

Inspection of The Gordon Children's Academy, Infant

Gordon Road, Strood, Rochester, Kent ME2 3HQ

Inspection dates: 27 and 28 September 2022

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Early years provision **Good**

Previous inspection grade Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils at The Gordon Children's Academy, Infant school aspire to be their best selves. They work together to live up to Gordon's 'Great Expectations', which are underpinned by the school values of ambition, bravery, confidence, kindness and pride.

The settling process for children in Reception begins ahead of the summer for many. This means that staff already know each individual, and their families, well. Children who have just joined the school are happily forming friendships as they explore the environment and begin the learning journey that will prepare them for Year 1.

There are clear expectations for how pupils will behave and conduct themselves. Pupils know exactly what is expected from them. They are kind and courteous to all members of the school community. Pupils sometimes have disagreements, but with the support of school staff, can resolve these quickly.

Parents have high levels of confidence in the school under the new headteacher's leadership. They describe her as extremely present and approachable. One parent, who is also a local governor, described his children coming home from school and having animated discussions at the dinner table. These discussions are inspired by the thinking and debate that all pupils participate in at the school, as they learn to engage with news about current events in an age-appropriate and inspiring way.

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

Before the current headteacher's appointment in October 2020, there had been multiple changes in the senior leadership of the school. Behaviour and attitudes had deteriorated, and the quality of education needed to improve. Work to address these issues had begun during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the appointment of the headteacher has enabled this work to accelerate.

Successful work to improve early years has been led by the deputy headteacher, with support from the trust. In re-designing the curriculum, leaders have carefully considered the needs of the children. Leaders and staff recognise the crucial importance of developing children's language. Children read a wide range of carefully selected texts. This ensures their love of reading is fostered. Alongside, they gain the knowledge and skills they need to become confident and fluent readers through the school's phonics programme. Leaders are continuing to refine the early years curriculum to ensure that every child gets the right foundations for the rest of their schooling.

Staff in early years work closely with the special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) coordinator to ensure that children with identified or suspected SEND get the right support from the start. Families are carefully involved in any decision-making for their children.

Work to improve the quality of education that pupils in Years 1 and 2 receive in reading, mathematics and science has been rapid. In these subjects, leaders demonstrate real clarity in their curriculum thinking. Pupils learn a well-sequenced curriculum that sets out exactly what pupils need to learn at each stage.

In their review of the foundation subject curriculums, senior leaders found that in some subjects, curriculums are overcrowded. There is not always a clear rationale for why some things are taught, or what the key learning is. Assessment in these subjects is not as effective as it needs to be. Senior leaders have clear plans in place to re-develop these subject curriculums.

The professional development programme for teachers has supported them to develop a consistent approach to teaching and ensured that teachers have the subject-specific expertise they require in reading, mathematics and science.

Leaders know that not all teachers have subject-specific expertise across all the subjects that they teach. This means that in some subjects, teachers do not always explain learning clearly, nor do they adapt learning consistently well for pupils with SEND.

Senior leaders have ensured that pupils study an effective personal, social and health education programme and, within this, learn about healthy relationships. A range of extra-curricular clubs are on offer for pupils, including for children in early years. At present, the take up of the club offer is lower than leaders would like. Pupils are proud to take on roles and responsibilities, such as class representative for pupil parliament. The school has developed a 'Thinking Inclusively' curriculum, that children begin in Reception. Pupils learn about themselves and others, and their place in the wider world.

Those responsible for governance, senior school leaders and trust executive leaders share a clear vision for pupils at The Gordon Children's Academy, Infant. They want to enable their pupils to be best that they can be. Those responsible for governance understand their roles and responsibilities very well. They are never hesitant to challenge school and trust leaders in the best interests of children. The multi-academy trust has a hands-on approach. In addition to the clear reporting lines that exist, the chief executive officer (CEO) regularly visits to carry out 'temperature checks' to ensure that the information he is being provided with aligns with reality on the ground.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Senior leaders ensure that all staff have the training they need to identify when a pupil might be at risk of harm or being harmed. Staff know how to raise a concern. Those responsible for safeguarding work alongside external safeguarding partners to ensure that pupils get the help that they need. Senior leaders ensure that they

follow safer recruitment processes, making the right checks on any new members of staff. The headteacher manages allegations about adults in an appropriate way, and in accordance with the advice of the local authority designated officer.

Pupils at the school follow a safeguarding curriculum, through which they learn to stay safe online, and in their day-to-day lives.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Not all foundation subject curriculums are logically sequenced. In these subjects, teachers do not always have clarity about the important knowledge that pupils need to learn. Pupils, including those with SEND, do not learn as well in these subjects. Leaders need to continue their work on the precision of sequencing in foundation subjects. They should ensure there is a clear and common understanding of knowledge that pupils need to acquire to be able to progress through the curriculum towards a carefully designed end point.
- Not all teachers have the subject-specific expertise they need to implement the curriculum effectively across all subjects that they teach. This means they do not always explain things clearly or design tasks that support the intended learning. Nor do they adapt learning effectively to ensure that pupils with SEND achieve the best possible outcomes. Leaders need to continue their work to support teachers in becoming increasingly expert in every subject that they teach, so that they can explain things clearly, design tasks that support intended learning and adapt learning effectively for pupils with SEND.
- In the foundation subjects that are at an earlier stage of re-development, assessment is not used effectively. This is, in part, because there is a lack of clarity around what the intended learning is. As the curriculums in these subjects are further refined, leaders need to ensure that assessment is developed to be closely aligned with the curriculum so that teachers are to check whether pupils are learning the intended curriculum in each subject.

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](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	140607
Local authority	Medway
Inspection number	10227004
Type of school	Infant
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	5 to 7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	156
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Gerard Newman
Headteacher	Kirstie Jones
Website	www.gordonchildrensacademy.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	7 and 8 February 2017, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The headteacher joined the school in October 2021. She is the executive headteacher of three schools within the multi-academy trust.
- The deputy headteacher joined in January 2020.
- A number of members of the senior leadership team have been appointed since the previous inspection.
- The school is not using any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

The inspector(s) carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher and other members of the senior leadership.

- Inspectors met with the CEO of the multi-academy trust, a trust director of education, a trust early years leader and a trust safeguarding leader.
- Inspectors spoke with representatives of the local authority about safeguarding arrangements at the school and how well the school engages with inclusion services to support pupils with SEND.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics, science, and art and design. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. For the reading deep dive, inspectors listened to pupils in Year 1 and Year 2 read to a familiar adult.
- Inspectors considered early years through all deep dives, and also met with school and trust early years leaders.
- To inspect safeguarding, inspectors checked the single central record and spoke to trust and school leaders, staff and pupils. Inspectors considered the safeguarding education that pupils receive. Throughout the inspection, leaders considered and checked the culture of safeguarding within the school.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documentation, including school improvement plans and minutes from recent meetings of the board of trustees.
- Inspectors talked to pupils formally and informally about their learning, what behaviour is like at school and whether they felt safe at school.
- Inspectors reviewed 15 responses to the staff survey and 20 responses to the parent survey, including the associated free-text comments. Inspectors spoke to parents and carers at the gate during the inspection.

Inspection team

Alice Roberts, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Chris Parker

His Majesty's Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
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