

The Willows Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	132084
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	360360
Inspection dates	29–30 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Martin Beale

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	538
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Arnold Lutton
Headteacher	Mark Abbott
Date of previous school inspection	21 January 2008
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Age group	3–11
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by four additional inspectors. They visited 23 lessons, observing 19 teachers. They held meetings with staff, groups of pupils, and members of the governing body, including the Chair. Informal discussions were held with parents and carers as they arrived with their children at the start of the day. Inspectors observed the school's work, and scrutinised assessment information, pupils' books, records of pupils' progress and school improvement plans. Inspectors analysed 62 questionnaires returned by parents and carers, 86 from pupils and 36 from staff.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key questions:

- has the school identified and tackled the reasons why the achievement of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities has declined
- do teachers challenge pupils sufficiently in lessons
- is there sufficient capacity in the current leadership for sustained and rapid improvement
- is the gender difference in 2010 assessments part of a pattern and, if so, what action is the school taking to the close gaps between boys and girls?

Information about the school

Most pupils are from White British backgrounds in this large primary school. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is broadly average. The proportion of pupils identified with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average. Their needs are mostly associated with learning difficulties related to literacy. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are taught in a Nursery and three Reception classes. Temporary arrangements are currently in place during the absence of the headteacher, with the senior team supported by an interim headteacher provided by the local authority.

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: how good is the school?

4

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

4

Main findings

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement.

Pupils are not making sufficient progress. Attainment is low and too many pupils are not reaching the levels expected of them by the end of Year 6 in English and mathematics and they are therefore not appropriately prepared for success at secondary school and beyond.

The promotion of equality of opportunity is inadequate. There is a pattern in most year groups of girls attaining higher levels than boys. This is recognised by the school, but action to close this gap has not been successful.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are underachieving. This is largely because they do not have sufficient direct input from their teachers, lesson planning is not sharply focused on meeting their individual needs and teaching assistants do not always have the skill to move their learning forward.

While there is some good teaching that engages and interests the pupils, there is too much that is satisfactory and a significant amount that is inadequate. Teachers do not make consistently effective use of assessment information to plan lessons that meet the learning needs of all pupils. Consequently, there is a lack of concerted challenge, and learning lacks drive, resulting in low-level disruption.

The curriculum is narrowly focused on English and mathematics and does not generate interest and enthusiasm for learning. Time is not used effectively and pupils have few opportunities to develop and apply their skills, including in the use of new technology, across subjects.

Leadership at all levels is having only a limited impact on improving the pupils' achievement. The staff team is not united and working together to drive forward and embed initiatives designed to improve provision. Not all members of staff understand their responsibilities towards implementing agreed policies. The governing body does not hold the school to account for its performance.

The school is sharply focused on supporting potentially vulnerable pupils and their families through its understanding of their circumstances and the use of external agencies to provide additional expertise not otherwise available.

The Early Years Foundation Stage is a major strength of the school. Children get off to a good start in the Nursery and Reception classes. They settle in smoothly, develop well and

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become confident learners because they are taught well in a welcoming and stimulating environment.

Shortcomings in self-evaluation and the inability in the past of leaders to drive through agreed improvements mean the school has limited capacity for further improvement. Not all members of staff have acted swiftly and decisively on points for action. However, the interim leadership arrangements are making clearer to staff their responsibilities and helping to support other able senior leaders in implementing initiatives designed to secure improvements.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of good and better teaching in order to accelerate progress, raise attainment and promote equal opportunities by:
 - raising expectations so that pupils are consistently challenged in lessons
 - making better use of assessment information to plan activities that move the learning of all pupils forward more rapidly
 - developing skills of teachers and teaching assistants in managing the behaviour of pupils in lessons
 - introducing different strategies to close the gap in achievement between boys and girls.
- Raise the achievement of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities by:
 - planning and delivering lessons to meet their specific needs
 - ensuring that they have frequent and direct input from their teachers
 - providing training for teaching assistants so that they can promote learning more effectively.
- Generate greater capacity for sustaining improvements in the school by:
 - increasing the effectiveness of the governing body
 - extending the role and skills of leaders in driving forward improvement
 - ensuring that members of staff act swiftly and decisively on action points
 - introducing a cycle of self-evaluation which includes all those involved in the school, including the governing body.
- Develop the curriculum so that pupils improve their key skills, their creative thinking and enquiry skills in different subjects by:
 - making more effective use of learning time, particularly in the morning
 - ensuring that planning shows how pupils are to develop their skills.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

4

The quality of learning varies considerably. When at its most effective, particularly in Year 6, pupils work with interest and determination. They benefit from working together on tasks or when discussing their ideas. However, elsewhere too many pupils do not

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persevere with their work unless closely directed. Their expectations of what they can achieve are not high enough, and they do not push themselves. Untidy presentation reflects a lack of pride in their work. The pupils lose interest and low-level background chatter can disturb learning when teachers talk too much and do not encourage pupils to take an active role in their learning.

The pupils' development of skills and knowledge is slow and attainment is low. Although Year 6 test results rose in 2010, they were still below average. Current school data indicate that this pattern remains. Not only are girls achieving better than boys but pupils known to be eligible for free school meals are not performing as well as others. These matters are not being tackled effectively. Specific programmes are benefitting the achievement of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, but their attainment is much lower than for similar pupils nationally.

Pupils are generally welcoming, and understand the rules needed to make the school a safe and happy community. Pupils take their responsibilities around school seriously but do not have a significant voice in developments. They are able to reflect on the impact of their actions on others. However, with few links beyond the immediate area, they are not helped to see the world from a different perspective. Most behave well and are very considerate towards each other.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	4
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	4
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	4
The extent to which pupils feel safe	3
Pupils' behaviour	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	4
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

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How effective is the provision?

Not enough teaching moves the pupils' learning forward at the pace needed to reduce the gaps between their attainment and national expectations. There are some effective lessons which engage the pupils through well-planned and stimulating and activities. However, even in these lessons, challenge is not consistent, particularly in the way teachers use their questions to extend and probe the pupils' thinking. Expectations of what the pupils can achieve and how they should behave are not high enough in some classrooms. Marking lets pupils know how well they have done, but not consistently what they need to do to improve to meet their targets.

There is a firm vision for the development of the curriculum to set a greater challenge for the pupils, raise their achievement and enable them to have a voice in their learning. However, many of the initiatives to support this vision are at a relatively early stage of development and are not making a significant contribution to learning and the pupils' enjoyment. These include developing opportunities for extended writing, topics linking learning between subjects and extending themed events such as an Egyptian day. Subjects other than English and mathematics are squeezed into small time-slots and opportunities for pupils to develop their enquiry skills, solve problems and use new technology to extend learning are limited.

Pupils feel supported in school and most classrooms provide a welcoming environment. Attendance has been on a rising trend in response to the range of incentives to encourage better attendance and the action to follow up unexplained absence. Year 6 pupils reported that they feel well prepared for their move to secondary school, but other transition arrangements such as between Reception and Year 1 do not provide sufficient continuity in experiences for the pupils.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	4
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	4
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	4
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	3

How effective are leadership and management?

Until recently, senior leaders had been unsuccessful in embedding actions aimed at moving the school forward. Policy implementation has been inconsistent, and the impact neither rigorously monitored nor carefully evaluated. Consequently, initiatives have foundered or not had the benefit intended. The senior team is now stronger, and the work of the deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher in support of interim leadership arrangements is proving particularly effective. Together they have identified many of the school's difficulties and introduced many pertinent actions to move the school forward. Members of staff are starting to be held more accountable for their performance, and the

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achievement and personal development of the pupils. There are indications that recent initiatives, such as enabling teachers to work alongside experts from other schools, are starting to bear fruit.

One recent advance has been the rigour with which assessment data are interrogated to identify where action is needed to tackle potential underachievement. Some additional activities have been successful in improving reading for individual pupils but others such as those at the start of each day have been less effective and are a drain on staff resources. School leaders now have a wealth of data about different groups of pupils and use this to identify any variations in performance. However, they have not been successful in closing the gap between boys and girls or between the attainment of key groups and national expectations.

Governance is inadequate. There is some understanding by the governing body of the challenges facing the interim leadership, but the governing body does not question performance sufficiently. It does not have suitable systems by which it can gain independent evidence of the quality of provision, and has little impact in shaping priorities for the school's improvement. It is only recently that it has taken steps, along with the school's interim leadership, to ensure that robust and secure safeguarding procedures are in place with a system to monitor their implementation.

While some activities are undertaken to promote greater community cohesion, these are not planned from a clear understanding of the school's context. The impact has not been evaluated. However, the school is a reasonably harmonious environment which is a measure of its success in tackling discrimination. School leaders have developed appropriate links with outside agencies to support the pupils' well-being and extend opportunities for their learning through after-school activities.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	4
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	4
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	4
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	4
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	4
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	4

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Early Years Foundation Stage

Children make good progress from skills on entry below those expected for their age and an increasing number are on track to reach expected levels in all areas of their learning by the end of Reception. More reliable assessment procedures provide adults with a clearer picture of the children's progress than in the recent past. There is now a firm platform from which to plan activities to meet individual learning needs. Adults also skilfully use the children's interests to develop the themes they study to ensure that they find activities engaging and relevant.

Teaching is good. Any slight unevenness between the classes, including in the effectiveness of support staff is being tackled by support, training and planning together. Adults know the children well and understand how to promote their learning effectively. The children have many opportunities to take responsibility for planning aspects of their learning and so grow in confidence and independence. They develop trusting relationships with adults and each other and behave well, enabling them to work and play constructively together.

The children are safe and well cared for. Procedures to safeguard their well-being are implemented by all and any potential risks are checked daily. The team of adults is led well and staff pull closely together to plan for the improvement of provision. For example, plans are being considered to improve the ease of access for children between the classrooms and in the outside area, as their learning does not flow freely at present between the areas. The team is building on its already strong links with home by sharing the children's folders of their learning with families on a more regular basis.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

A much smaller proportion of parents and carers responded to the questionnaire than is usual, and the level of satisfaction is well below average in response to most questions. Many parents and carers have lost confidence in the school's leadership and the partnership between home and school. Inspection evidence concurs with many of the concerns raised by parents and carers about their children's progress, the quality of teaching, how well individual needs are supported and whether they are suitably prepared for the next stage of their education. Inspection evidence found that it is only because of the recent action taken that the school can be sure it is safeguarding the welfare of the pupils. This includes dealing with unacceptable behaviour more securely.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Willows Primary School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 62 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 538 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	22	35	32	52	5	8	1	2
The school keeps my child safe	13	21	44	71	3	5	1	2
My school informs me about my child's progress	7	11	37	60	12	19	5	8
My child is making enough progress at this school	8	13	31	50	12	19	7	11
The teaching is good at this school	11	18	31	50	13	21	3	5
The school helps me to support my child's learning	8	13	35	56	12	19	7	11
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	6	10	41	66	13	21	2	3
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	6	10	29	47	10	16	7	11
The school meets my child's particular needs	7	11	34	55	14	23	6	10
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	2	3	18	29	22	35	14	23
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	5	8	21	34	21	34	9	15
The school is led and managed effectively	6	10	13	21	24	39	12	19
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	8	13	32	52	20	32	2	3

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

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	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

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

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on 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 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:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.

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.



31 March 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Willows Primary School, Basildon, SS14 2EX

Thank you for making us feel welcome and for being so ready to share your thoughts about your school. We had a chance to talk to quite a lot of you and we have told your teachers how you were very helpful and polite. We were pleased to see that most of you enjoy school.

We recognise that The Willows does some things well but there are weaknesses in important areas. For this reason, we have judged that the school requires special measures; this means it needs help to improve. Although the youngest children get off to a good start in the Nursery and Reception, some of the teaching in the rest of the school has not been good enough and you have not made the progress of which you are capable. The main things we have asked the school to do are:

- make lessons more challenging so you can all concentrate on your learning
- improve teaching for pupils who find learning more difficult
- provide more interesting learning experiences that build on what you have learnt before, so that you can develop your enquiry skills and have more opportunities to use computers in lessons
- make sure everyone focuses on improving your progress and helping teachers to develop their teaching skills.

Inspectors will visit regularly to check the progress the school is making. All of you can play your part in helping the school to improve by continuing to work hard and improving your attendance further.

Yours sincerely

Martin Beale

Lead inspector

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