they mean or how they can help them to improve their learning.
- Tasks and activities are often too hard or too easy for pupils. In these situations, pupils are often easily distracted and lose concentration. Work is not made consistently challenging for all abilities, even when teaching assistants give support.
- The school have recently implemented a new policy to improve the teaching of calculation. This has started to have a positive impact in year groups where progress is seen to be accelerating. However, the policy is not applied to equal effect in all year groups across the school and pupils often lack opportunities to use mathematics more widely.
- Not all teachers have the skills or support to manage pupils' behaviour effectively. A small minority of pupils are disruptive and have a negative impact on learning in some lessons. In these situations, others become distracted and lose concentration. For example, in a Key Stage 2 science lesson which was disrupted by poor behaviour, pupils who had been enthusiastic about their learning up to this point lost interest in their work.
- The teaching of phonics requires improvement because not all teachers and teaching assistants are confident with the necessary skills and subject knowledge. Consequently, they are not teaching or supporting pupils effectively in using phonic skills, particularly in writing. Some pupils in Key Stage 2 have not yet secured basic early writing or reading skills.
- Much teaching is challenging and stretches all pupils and enables them to learn with confidence. For example, literacy work in the Reception classes was based on 'pirates'. This subject enthused learners with a range of different activities and different challenges. All the children made good progress and thoroughly enjoyed their learning. Teaching in Nursery and Reception is consistently good.
- When teachers are confident in their skills and subject knowledge, work is challenging for all and pupils make good progress. For example, in Key Stage 1 mathematics, pupils were challenged and stimulated by their work on number lines and made good progress. The teacher skilfully reshaped tasks to overcome pupils' misunderstandings and encouraged them to explain their thinking clearly.
- The specialist art and music teachers who visit the school inspire pupils, who make good, and often outstanding, progress in these sessions.

The behaviour and safety of pupils requires improvement

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement. A small minority of pupils are consistently disruptive in lessons and this adversely affects their progress and the progress and behaviour of their classmates.
- Some consistently poor behaviour has led to the number of exclusions more than doubling since last year. More exclusions have not resolved the difficulty.
- When work set is too hard or too easy for pupils, they become distracted and do not work as hard as they should.
- Pupils' attendance has improved and is, currently, ahead of last year's national average.
- Most pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. They are friendly and polite. Behaviour in the lunch hall is particularly impressive. Pupils of all ages eat and chat together. There is a good sense of community.
- Warm, supportive relationships exist among the staff and the children. Pupils' individual well-being and happiness are at the heart of the school's work, although not all pupils have yet been helped to behave responsibly in all situations.
- The support and care provided for disabled pupils and those who have statements for their special educational needs are impressive. Pupils, some of whom have very complex physical and medical needs, are thriving in school because of the impressive individualised care and support they receive.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Leaders make sure the building is secure and that staff are closely checked before they are appointed. Most parents who spoke to inspectors were positive about the school and said that their children feel safe and happy. Some parents wrote letters, emails or telephoned inspectors to tell them how impressed they were by the individualised care their children receive.
- Pupils have a good understanding of different forms of bullying and the school has worked hard to ensure they are very clear about e-safety. Pupils say they always know someone to go to in school if they are worried about anything.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- The headteacher, deputy headteacher, acting headteacher and all senior leaders have secured improvements in achievement and teaching. They have been supported in this by the academy trust. However, these improvements have not yet led to consistently good teaching or achievement across the school.
- Leaders are clear about priorities for improvement but there are too many actions being put in place at the same time, so improvements are not yet secure or consistent in all year groups. Improvement planning does not focus sharply enough on improving the teaching of writing and mathematics.
- The school's monitoring of teaching since September 2013 does not present an accurate view of its quality. The newly appointed acting headteacher has an accurate view of the quality of teaching and is skilled in feeding back priorities for development to the staff. She rightly intends

to share her expertise with other leaders in the school.

- Leaders acknowledge that teaching and other provision for pupils with persistent disruptive behaviour must be adapted so that these pupils can be successful with their learning and the learning of their classmates is not disrupted. This weakness is a key challenge for leaders and governors to meet so that teaching and achievement improve more rapidly.
- Subject leaders have an accurate view about what needs to be done to improve teaching and achievement in mathematics and writing. The special educational needs coordinator is having a positive impact on provision and progress for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, particularly those with complex physical or medical needs.
- The school's commitment to equality of opportunity is shown in the support given to pupils eligible for the pupil premium and to disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. Consequently, they achieve at least as well as their classmates.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted throughout the school through the range of subjects and topics taught. Assemblies and the work of the very skilled art and music specialists also contribute well to pupils' learning and personal development. For example, in an assembly seen during the inspection, pupils confidently performed a play for their parents. This was a wonderful social event for pupils and parents.
- Leaders and teachers receive good support and advice from the academy sponsor, which is helping to build capacity for further improvement.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors know the school's strengths and areas for improvement. They understand how well their pupils are achieving in comparison to pupils nationally. They make sure they attend relevant training and are working well with the academy board to further improve their role in challenging and supporting the school.
 - They monitor spending well and have introduced effective systems to make sure resources are allocated effectively. They make sure teachers' pay rises are linked to the progress their pupils make. A governor with professional expertise demonstrated good mathematics teaching to help pupils reach the higher levels to assist other governors better recognise effective teaching.
 - The governing body ensures that all statutory requirements are met regarding safeguarding, the management of staff performance and financial management, including the additional funding for sports and the pupil premium.
 - Governors understand that the review of their effectiveness is intended to help them to become more effective in helping the school tackle its improvement priorities.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	138389
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	425159

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	239
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Lorna Alcock
Headteacher	Linda Meredith
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01462 621800
Fax number	01462 621802
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