

The Willows School Academy Trust

Stipularis Drive, Hayes, Middlesex, UB4 9QB

Inspection dates

6–7 June 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	This inspection:	Inadequate 4
Achievement of pupils	Inadequate	4
Quality of teaching	Inadequate	4
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Inadequate	4
Leadership and management	Inadequate	4

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This school requires special measures.

- Pupils do not make sufficient progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Reading skills are not taught in a consistent way throughout the school.
- Teachers are not all secure in their understanding of mathematics or the most effective ways of teaching the subject. This hampers pupils' ability to develop a deeper understanding of important concepts.
- Teachers are not expecting enough work from pupils, the tasks set are often too hard or too easy and pupils sometimes lose concentration because they are kept sitting listening too long.
- Behaviour is inadequate. Adults do not manage behaviour well enough. Poor behaviour often prevents pupils from learning.
- Teachers' marking does not always show pupils how to improve their work and they are seldom given time to respond to what teachers have written.
- High levels of staff turnover and long-term staff absence are hindering pupils' learning.
- Checks on the quality of teaching do not take enough account of how well pupils are learning. Weaknesses identified are not resolved quickly enough.
- Records of the standards pupils reach are not accurate, so leaders cannot check on pupils' progress or how well plans are working. It also means that leaders cannot prioritise what needs to be done. Combined with changes of staff, the result is leaders are trying to deal with too many things that need to be put right.
- Members of the governing body do not have a good understanding of the quality of teaching because they have not had sufficiently accurate information about the school's weaknesses.
- Arrangements to keep pupils safe are inadequate.

The school has the following strengths

- Children in the nursery make good progress and behave well.
- Pupils in the learning support unit make good progress in their social skills and all successfully return to their mainstream school.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector visited six lessons or parts of lessons. All were observed jointly with the headteacher.
- Informal and formal discussions were held with groups of learners, and pupils were heard reading.
- There were no recorded submissions to the online questionnaire (Parent View), but the inspector took account of the school's own information from parents and carers. Discussions were also held formally and informally with parents and carers. In addition, the inspector considered views from staff questionnaires.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher and interim senior leader, other senior leaders, and the speech and language therapist. Telephone discussions were undertaken with the Chair of the Governing Body and the parent governor.
- The inspector evaluated documentation, including information on the pupils' current progress, school development plans, information about safeguarding, and records of behaviour and attendance.

Inspection team

Sonja Joseph, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

In accordance with 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 in the school.

Information about this school

- The Willows School Academy Trust is a special school for pupils who have difficulties related to their behavioural, emotional and social development. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs and present very challenging behaviours. Some were at risk of exclusion from previous schools or had been excluded and have had a disrupted education.
- The school converted to academy status in November 2011. When its predecessor school, Willows School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be outstanding.
- An acting headteacher who was appointed when the school became an academy left in July 2012. The deputy headteacher left at the same time. A new headteacher and deputy headteacher took up their posts in September 2012.
- There have been high levels of staff turnover and long-term staff absence. There are vacant posts at senior and middle leadership level. A high number of staff are leaving at the end of the summer term.
- The majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds. Approximately one third of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds.
- Over two thirds of pupils are known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium, which provides additional funding in this school for children who are looked after by the local authority and those known to be eligible for free school meals. This figure is much higher than the national average.
- The school provides an early years intervention group through its nursery. This caters for up to eight children who have been identified as needing extra support to learn and be socially included in a mainstream setting. The length of placement may be up to two terms. All children transfer to mainstream provision at the end of the nursery placement. The nursery does not cater for children with designated special educational needs.
- There are no children in the Reception Year of the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- The school has a separate learning support unit class, established prior to academy conversion and due to close in July 2013. Like the main school, it provides for pupils who have behavioural, social and emotional needs, but in this case, though pupils have been at risk of exclusion, they do not have statements of special educational needs. This class can cater for up to eight pupils at a time. Their length of stay can be very short, but can be up to two terms. All pupils attend four days a week in the class and one day in their home school for the length of their placement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that more is good or better and none is inadequate by ensuring teachers:
 - set tasks at the right level for pupils
 - demand more work and better presentation from them
 - provide more opportunities for pupils to work actively with others

- As a priority, ensure that the site is secure and pupils are always supervised so that no pupil is able to leave unnoticed.
- Involve pupils in assessing and checking their own learning by making sure:
 - marking tells pupils how to improve, and pupils have the chance to take action in response to it
 - targets are used better, particularly in literacy and numeracy.
- Improve pupils' skills in literacy and numeracy by:
 - helping pupils to extend their range of vocabulary and teaching them how to structure sentences
 - making sure teachers correct pupils' errors in spelling and punctuation
 - ensuring that reading skills are taught systematically throughout the school
 - improving teachers' mathematical knowledge, and helping pupils practise their skills by solving more real-life mathematical problems.
- Improve pupils' behaviour by ensuring:
 - staff consistently challenge poor behaviour before it escalates, using agreed procedures
 - the topics and activities of the curriculum are more interesting and engaging.
- Ensure that leaders and managers:
 - have clear roles and responsibilities
 - gather accurate data on pupils' progress and behaviour, and analyse it to be clear about how well different groups are doing, identify priorities and rigorously check plans are working
 - assess the quality of teaching accurately, taking into account the impact teaching is having on pupils' progress, and follow up improvement points teachers are given
 - base targets for teachers' performance and any pay increases on improvements in the quality of teaching.
- Make sure governors use accurate data and sound evidence effectively to hold senior leaders and staff accountable for the school's performance.
- An external review of governance should be undertaken to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is inadequate

- Too few pupils make the progress expected in both English and mathematics because too much teaching is ineffective and poor behaviour interrupts learning in some lessons. A small number of parents and carers expressed concern over pupils' achievement, and inspection findings confirm their concerns.
- Pupils are often reluctant to write and this is not tackled robustly by teachers. Pupils produce very little writing in English and other lessons that extends beyond single sentences. Where they do produce pieces of writing, these often show a limited range of language and are poorly handwritten and punctuated.
- Progress in mathematics is weak. Some teachers' subject knowledge is not strong enough to help pupils get a clear understanding of mathematical methods, or to address pupils' misconceptions. Pupils have too few opportunities to practise and improve their mathematical skills by solving practical and real-life problems.
- Recent improvements in the initial assessment of pupils' ability and the checks made on their progress have meant that pupils are now being set more appropriate targets. However, pupils do not always understand their targets and the levels at which they are working and they do not always know what they need to do to improve their work.
- Although there is limited accurate information on pupils' current and past achievements, there is no evidence that pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds are doing significantly less well than their classmates.
- Pupil premium funding is used to provide additional resources. Test results in 2012 showed that the pupils for whom the school receives the pupil premium were working at the same level as their classmates in English, but over six terms behind in mathematics. The school's information shows that eligible pupils currently in the school are still making inadequate progress and the gaps between their performance and that of other pupils are too wide.
- The support given by specialist staff to pupils the school has identified as having particular speech and language communication needs is effective in that it offers pupils opportunities to practise reading and develop their understanding of spoken language. However, because there is no school-wide approach or sufficiently good teaching of reading, pupils' progress is too slow in this area.
- Pupils in the learning support unit class make good progress in developing their personal, social and emotional skills and successfully return to their mainstream schools. Their academic progress requires improvement; it is not good because teaching is not always fine-tuned to their needs.
- In the nursery, all children make good progress in developing their personal, social and emotional skills and all successfully return to their mainstream schools or other appropriate settings. Consistent systems and carefully planned sessions ensure children also make good academic progress.

The quality of teaching

is inadequate

- Teaching is not good enough to ensure that pupils learn quickly. Although there is some good practice, too much is inadequate or requires improvement. There are weaknesses within both key stages and across subjects. The effect of weak teaching is evident in the limited progress seen in some pupils' books, which contain work that is poorly presented and writing that is of low quality.
- In too many lessons, teachers' expectations of pupils' capabilities are low. Teachers expect too little from pupils in relation to the quantity of work they produce in lessons, and the whole class works on the same activity whatever the pupils' abilities. This work is often too easy for some pupils, particularly the most able, and too hard for others. Consequently, pupils' enthusiasm for

work declines and they underachieve.

- Not all teachers set challenging targets for pupils or refer to them routinely in lessons. This means teachers are not working with pupils to help them understand what they should be aiming for in literacy and numeracy. They do not check the progress pupils make towards achieving their learning targets. This makes it difficult for staff to know how quickly any gaps in pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding are being closed, or if pupils are learning as much as they could.
- Frequent changes to the teaching staff mean that the school's expectations and procedures have not been followed consistently, and learning in many lessons is affected by poor behaviour. Sometimes, however, teachers are too controlling, and they maintain discipline by relying too much on pupils working individually. This does not give pupils the chance to work successfully with one another. Sometimes, opportunities for pupils to learn more effectively through working with others are diminished because teachers talk for too long.
- The quality of marking in books is too variable. In general, pupils are not given enough information on how to improve their work or the opportunity to respond to teachers' comments. For some pupils, this means that the same mistakes are repeated in subsequent work.
- Where teaching is better, the relationship between teachers and pupils is strong and secure. This gives pupils confidence and they are more willing to cooperate and learn effectively. In a Key Stage 2 literacy lesson, for example, the teacher kept pupils well involved, using a constant flow of positive prompts and praise. Expectations were high, pupils' full cooperation was achieved, and teaching and learning proceeded at a good pace. This is not routine in all classes.
- In the nursery, children develop good social skills through taking turns to share food during snack time. Teaching promotes children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well, through opportunities for children to discuss and think about their learning. They respond sensibly.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are inadequate

- Too many lessons are disrupted by poor behaviour. Adults are often too lenient, ignore inappropriate language and do not all follow agreed action plans when pupils become aggressive. On occasions, pupils have left the school grounds unsupervised and without anyone knowing.
- Poor behaviour has necessitated the use of safe spaces for pupils who need to be isolated for their own or others' safety. Pupils vent their frustrations on the fabric of the building and the sound of banging and shouting sometimes echoes through the school. Senior leaders have to spend too much time resolving issues of misbehaviour.
- Some staff expressed concern in their questionnaires over behaviour in some lessons in which they have been hurt, even if unintentionally, by the pupils.
- Pupils say that they mostly feel safe in school but that it is too 'easy to get out of school'. They are aware of different types of bullying, including the misuse of computer and text messages. Pupils told the inspector that bullying rarely takes place, but that when it does, teachers deal with it well and quickly.
- The school's leaders have not completed an analysis of patterns of behaviour that could be used to identify how to improve lessons or review pupils' behaviour. Any links between poor behaviour and the quality of teaching are not checked carefully, which means that school leaders are missing important information that could help them improve both behaviour and teaching.
- There were examples of good behaviour across the school, particularly where teaching was better and during less-structured occasions such as 'tea and toast' time, where strong relationships with adults gave pupils the confidence to discuss their learning and share any concerns they might have. The use of points for rewards is also helping to motivate pupils to behave well but it is still too recent to have had significant impact.

The leadership and management are inadequate

- There is insufficient emphasis from leaders and managers on ensuring that pupils make as much progress as they can and reach the highest possible standards of attainment. While the new leadership team has identified some specific priorities, recent improvements have not been in place long enough to make a secure and sustained difference to pupils' learning or the quality of teaching.
- It is strongly recommended that the academy should not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.
- Not enough has been done to ensure pupils are kept safe. Weaknesses in both site security and staff supervision have meant that pupils have been able to leave the school unnoticed and this has been more than occasional. School leaders are swiftly addressing this.
- The new headteacher and interim senior teacher have worked hard to deal with some of the issues regarding weak teaching, significant staff absence, and financial matters relating to academy funding. There are still difficulties arising from long-term sickness, changes in senior leaders, staff retention and recruitment.
- Leaders have had many issues to deal with and have not been able to manage them all effectively. Checks made on the school's work and pupils' progress are not well coordinated, or sufficiently rigorous. For example, the impact of pupil premium funding on pupils' learning and progress is not effectively analysed and evaluated.
- The information that the school has collected about pupils' progress over the past year has many significant gaps. Assessment data for previous years are unreliable, because teachers' assessments are not always thorough or reliable.
- As a result of weaknesses in the data about progress, leaders do not have a clear enough picture of the school's strengths, weaknesses and overall effectiveness as a basis for good improvement planning. The progress of different groups of pupils cannot be checked effectively, and consequently, the school's promotion of equality of opportunity is inadequate.
- Observations of teaching are not regular and do not focus clearly on the impact of teaching on pupils' learning and the progress of different groups in lessons. Steps for improvement of teaching identified are not carefully followed up so weaknesses remain.
- Some leaders' roles and responsibilities are not well enough defined. In many cases, it is not clear enough who is accountable for specific aspects of the school's work, particularly in relation to the management of the learning support unit.
- There is no clear link in the performance management process between the quality of teaching, its improvement and teachers' pay. Teachers are not held to account fully for the progress of pupils in their classes. Targets set for staff and the ways in which they can be measured lack rigour.
- The curriculum does not promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development effectively enough to have a positive effect on their behaviour. It does not provide a wide range of stimulating and relevant activities likely to engage pupils and promote their better behaviour.
- The school uses the new headteacher mentor programme to support school improvement. An experienced senior leader has worked closely with senior staff to swiftly address concerns about academy funding and ensure financial stability.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The new governing body has not challenged the school's leaders thoroughly. Governors are not fully aware of the school's weaknesses and are not using data sufficiently well. They have not had clear information about the school's work to enable them to monitor pupils' achievement, oversee improvements in teaching, or make confident decisions on salary progression. They do not have sufficient understanding of the quality of teaching. Governors know how the pupil premium funding is being used, but are less aware of whether it is having a positive impact on the pupils for whom it is intended. Governors have ensured that all vetting checks for staff, including temporary teachers, fully meet statutory requirements. Staff and governors have undertaken appropriate training in child protection and safer recruitment.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	137652
Local authority	Hillingdon
Inspection number	408922

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

Type of school	Academy converter
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	40
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Trudy Travers
Headteacher	Malcolm Shaw
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	020 8841 7176
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