

The Willink School

School Lane, Burghfield Common, West Berkshire, RG7 3XJ

Inspection dates 6–7 February 2014

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|--------------------------------|----------------------|--------------|----------|
| Overall effectiveness | Previous inspection: | Satisfactory | 3 |
| | This inspection: | Good | 2 |
| Achievement of pupils | | Good | 2 |
| Quality of teaching | | Good | 2 |
| Behaviour and safety of pupils | | Outstanding | 1 |
| Leadership and management | | Good | 2 |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Students make good progress and attainment has risen rapidly. The proportion of students gaining five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, now exceeds the national average.
- Teaching is good overall and some is outstanding. Students say that teachers make lessons interesting and encourage them to do as well as they can.
- The very effective tracking system picks up any students who are not making the progress they should and this triggers extra help for them. Consequently, students eligible for the pupil premium make at least as good progress as their peers.
- Students are safe and secure and their behaviour is outstanding. They are proud of their school, polite, courteous and keen to achieve well.
- Attendance has improved and is now above average for all groups of learners. Exclusions have reduced and are now well below the national average.
- Leadership and management are good and recent appointments to the senior team have strengthened leadership at this level. Consequently, the quality of teaching and standards of students' achievement are improving rapidly.
- Governance is very strong and governors have been instrumental in the school's improved success in ensuring that students achieve well.
- The sixth form is good. A high proportion of students leave the school with the highest grades at AS and A level.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- There is not enough outstanding teaching to enable students to make the best possible progress. Students are not always given the precise written guidance they need to improve their work and poorly presented work is not always challenged.
- Although the progress of students with special educational needs is improving, it still lags behind that of their peers.
- School policies are not consistently applied by all staff. Hence the strengths present in the school are not sufficiently shared across all subjects.
- Attendance of students in the sixth form is not monitored carefully enough.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 46 lessons, of which 24 were jointly observed with a member of the school’s leadership team. Inspectors visited an assembly and made a number of short visits to classes that included students with special educational needs.
- Inspectors held meetings with five groups of students. They talked with students in their lessons and scrutinised written work in books.
- Meetings were held with senior and middle leaders, teachers, members of the governing body and with a representative of the local authority.
- A variety of school documentation was examined, including the school’s records of the progress of students currently at the school, self-evaluation summaries and improvement plans, behaviour and attendance logs, records relating to safeguarding and those relating to the management of staff performance. Inspectors also examined documentation about the work of the governing body.
- Inspectors took account of the 149 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, two additional comments from parents and 81 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Caroline Dearden, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Richard Kearsey

Additional Inspector

Jonathan Whitcombe

Additional Inspector

Fran Ashworth

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The Willink School is an average-sized secondary school with sixth form.
- The majority of students are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs and requiring extra support through 'school action' is lower than average. The proportion of students supported at 'school action plus' or by a statement of special educational needs is also below average.
- The proportion of students supported through the pupil premium is lower than the national average. The pupil premium is additional funding for those students who are known to be eligible for free school meals, children from service families and those children that are looked after by the local authority.
- A small number of students in Year 10 and Year 11 follow alternative provision at Reading College one day a week.
- A few students are entered early for GCSEs in English and mathematics.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve achievement further so that all students make as much progress as possible by ensuring that:
 - marking enables students to take pride in their written work and provides them with precise guidance about how to improve their work
 - pupils are given the resources and opportunities that will enable them to read more widely
 - all students are given time to respond to their teachers' comments and are therefore able to take the necessary steps to improve their work
 - work provided enables those with special educational needs to reach their full potential and that learning support assistants are well deployed to support these students.
- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - policies are consistently implemented across all areas of the school's work
 - best practice in the school is shared across all subjects
 - attendance of students in the sixth form is monitored as rigorously as in the rest of the school.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- In the majority of year groups students' attainment on joining the school is above the national average. By the end of Year 11 the proportion of students who gain five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, has increased since 2012 and is now above average.
- The majority of groups of students, including the most able, make good progress in most subjects including English and mathematics. In some subjects, such as physical education, progress is less rapid and more variable, and as a result not all students fulfil their potential.
- Despite the improving progress of students who have special educational needs it still lags behind that of other students in the school. Progress was not so strong when the work provided did not enable these students to reach their full potential.
- The most able students make good progress. In 2013 a high number achieved the highest grades in their GCSE and A-level examinations.
- A small number of students attend alternative courses at Reading College. These courses are well matched to the needs and aspirations of the students and, consequently, they make good progress and achieve well.
- The Year 7 catch-up fund has been used to support students' progress in reading and literacy. Inspectors saw the impact of this in paired reading and in small group sessions led by older students and specially trained adults. However, as the number of books in the school library is much lower than the recommended number, particularly for post-16 students, opportunities for students to read widely in school is limited.
- Students who are eligible for the pupil premium are well known by their teachers and by school leaders. In 2012 the gap in attainment between these students and their peers was approximately one and a half GCSE grades in English and two and a half GCSE grades in mathematics. However, students are now making good progress and in 2013 the gap was reduced to approximately one third of a grade in English and half a grade in mathematics.
- A small number of students are entered early for GCSE examinations in English and mathematics. The decision to enter students early for these examinations is based on the learning needs of the students and in 2013 their progress was similar to national in English and above national in mathematics.
- Students follow an academic curriculum in the sixth form. They make good progress and achievement is improving steadily with many attaining grades A* to B grades at A level. Many leave the school to take up places at top universities.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching has improved since the last inspection and the majority is now good with some that is outstanding. Consequently, students make good progress across a wide range of subjects.
- Students respond positively and learn effectively when they are given work that stretches their learning. For example in a Year 11 history lesson about the Vietnam War, students had to decide the significance of key events and to explain and justify their choices. Consequently, all students demonstrated a wide-ranging knowledge of the war.
- Teachers are enthusiastic, have high expectations and create a very purposeful learning environment. For example, as Year 11 students said: 'teaching has improved; teachers now interact much more with the class, they walk around the classroom and ask questions.'
- In many subjects the quality of marking is usually good and most teachers mark students' work regularly and in detail thereby providing students with clear advice about how to improve their work. These teachers encourage students to take responsibility for improving their work by responding to comments about, 'what went well and even better if'. However, as this good

practice is not consistently applied across the school marking is sometimes brief and lacking in detail. As a result students do not know what they have to do to improve and they are not given time to respond to the teachers' comments. Sometimes, untidy or poorly presented work is left unchallenged.

- While many teaching assistants make valuable contributions to students' learning, a small minority do not use the training they have received to help maximise the progress of students, particularly those with special educational needs. All teachers need to ensure that they direct teaching assistants to work with students who need additional help or support.
- Teaching in the sixth form is typically good and often outstanding.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Behaviour is outstanding. Students in all years and in the sixth form behave exceptionally well around the school. They are polite and courteous to staff, visitors and to each other. They have pride in their school which is demonstrated by the lack of litter and absence of graffiti.
- In almost all lessons students' attitudes towards learning are exemplary. Low-level disruption is rare and when it does take place is a consequence of teaching that does not meet the learning needs of the students.
- The rate of fixed-term exclusions fell in 2013 to be lower than the national average. Information provided by the school demonstrates further reduction this academic year.
- Attendance has improved and is now above the national average for all groups of students.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Students feel very safe at school and know how to keep themselves safe; this includes e-safety and the use of social networks. This view is supported by the overwhelming majority of parents and carers who responded to the online questionnaire.
- Students have a very good understanding of the different types of bullying and are conscious of the pain bullying can inflict. Consequently, bullying is very rare. When it does occur, students know who to turn to for help and are confident that all issues are dealt with promptly and appropriately by staff.
- The school checks that all students attending off-site provision attend regularly and there are no concerns about their welfare or behaviour.
- There are many opportunities for students to influence standards of behaviour in the school by acting as positive role models. For example, the involvement of peer mentors in the transition of younger students from Key Stage 2 to Year 7 helps these students to feel welcomed and safe.

The leadership and management are good

- The school's headteacher has a clear vision for the school which is shared by all members of the school community. Recent appointments to the senior team have added strength to this level of leadership.
- Middle leadership is strong. Senior and middle leaders have worked well together to take effective action to raise students' achievement and to improve the quality of teaching.
- The school's evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses is accurate and informs a good school improvement plan that has measurable outcomes.
- The management of teaching and its impact on learning are good. Joint observations during the inspection showed that the school's judgements on the quality of teaching are accurate. The school's pay policy and procedures for teachers' appraisal have been used effectively to improve the quality of teaching. There is evidence that salary progression occurs only when merited by sustained good performance.
- Systems for checking how well students are achieving are very thorough. Any student who is in danger of underachieving is identified early and helped to catch up well. As a result, gaps between the progress of both students eligible for the pupil premium and those with special

educational needs and their peers are closing. This reflects the inclusiveness of the school and its intolerance of discrimination.

- The school is committed to providing equality of opportunity to all its students. It has reviewed its curriculum and additional vocational courses are now on offer in order to better meet the needs and aspirations of students. The wide range of extra-curricular activities on offer successfully broadens students' experiences and interests.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and enhanced by the range of opportunities the school provides for them to engage in charitable, artistic, sporting and other activities.
- Leadership of the sixth form is good and the number of students choosing to stay at the school post-16 is increasing. However, as the systems for monitoring students' attendance are not as rigorous as in the main school unauthorised absence is not correctly recorded.
- The local authority has supported the school effectively in its plans to raise achievement and improve the quality of teaching.
- All statutory requirements relating to safeguarding are met.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors regularly participate in training provided by the school, the local authority and through collaboration with other local schools. Consequently, they are ambitious for the school, highly competent, committed and very much part of the leadership of the school. The range of experience and expertise within the governing body enables governors to be a driving force in the improvement of the school. Through the work of committees, links with middle leaders, working with senior leaders and through their impressive understanding about how to interrogate achievement information governors are rigorous in holding the school to account for improving standards of achievement and the quality of teaching. They have an in-depth understanding of the school's finances, including the appropriate allocation of pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up funding and they fully understand and fulfil their responsibilities with regard to keeping students safe. Governors know about the quality of teaching. They are involved in the performance management system for teaching staff and were instrumental in the adoption of the new pay policy. They know what the school is doing to reward good teaching and to tackle underperformance.

What inspection judgements mean

| School | | |
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| 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

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| Unique reference number | 110048 |
| Local authority | West Berkshire |
| Inspection number | 429619 |

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

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| Type of school | Comprehensive |
| School category | Maintained |
| Age range of pupils | 11–18 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Gender of pupils in the sixth form | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 996 |
| Of which, number on roll in sixth form | 170 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Julie Spratley |
| Headteacher | Peter Fry |
| Date of previous school inspection | 31 May 2012 |
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