

Willow Bank Infant School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	109899
Local authority	Wokingham
Inspection number	378005
Inspection dates	13–14 March 2012
Lead inspector	Rob Crompton

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	178
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sharon Jhheent
Headteacher	Andrea Stephens
Date of previous school inspection	11–12 October 2006
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Age group	4–11
Inspection date(s)	13–14 March 2012
Inspection number	378005



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Introduction

Inspection team

Rob Crompton

Additional inspector

Lynne Kaufmann

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspectors visited 18 lessons and observed six teachers. Inspectors held meetings with members of the governing body and staff, and talked with pupils. They took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection and observed the school's work. Inspectors looked at the school's self-evaluation, improvement plans, policies, assessment and tracking systems, safeguarding procedures and pupils' work. The inspector examined questionnaires from 57 parents and carers, and 12 members of staff.

Information about the school

The school is smaller than the average primary school. Just over three quarters of pupils are of White British heritage. The remainder come from a range of backgrounds, with Pakistani being the largest group. A below average proportion of pupils are at an early stage of learning English. Very few pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals. The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is also below average. Most of these pupils have moderate learning difficulties. The school has Healthy Schools and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) national awards.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	1
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a good school. Pupils enjoy learning and reach above average attainment by the time they leave. The opinion expressed by one parent succinctly summed up the views of many: ‘The children are nurtured and supported to reach their full potential in a safe and caring environment.’ The school is not yet outstanding because the quality of teaching is good rather than of the consistently high quality necessary to accelerate the rate of pupils’ progress even further.
- All groups of pupils achieve well through the school. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage quickly develop good levels of independence and confidence in communication skills. By the end of Reception, their skills and abilities are typically above expectations. Pupils make good progress through Years 1 and 2 and, by the end of Year 2, levels of attainment are consistently well above average.
- Good teaching across the school stimulates pupils’ interest and they are keen to do well. Most lessons move at brisk pace, but the structure of a few does not allow enough time for pupils to work independently. Pupils are increasingly aware of their individual targets, although guidance through marking on how to achieve these is uneven.
- Pupils’ excellent behaviour and positive attitudes contribute significantly to their learning. A consistent approach to behaviour management means that lessons run smoothly. Pupils play along happily with one another. They are very well aware of how to keep themselves safe and are considerate of others.
- Leaders monitor the quality of teaching effectively and use performance management well to improve it further. They keep careful track of each pupil’s progress and whole-school performance. There is a wealth of assessment data but this is not always synthesised to provide an overview of pupils’ achievements. The curriculum engages pupils and promotes their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development extremely well.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure a better balance in lessons between introductions and the time available for pupils, particularly the more able, to work independently.
- Improve the quality of teachers' marking so that it provides specific guidance for pupils on how to improve their work.
- Provide a succinct and easily understood overview of the performance of individuals and groups to help inform self-evaluation and strategic planning.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Pupils make good progress across the school. Parents and carers are happy with their children's achievement. Building well on the secure skills they have as they enter Reception, children reach above average levels in all areas of learning. They rapidly become confident in communicating with one another and adults. A systematic programme of teaching phonics (letters and sounds) means they make good headway on early reading and writing, usually making entirely logical attempts at spelling. One boy proudly exclaimed, 'I did it!' after his attempt at writing 'sunflowerz' (sunflowers) completely independently.

Pupils continue to make good progress through Years 1 and 2. Close attention is paid to reading, with parents and carers working in partnership with staff to ensure pupils have plenty of time to practise and improve. By the middle of Year 1, most pupils are at least at the level expected and progress moves on apace, so that attainment in reading is well above average by the end of Year 2. This is reflected in the high level of pupils' written work, much of which immediately engages the reader. Following a theatre visit, one wrote:

'I woke up last Tuesday shivering with excitement. I nearly shouted out, 'YES, today I'm going to see the Gruffalo.' I ate my breakfast lightning fast, got dressed and ordered my mum to leave – now!

Pupils gain a very solid grounding in number facts, such as number bonds and the four arithmetical operations, which enables them to tackle mathematical problems with increasing confidence. They become adept at recording events, such as cars passing the school, using tally marks and converting these into bar graphs. One pupil remarked, 'Data handling sounds hard but pictograms make it easy.' Pupils were quick to spot symmetrical patterns in nature, such as on the wings of ladybirds and butterflies, and went on to draw lines of symmetry accurately on shapes, including a triangle and an octagon.

Pupils also use their basic skills well in other subjects. Writing about the Great Fire of

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London, one wrote, 'Flames lapped the glowing fire round the panic in the street', while another offered, 'All the children tried to escape the dazzling inferno of the fire but all was lost...' Pupils use their well-honed skills in information and communication technology (ICT) in subjects such as mathematics and science.

Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make good progress overall. In particular, those with moderate learning difficulties often make exceptional progress due to highly effective support. Skilful help for individual pupils with specific difficulties, such as autism and Down's Syndrome enables them, for the most part, to learn alongside their classmates. Although the more able pupils generally make good progress, they sometimes have too little time in lessons to tackle work which really challenges them.

Quality of teaching

Parents and carers are rightly very happy with the quality of teaching. The inspection found that teachers plan lessons effectively, using assessment information well to take account of the range of abilities in their classes; however, planning to meet the needs of children with disabilities and special educational needs and those with English as a second language is stronger than planning to extend the higher ability pupils. From the Early Years Foundation Stage, pupils are encouraged to work collaboratively, make decisions and express opinions. For example, two children were bursting with enthusiasm to show their 'treasure map' and proudly asked, 'Can you find the treasure on our map?' This independent approach is less evident in the older classes, however, where most tasks are planned entirely by the teachers.

The curriculum is generally interpreted in imaginative ways which successfully promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Where teaching is most effective, learners flourish because teachers' innovative flair captures their imagination and drives their thirst for learning. This was evident, for example, when Year 1 pupils became 'palaeontologists', brushing debris away carefully from fossils, shells and bones hidden in sand trays. There were gasps of surprise as various objects emerged.

Teachers generally manage their classes well but in a few lessons, extended introductions lead to some restlessness and the more able pupils cover old ground before tackling more demanding work. Teachers check pupils' understanding regularly and confidently adapt activities if pupils are struggling. They use questions skilfully and encourage pupils to think more deeply by probing their answers, and provide good opportunities for pupils to practise, consolidate and extend their key skills basic skills, including ICT, across the curriculum. For example, literacy and mathematics were key features of a science lesson in Year 2.

Teachers make learning objectives of the lesson clear, and ensure that pupils have clearly understood 'Top Hat' targets for improving the quality of their work in English, mathematics and science. Pupils' work is marked regularly with a range of comments and stamps. However, in some instances, pupils say that they do not understand the

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marking and what to do to improve. Teaching assistants provide skilled support for specific groups of pupils, especially those with disabilities, with special educational needs, or with English as an additional language. However, there is some variation in the effectiveness of their deployment, especially during whole-class discussions, where teaching assistants are too often spectating rather than playing a more active role.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Parents and carers responding to the questionnaires were unanimous in their praise for the safe and caring environment. They were very happy with the way the school manages behaviour and tackles any occurrence of bullying immediately and effectively. One commented: 'Neither of my children has ever commented on lessons being disrupted by bad behaviour'; another wrote: 'My son talks about his peers as if they were a second family.'

Pupils are courteous, respectful and collaborate with enthusiasm. Their positive attitudes to learning are very good and illustrated by the above average attendance. The school provides a calm and purposeful environment for pupils to learn and play, where anti-social behaviour is extremely rare. Break times and lunch times are harmonious and civilised. Pupils look out for one another. They are quick to offer support when they spot someone on the 'friendship bench'. Pupils have a good idea of what constitutes bullying as opposed to occasional squabbles, and say any form of bullying is extremely rare. Pupils are well aware of potential hazards of day-to-day life. The school's emphasis on e-safety is effective in ensuring pupils adopt safe practices, such as keeping passwords to themselves. Play leaders and peer mentors are active in supporting those who ask for help. Records of incidents and exclusions are kept but it is very rare for an entry to be made. Pupils benefit from a safe environment and are supervised closely at all times.

Leadership and management

The headteacher provides highly effective leadership and plays a pivotal role in driving improvement. School leaders and members of the governing body share a common determination to sustain high standards and there is a strong team spirit. The school has moved forward since the previous inspection. The quality of teaching is monitored closely and staff benefit from well-informed feedback. This means that staff, particularly those new to the profession, are very well supported in developing their expertise through in-house training or external courses. For example, teachers have acquired more skills in engaging boys in writing.

The curriculum, and the way in which it promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is outstanding. Pupils enjoy a rich variety of activities, within school and outside on visits, which contribute much to their academic achievement and personal development. They explore different cultures through celebrating Diwali, Yom Kippur and Eid, for example. Taking part in activities such as a 'Come Dancing' day, playing the Gamelan centre or exploring the National History Museum

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draws on pupils' social skills as well as broadening their experiences. They responded respectfully when asked to reflect on how they could make a personal contribution to the school's welcoming atmosphere.

All staff share a determined commitment to tackle discrimination and promote equal opportunities, ensuring all pupils do as well as they can. Safeguarding procedures are exemplary. Very clear and annually reviewed policies are rigorously applied to ensure all aspects of work in school and off site are carried out with rigorous attention to pupils' welfare and safety.

Self-evaluation is accurate and strategic planning is well-founded. A wide range of assessment information is gathered and this helps teachers to build on pupils' previous learning. Although this information is analysed carefully, the way this is presented does not always provide a succinct overview of the school's performance. That said, members of the governing body are increasingly adept at drilling down to the detail and take their responsibility to hold the school to account extremely seriously. They gain first-hand information through regular visits. The school's record of sustaining high standards and responding to different circumstances, such as staff changes, indicate a good capacity for sustained improvement.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



16 March 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Willow Bank Infant School, Reading RG5 4RW

Thank you very much for making my colleague and me so welcome when we visited your school last week. We enjoyed hearing all about what you were doing.

You go to a good school where you achieve well and reach well above average levels of attainment. You said you enjoyed lessons and all the extra activities that make learning fun. We saw this for ourselves when we visited your classrooms and when we joined your assemblies. I am sure we will remember you doing the actions to the chicken song for some time! You all behave extremely well and look out for one another. Everybody feels safe and it was great to hear that bullying is extremely rare.

It was good to see that you all have targets for literacy and numeracy. We have asked the teachers to make sure you are clear about the steps you need to take to reach these targets. Many of you are doing really well and we think that sometimes you would learn even more quickly if you got started on challenging work straight away. This is why we have asked teachers to make their lesson introductions shorter, or perhaps ask the teaching assistants to take small groups from the beginning.

The school runs very smoothly, thanks to the adults in charge and also to your own contributions, for example as play leaders and peer mediators. The adults keep a really close eye on how well you are doing and we have suggested how they could improve the way this information is presented.

Thank you again for making us so welcome and telling us about your school. Please continue being friendly and working hard.

Yours sincerely

Rob Crompton
Lead inspector

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