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Key stages	EYFS- KS1
School type	LA maintained, primary
Themes	Mixed-ages classes, outstanding teaching

Outstanding teaching and learning in mixed-age classrooms

Little Gaddesden CofE VA Primary School

Context

Little Gaddesden Primary School is a much smaller than average-sized school located in a small village in the Dacorum district of Hertfordshire. Very few pupils are eligible for the pupil premium grant and the proportion of pupils who leave and join the school partway through the year is higher than average. Currently there are 106 pupils on roll at the school, the highest number to date.

Brief description

In March 2014, Little Gaddesden Primary School was judged as 'outstanding' by Ofsted. Effective leadership and outstanding teaching contribute to the high outcomes and positive behaviour of pupils at the school.

Due to the small number of pupils on roll, pupils are taught in mixed-age classrooms to allow the school to deliver the best educational outcomes in the most efficient way. Seven age groups, ranging from reception to Year 6 are divided into four classes; with Years 1 and 2, Years 3 and 4, and Years 5 and 6 sharing a classroom. Pupils at Little Gaddesden are exposed to a wide range of benefits that come with being part of a small school and taught in mixed age classrooms.

Keeping standards high at a small school

Staff structure and quality

Apart from the headteacher and one other member of staff, all of the teachers at Little Gaddesden School work part-time; therefore each class has two teachers who split teaching between them. The headteacher recognises that teaching is a real challenge and encourages this approach to reduce the demands on her staff, share the workload and attract people who have a passion for teaching but cannot do so full-time. This recruitment approach has resulted in the school being a larger and happier community. The school lays great store in liaison between the two teachers who teach the mixed age class; most of this happens because there is an expectation that teachers will place fully evaluated lesson plans on the teachers' shared site on the school's website. There is generally one

teaching assistant per class, many of whom go on to become teachers demonstrating their potential and quality.

The headteacher has 'built a strong team of staff and fostered a professional culture of continuous improvement' within the school (Ofsted 2014). Currently there is no senior management structure at the school; this was a conscious decision taken by the headteacher in discussion with the governors of the school. The headteacher believes this demonstrates the quality of the staff, who all take full responsibility for themselves. Staff at the school work as a team and as there is no hierarchy in the school they feel more valued, equal and accountable for their own performance. They are questioning, very outward looking and support each other as well as other schools. Most of the communication between staff happens informally but very regularly, in the form of discussions in the staffroom and spreading information by word of mouth; this reflects the close community culture of the school and allows teachers to focus primarily on pupils and quality first teaching.

Outstanding leadership and teaching have been the main contributor to the success of the school and have allowed pupils to enjoy the benefits of being part of a small but high quality community.

Teaching in a mixed-age classroom

In the current class structure pupils at Little Gaddesden are taught in classes of two age groups and have the same two part-time teachers for two years. This means they spend one year being the younger group in the class and the next year being the older ones.

Teachers at the school recognise that mixed-age teaching is a challenge where they must constantly adapt their approach. A high level of flexibility and organisation in lesson planning is required to ensure that teaching caters to both age groups and all abilities within the class. The small size of the school means that teachers know most pupils personally and can learn about their individual needs easily.

A two year rolling programme for foundation subjects ensures that pupils do not repeat topics and regular continuous professional development allows teachers to refresh themselves with new texts.

Impact

The benefits of mixed-age classrooms

In a mixed-age class pupils stay with the same teacher for a couple of years. This allows the teacher to develop a deeper understanding of a pupil's strengths and needs, and puts them in a better position to support their learning. In the second year of being with the same teacher pupils at the school gain extra teaching time as the teacher does not have to spend the early weeks in the school year getting to know each child. Less review of prior instruction is needed before proceeding with new content and the pupil feels more comfortable and ready to learn.

Mixed-age teaching at the school ensures that teachers view pupils as unique individuals and pay more attention to their needs. As a result teachers focus on teaching each child according to his or her own strengths.

Socially, pupils enjoy being taught in mixed-class groups and love growing in stature across the two years. Older children have the opportunity to serve as mentors and to take leadership roles and younger pupils are able to accomplish tasks they could not do without the assistance of older children. Pupils develop a better sense of familiarity with their classmates and learn to mix with a wide range of age groups from a young age.

Outcomes

Effective leadership and teaching have resulted in pupils making higher than average progress across the school and has proved that pupils can achieve well after being taught in mixed-age groups.

In 2015 100% of pupils achieved a level 4 or above in reading, writing and maths, 16 percentage points (pp) higher than the local authority average and 20 pp higher than the national average. 54% of pupils at the school achieved a level 5 or above in reading, writing and maths. All pupils at the school make at least expected progress given their starting points and the vast majority make significantly better than expected progress. There are good numbers of pupils for whom progress is exemplary.

Contact	Charis Geoghegan, Headteacher at Little Gaddesden Primary School
Related documents and links	http://www.littlegaddesden.herts.sch.uk/

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