

Willow Tree Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104772
Local authority	St Helens
Inspection number	377126
Inspection dates	7–8 December 2011
Reporting inspector	Joanne Olsson HMI

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	204
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jackie Lowe
Headteacher	Kathryn Hall
Date of previous school inspection	5 November 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors. Fourteen lessons led by nine teachers were observed. Inspectors made several visits to the Early Years Foundation Stage. They also visited all year groups to observe the teaching of basic skills and reading. Inspectors observed pupils at play and during lunchtime. Meetings were held with groups of pupils, representatives of the governing body, senior leaders and managers and a local authority officer. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a range of documentation, including arrangements for the care and protection of pupils (safeguarding), information about pupils' attainment and progress and pupils' books. They considered the responses to questionnaires from staff, pupils and 24 parents and carers.

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

- Whether all pupils, particularly those in Key Stage 1, girls, more-able and those known to be eligible for free school meals are making consistently good progress to narrow achievement gaps in English and mathematics.
- How successfully the school is securing good attendance rates for all groups of pupils and reducing the number of pupils who attend school less often.
- How effectively the school has secured improvements in the quality of teaching to enable all groups of pupils to make good progress from their starting points.
- The impact of all leaders and managers, including members of the governing body, in driving improvements to teaching and pupils' achievement.

Information about the school

This is an average sized primary school. Almost all pupils are of White British heritage. The number of pupils from minority ethnic groups and the proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language are low. The number of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. There are more pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and more pupils with a statement of special educational needs than found nationally. The school has received the National Healthy Schools Award and the Basic Skills Award. The headteacher took up post in September 2009.

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?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

'This is a really good school; you always feel welcome', is a typical comment from the overwhelming majority of pupils who enjoy their school experience. Pupils are very proud of their school and they make an outstanding contribution to its success. Their considerate and respectful behaviour to each other and to adults makes a positive contribution to their learning. Pupils at Willow Tree fully live up to their motto of 'one team, one goal, to do our best always'.

This good school has significant strengths such as the exceptional care, guidance and support pupils receive and the outstanding partnerships which are used to support pupils' achievement, enjoyment and well-being. Determined leadership by the headteacher, ably assisted by strong senior leaders and managers has eradicated all major shortcomings identified at the last inspection. As a result, almost every aspect of the school has improved and there is a common sense of purpose among members of the governing body and school staff. Attendance has improved to broadly average because of concerted action to reduce the absence rates of those pupils who attend school less often. Nevertheless, there are still some pupils who do not attend school frequently enough.

Children enter Nursery with skills and knowledge that are low for their age. They make good progress across the school and leave Year 6 with attainment levels that are broadly average. Attainment in Key Stage 1 is below average but improving because pupils make consistently good progress from their low starting points. Pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals make similar, and sometimes better, progress than their peers. This means gaps in attainment are rapidly closing. Although girls perform less well than boys at the end of Key Stage 2, there is little variation in the achievement of these two groups across the school. The achievement of more-able pupils has improved since the previous inspection. However, fewer pupils consistently attain the higher levels by the end of Year 2 and Year 6 than found nationally.

Pupils' basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics are strong across the school. However, as their speaking, listening and handwriting skills are not always as secure, this sometimes hampers their progress. Nonetheless, secure basic skills, very well-developed personal qualities and average attendance rates mean pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Warm and welcoming classrooms fully support pupils' learning and foster positive relationships. Lessons are imaginative and relevant because teachers make links to everyday life and use stimulating resources to capture pupils' interest. Pupils' work is carefully marked and their efforts are celebrated. Teachers provide clear guidance to help pupils to improve their writing, but this is less well developed in mathematics. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, not all adults seize the opportunity to use good questioning skills to intervene and move children's learning forward during child-led activities.

Robust systems to check the quality of teaching mean senior leaders and managers know the school well. Priorities for improvement and school development planning are sharply focused on areas requiring development. Sustained improvements since the previous inspection and accurate self-evaluation mean the school has good capacity to secure further improvements.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the attendance of all pupils by:
 - applying the proven strategies to raise attendance for all pupils who do not attend school frequently enough
 - building on the positive relationships with parents and carers so they become partners in their children's learning.

- Raise pupils' achievement further, particularly for the most able pupils by:
 - ensuring all activities precisely match the needs of the most able pupils and provide sufficient challenge
 - ensuring pupils' speaking, listening and handwriting skills are systematically developed across the school
 - ensuring teachers' marking provides clear guidance to pupils to help them improve in mathematics
 - ensuring all adults support children's learning during child-led activities in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Pupils enjoy their learning. They are keen to participate in activities and work at a good pace to achieve success. In a Year 6 English lesson, pupils worked exceptionally well together to identify how a video-clip persuaded them to be eco-friendly. They were able to use their good prior knowledge of global warming to write mature and convincing arguments to take action and prevent further damage. In a Year 2 English lesson, pupils thoroughly enjoyed applying their knowledge of sentence structure, verbs and adverbs to help improve their shared writing. They eagerly began their own writing and carefully considered what they needed to do to meet the success criteria. Activities such as these excite and motivate pupils. They enable them to become independent learners and reflective thinkers who can share their ideas and tackle new challenges.

Pupils' academic achievement is good because their basic skills are consistently developed as they move across the school and they have ample opportunities to use

these skills for a range of purposes across different subjects. Some pupils are not always able to express their ideas clearly or write for a sustained period of time because their speaking, listening and handwriting skills are underdeveloped. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make consistently good progress. This is because activities are well matched to their needs and they receive effective support from skilled teaching assistants.

'You know you are safe; anything will be sorted out', is a typical comment from pupils who are confident adults will deal fairly and effectively with any concerns they raise. Pupils say they feel safe and that bullying is a rare occurrence. Pupils have a sound understanding of how to keep themselves safe. Younger pupils are keenly aware of 'Stranger Danger' and older pupils know what strategies they should use to protect themselves when using personal computers. Pupils think the school helps them to have a healthy lifestyle because of healthier lunches and opportunities to take exercise. They understand the effects of an unbalanced diet and the dangers associated with smoking and alcohol. In acting as school councillors, prefects, play leaders and peer mentors pupils show their outstanding commitment and desire to support their school. They show their great interest in the community through their partnership with the residents of the sheltered accommodation and the Sutton Smile Community Group.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	3
Pupils' attendance ¹	
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Trusting relationships mean pupils feel safe and are not afraid to share their ideas. Teachers have good subject knowledge and use assessment information well to plan lively activities which meet the needs of most pupils. In the most effective lessons teachers have very high expectations. Teaching is clear and precise so pupils are fully aware of what they are learning and how they can measure their success. However, some teaching provides insufficient challenge for the most able pupils. The teaching of basic skills is highly effective because there is a common approach across the school and activities are well matched to pupils' needs. Although there are many opportunities for pupils to practise their speaking, listening and handwriting skills,

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

these areas are less well developed. This is because these skills are not systematically taught in all year groups.

The well-organised curriculum provides a range of enjoyable and exciting experiences which support pupils' academic and personal development. The strong focus on basic skills is balanced with ample opportunities for pupils to learn about the wider world on a local, national and global scale. Themed days and regular visits and visitors are used to enhance the schools provision, for example, pupils talk with enthusiasm about the opportunity to learn more about owls through first-hand experience. Teachers carefully link subjects together to make learning more relevant. The high quality biographies of John Lennon produced by Year 6 as part of their history topic are just one example of the purposeful opportunities pupils have to practise their writing skills in different contexts.

The school knows its pupils very well and is alert to any barriers that are preventing them from achieving success. The overwhelming majority of pupils are confident staff care about them. A key strength of the school is the range and quality of intervention strategies which are used to support pupils' social needs as well as their academic achievement. The nurture group provides effective support to individuals across the school with specific emotional or behavioural needs. The Think Family coordinator works closely with families to sign-post them to any additional support and to encourage regular pupil attendance. Good induction and transition arrangements mean pupils settle quickly into each class. Additional provision for those pupils who are absent means they quickly catch up on their learning when they return to school.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher's drive and ambition to secure better outcomes for pupils are effectively shared across the school. As a result, all members of staff have a sharp understanding of their responsibility in supporting pupils' achievement. Effective professional development plus robust monitoring activities have led to considerable improvements in the quality of teaching. The system to check on pupils' progress is secure and effective. This is because the information it provides is regularly evaluated to identify any individual or group of pupils who are at risk of falling behind. Members of the governing body share the headteacher's high aspirations and have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They refer to a 'no excuses' culture and provide appropriate challenge to support school leaders and managers in securing further improvement.

Well-founded policies and procedures mean the school's systems to safeguard pupils are good. Pupils' behaviour is well managed. The school recognises rewarding good behaviour with sweet treats should be a rare occurrence in all classes.

Exceptional use of is made of partnerships to enhance every aspect of school life. The 'Write Club Seven' network of local schools has enhanced teachers' skills in assessing pupils' work and provided additional activities to challenge more-able pupils. Very good use is made of external expertise such as the local authority's inclusion team to develop staff skills and support pupils' learning effectively. Positive relationships with parents and carers are fostered through regular communication and opportunities for them to share their views. The school is fully aware these strategies have had varied success in engaging all parents and carers as partners in pupils' learning. The promotion of community cohesion is good because the school has an accurate understanding of its own context and has established good links with national and international schools to enhance pupils' understanding of diversity. The school itself is a very cohesive community where rare instances of discrimination are swiftly tackled. As achievement gaps are quickly closing, the school's provision for equality of opportunity is good.

These are the grades for the leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

When most children enter the Nursery what they know and what they can do are well below that typical for their age. They make good progress from their starting points and leave Reception with lower than average skills and knowledge. Children enjoy their time in the Early Years Foundation Stage. They are curious learners who are keen to take part in all activities. They are able to work without adult direction for sustained periods of time and show good levels of concentration. This was evident as two children wrapped Christmas presents to place under the tree. They persevered with the task, using the equipment safely and supporting each other when they lost the end of the sticky tape. Children are keen to use their developing skills to read and write, for example, children write their name on their work without prompting and many choose to sit in the book corner and share a book.

The attractive and well-organised learning environment supports children's learning well. This is because of warm relationships between adults and children and an

interesting range of resources which are readily available. Adults use assessment information well to plan learning opportunities which meet the needs and interests of most pupils. There is good provision to encourage children to write and to foster their enjoyment of books. Adults use questions very effectively to extend children’s learning during adult-led activities. In contrast, adult intervention in child-led activities is not always precise enough to move children’s learning forward.

The newly-appointed Early Years Foundation Stage Leader is effectively building on previous good leadership and management to secure further improvements. She has quickly built a cohesive team who are fully aware of their collective and individual roles in supporting children’s learning. An accurate understanding of children’s needs when they enter the school has resulted in extensive provision to support children’s communication, language and personal development skills. This is leading to improved early reading and writing skills plus an increase in children’s self-esteem and ability to work together. Good communication and opportunities for parents and carers to contribute to children’s learning journeys ensure positive links between home and school.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation stage	2
Taking into account:	2
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 in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

The return rate for parent and carer questionnaires was lower than is usual in primary schools. All the parents and carers who returned the questionnaire agree that they were happy with their child’s experience at the school. The overwhelming majority agree their children enjoy school and they are kept safe. Almost all consider teaching at the school is good and the school keeps them informed of their child’s progress. A few were not so content with the manner in which unacceptable behaviour is dealt with or with the school’s provision to help children have a healthy lifestyle. Inspectors looked at these concerns carefully and the findings are included within this report.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Willow Tree 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 24 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 295 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	16	67	8	33	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	16	67	8	33	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	12	50	12	50	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	17	71	5	21	1	4	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	15	63	9	38	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	14	58	9	38	1	4	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	15	63	8	33	1	4	0	0
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)	12	50	10	42	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	13	54	9	38	1	4	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	10	42	12	50	1	4	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	12	50	10	42	0	0	1	4
The school is led and managed effectively	13	54	10	42	1	4	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	17	71	7	29	0	0	0	0

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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 is for the period 1 September 2010 to 08 April 2011 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 2010/11 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.



9 December 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Willow Tree Primary School, St Helens, WA9 4LZ

Thank you for being so friendly and polite when we recently came to inspect your school. We really enjoyed chatting to you and listening to your views. You are very proud of your school and wanted us to hear about all the positive experiences you have had. We consider Willow Tree to be a good school. These are the main things we found out about your school.

- Your school has improved a lot since the last time it was inspected.
- You make good progress over time and your attainment is average.
- You feel safe; you know adults care about you and you trust them to sort out any concerns you might have. Adults are very good at helping you to overcome problems in your learning or your relationships.
- You think behaviour is good; you behave well in lessons and around the school.
- You are keen to take on responsibilities around school and you are very interested in your local community.
- Teachers are good at making your learning interesting and fun.

In order to make your school even better, we have asked the governing body to work with your headteacher to make sure those of you who are more-able always receive challenging work. We have also asked them to improve the teaching of speaking, listening and handwriting skills so you can express your ideas more clearly. Finally, we have asked them to encourage all of you to attend school regularly.

It really was a pleasure to meet you. Please accept our very best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Joanne Olsson
Her Majesty's Inspector

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