

The Willows Primary School

Tayfield Road, Manchester, M22 1BQ

Inspection dates 11–12 February 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected as an academy	
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management	Good		2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Good		2
Quality of teaching	Requires improvement		3
Achievement of pupils	Requires improvement		3
Early years provision	Requires improvement		3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Achievement is not good. Pupils leave Key Stage 1 with attainment that is well behind that of other pupils nationally, particularly in mathematics.
- Some pupils are not always challenged by the teaching they receive and as a result, too few make better than expected progress, particularly in mathematics.
- Early years provision requires improvement. Assessment information is not used well enough by leaders and teachers to ensure that all pupils reach a good level of development.
- Over time and across the school, teaching has not been consistently good enough. Some teachers do not set high enough expectations for the quality and presentation of pupils' work.
- Work in pupils' books does not always reflect the pride they have in their school and is sometimes untidy and left unfinished.
- Not all teachers make the best use of teaching assistants to improve learning.

The school has the following strengths

- Behaviour is good and pupils feel safe in school. Pupils show respect for each other and adults. They make a good contribution to the school through their 'school action team' and by taking on roles of responsibility. Pupils are keen to learn.
- Disadvantaged pupils make good progress, particularly in reading and writing.
- Parents are very supportive of the school, because leaders actively encourage and provide support for them to participate in their children's learning.
- Pupils with special educational needs or disabilities are well supported and consequently develop well.
- Many teaching assistants have high levels of skill and experience that can contribute well to pupils' learning.
- Pupils benefit from many life-enriching opportunities and experiences because of the breadth and depth of the school's curriculum.
- Governance is strong. Governors have a clear vision and high expectations for the school. They provide good support and challenge school leaders rigorously to ensure improvement.
- Senior leaders, appointed since the school became an academy, are taking appropriate action to strengthen the quality of teaching. Their actions are leading to improvement in the progress pupils make.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed parts of lessons, including those in which pupils were taught about how letters in words represent different sounds (phonics). Some of these were undertaken jointly with a senior leader of the school.
- Inspectors visited all key stages jointly with members of the school’s senior leadership team to see the school at work and also the impact of leaders’ actions.
- An inspector briefly visited ‘The Bridge’, a learning provision operated jointly with another school in the trust.
- Discussions were held with senior leaders, members of staff, groups of pupils, four representatives of the governing committee and the chair of the multi-academy trust. A meeting was also held with a representative of Manchester local authority at the request of the school.
- A range of documentation was examined, particularly that relating to keeping pupils safe, and their behaviour and attendance.
- The school’s tracking of pupils’ progress was checked and pupils’ work in books was examined.
- Inspectors took note of displays around the school and the work in the outdoor areas.
- Inspectors listened to a number of pupils read.
- Inspectors took note of the 44 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and spoke with parents arriving at the school at the start of the day.
- Inspectors took note of the 43 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

John Nixon, Lead inspector

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Ian Young

Additional Inspector

Mujahid Ali

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The Willows is larger than most primary schools.
- There is an on-site breakfast club run by the school.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is higher than the national average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils supported by the pupil premium is over two thirds and much higher than the national average. The pupil premium is additional funding for those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, and those children who are looked after by the local authority.
- The large majority of pupils are of White British heritage, while the proportion of pupils for whom English is not or believed not to be their first language is well below the national average.
- The school has undergone a significant change of staff, including leadership, since converting to become an academy in April 2013. The predecessor school's overall effectiveness was judged to be outstanding in 2009. A new headteacher was appointed in April 2014 and a new deputy headteacher was appointed in September of the same year. Many of the new staff are at the start of their teaching careers.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is at least good to ensure that pupils make the best progress possible to reach the highest standards of which they are capable by:
 - sharing the good and exemplary practice in teaching across the school
 - continue to improve the quality of middle leadership, including giving middle leaders more opportunities to check on the quality of teaching and pupil progress rigorously
 - ensuring that all pupils, including the most able, receive sufficient challenge, particularly in mathematics, to enable them to accelerate their learning
 - improving the quality of presentation of children's work in some books in some subjects, so that it reflects the great pride the children have in their school
 - ensuring that teachers' guidance on how to improve work is focussed on learning and that teachers check that pupils act upon it
 - ensuring that teachers consistently make best use of teaching assistants to improve learning.
- Improve the leadership and management of early years so that data available in school are more accurate and used more effectively, particularly during transition from Nursery to Reception.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- Senior leaders, who have been in post for less than one year, demonstrate a good understanding of where strengths lie and where further improvement is required. They are taking appropriate action to improve the quality of teaching and develop high expectations and an ethos of learning through the development of a good curriculum. Many actions however, are new, so have not had time to show their full impact on the quality of teaching and learning.
- Performance management is good. All staff, including teaching assistants, have targets that are challenging and linked directly to pupils' achievement. There are clear links between performance management outcomes and teachers' pay progression. The school's policy is detailed and thorough and applied consistently. Induction for new staff is effective.
- School development planning has appropriate objectives for future development. This includes the focus on improving the quality of teaching and raising attainment, particularly in mathematics.
- Senior leaders monitor the quality of teaching regularly through observation of teaching and scrutiny of pupils' work in books. This helps them identify where they need to take action to improve outcomes, but some written records do not always reflect this. Some middle leaders do not have sufficient understanding of pupils' assessment data in their areas of responsibility.
- Where middle leadership is strongest, leaders demonstrate an enthusiasm and deep knowledge of their subject. Their action-planning is clear, with appropriate priorities and is resulting in improvements in provision. Some middle leaders are new to their posts and at the beginning of their careers in leadership. Senior leaders are supporting these middle leaders appropriately through further professional development and by pairing them with a more experienced colleague. While subject leaders are regularly held to account by senior leaders, they do not have always enough opportunities to check on the quality of teaching and learning in the subjects for which they are responsible.
- The curriculum is a key strength of the school. It is broad and balanced, with clear links to the ethos of the school. It promotes well the 'rights respecting agenda' and the subsequent behaviour of pupils indicates the school's promotion of equality of opportunity is highly effective. The curriculum ensures that pupils gain knowledge in a wide variety of subjects and, coupled with effective links within the community and beyond, it prepares them well for their next steps in education. The school tackles all forms of discrimination effectively and promotes good relations with all.
- Pupil premium funding is used well and is having a positive impact on improving the learning of disadvantaged pupils who make better progress than non-disadvantaged peers in school and nationally in reading and particularly in writing. For example, the use of funding to support cultural and social visits enhances pupils' life experiences beyond their immediate community, resulting in boosts to their learning, particularly in relation to the quality of writing.
- The school promotes pupils', spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Pupils develop a good understanding of the rule of law and of British values and furthermore, use these skills to improve their school. The 'Action Team', a representative group of pupils from Key Stage 2, is currently investigating how pupils can be more involved in evaluating the curriculum they receive. The study of other cultures and links with other countries ensure pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Leaders, including the middle leader for sport, have ensured that the primary physical education and sport funding is used effectively and has positive impact on pupils' participation and well-being. For example, the school's provision of cheerleading as an activity has increased the participation of pupils in sport and led to success in local competitions. Leaders' innovative use of the school day is further increasing pupils' participation in sport. For example, there is a range of clubs before school at the breakfast club and later at lunchtime where older pupils take a lead in helping younger ones to participate in small games. Additional training for staff has increased their confidence in teaching high quality physical education lessons and built the capacity of the subject leader to sustain these developments.
- The school communicates well with parents. Before children start in the early years, home visits allow teachers to build relationships with families and prepare children for their start in school. The school's website is of a high standard and informative. Parents welcome being invited into school on a frequent and regular basis to participate in their children's learning. Reports are clear and give information about how well pupils are doing and what they need to do to improve.
- The Academy Trust is effective in both supporting and challenging the school. It plays an important role in the strategic governance of the school. School leaders are well supported because of regular visits from senior members of the trust and because it has established effective common policies relating to human resources, safeguarding and finance across its schools. The trust's prudent financial management

has secured and developed a high quality resource, 'The Bridge' that is used to enhance provision for pupils and parents across the trust's schools. Schools in the trust work well together and participate in many joint activities for both pupils and staff.

■ The governance of the school:

- Governance of the school is strong. Governors have a very clear vision and high aspirations for the school. They know where the strengths and weaknesses of the school lie and challenge senior leaders robustly to provide additional information, if necessary, to clarify their understanding of the impact of actions and funding.
- Governors regularly visit the school to work in classes. They check on their own skills relating to their roles as governors and take appropriate actions to maintain their knowledge and skills through a detailed programme of training.
- Governors ensure that the school's finances are managed well, including those for disadvantaged pupils and the additional sport funding provided to the school.
- Governors ensure that performance management, including its link to teachers' pay, is implemented effectively. They also ensure that teachers receive financial reward only if their pupils reach their progress and attainment targets.
- The governing body ensures that the school meets its statutory requirements with regard to safeguarding and takes appropriate action alongside school leaders when concerns are raised.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Nearly all children behave well in lessons because the school's 'rights respecting' ethos is thoroughly embedded. No disruptions to learning were seen during the inspection. However, some children, including some who are the most able, sometimes do not concentrate well enough on learning to make the best progress.
- Pupils' behaviour around school is good. They are polite and show consideration and respect for each other and adults. Many take responsibility for the continued harmony in school. For example, some older pupils help by leading play and sports activities for younger pupils, by caring for the school chickens and garden or manage the door to and from the playground at breaks and lunchtimes.
- Pupils say they like coming to school because of the range of activities available to them and because the school helps them to learn. Children demonstrate a great pride in their school.
- Pupils' attendance is better than that seen nationally and is continuing to improve over time. Persistent absence over the last year reduced greatly and is lower than that found nationally. This is attributable to the actions taken by school leaders, including the employment of a parent support worker and the implementation of rewards relating to good attendance for both parents and pupils.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good.
- Policies are well written and recognise cultural threats to children. All staff apply procedures rigorously. This results in a safe and secure environment which supports good attitudes to learning and behaviour. Teachers are well trained in child protection and take their roles seriously. Consequently, pupils say they feel safe and trust teachers and other adults to help them if they have a problem.
- Where risks to pupil safety are identified, school leaders take immediate action to reduce the risk, while permanent, longer-term solutions to eradicate them are implemented.
- Pupils know how to keep themselves safe because of regular and effective teaching in lessons and at other times, including being taught how to stay safe when using the Internet.
- The vast majority of parents who responded to the parent view questionnaire or who spoke with inspectors were very supportive of the school. A small number, however, did raise some concerns regarding bullying and how it was dealt with by the school. Inspectors found no evidence to support these concerns.
- Pupils have a good understanding of the different types of bullying and say it is not, in their words, 'respectful behaviour.' Pupils say that if bullying occurs any incidents are dealt with quickly and effectively by teachers.

The quality of teaching requires improvement

- The quality of teaching over time is inconsistent. While there are examples of good teaching, particularly in upper Key Stage 2, teaching requires improvement overall because pupils are not always achieving as well as they could.
- Teaching is improving because of the action of leaders, including appropriate training and the appointment and effective induction of new members of staff.
- Where learning is strongest, teachers focus sharply on improving pupils' knowledge and skills, rather than on the provision and completion of tasks. Teachers use their assessments of what pupils know to build upon pupils' prior knowledge and address misconceptions.
- Lessons start promptly and children are eager to begin their learning. Where learning is strongest, teachers make best use of this eagerness and plan activities that challenge and ensure that progress is sustained at a rapid pace.
- Where learning requires improvement, work that is too easy or too hard is sometimes set, particularly in mathematics and for the most-able pupils. This lack of challenge limits the progress that some pupils can make.
- Teachers mark work regularly, but the quality of feedback they provide is variable and comments are not always focussed on the skills and subject knowledge being taught. This does not always help pupils to understand what they have to do to improve or to correct errors. Pupils are not always given the opportunities to respond to feedback and the quality and accuracy of pupils' responses are not always checked. Teachers do not always ensure that work is presented to the highest standard so that it reflects the pride the pupils have in their school.
- Not all teachers make best use of the high-quality skills that some teaching assistants make available to them to impact fully on learning. Leaders have changed how teaching assistants work across the school. Teachers now have more control and ownership in how teaching assistants are deployed. Where teachers plan and use this new resource effectively, teaching assistants make good impact on the learning of pupils. However, this is not yet consistent across all classes.
- Not all teachers make the best use of assessment data to help them plan effectively for children's learning. Some teachers are unsure of the end-of-year data for pupils coming into their classes and therefore do not use this information to ensure the best match of challenge.
- Reading is taught effectively and results in children in all groups developing a love of reading and making expected progress by the time they leave the school, so that they are ready for their next stage in education.
- Over time, the teaching of mathematics has not been as effective as in other subjects, particularly in the teaching of basic calculation skills. School leaders are taking appropriate actions to address this issue. However, there is still some variability in the rigour and depth with which calculation skills are taught. Coupled with the low expectations of some pupils, particularly the most able, exhibited in some year groups, this means that pupils' progress is still not quick enough in the subject.

The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- Achievement requires improvement because the progress pupils make across the school is not always good enough to ensure that they all reach the levels of which they are capable. By the time pupils leave the school, nearly all make the progress expected of them in reading, writing and mathematics. The proportions of pupils making better than expected progress are similar to those seen nationally in reading and writing. However, too few pupils make better than expected progress in mathematics.
- Over the lifetime of the academy, the proportion of pupils meeting national expectations in the Year 1 phonics check has remained above that seen nationally. Disadvantaged pupils do well and outperform their peers and other pupils nationally. However, boys underperform compared to their peers nationally and girls in school. A high proportion of pupils, including the majority of boys, who did not meet the expectations in the check, do so when rechecked in Year 2.
- Over time, the attainment of pupils in all subjects at the end of Key Stage 1 has remained below that seen nationally and results published in 2014 declined slightly overall. Pupils leave Year 2 approximately one term behind their peers nationally in writing and nearly two terms behind in reading and mathematics. The progress pupils make across Key Stage 1 is improving, particularly in reading and writing. Most pupils, including those with disabilities or special educational needs, make at least expected progress across the key stage, but work in pupils' books and in observations of learning identify that this progress still requires further improvement to enable pupils to reach the standards expected of them.

- By the end of Year 6 pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics is lower than that seen nationally. Pupils leave the school about one term behind that seen nationally in writing, one and a half terms behind in reading and two and a half terms behind in mathematics. Pupils have recently begun to make more rapid progress in reading and writing following successful action taken by new school leaders. However, the same rapid progress is not seen in mathematics.
- Disadvantaged pupils, those supported by the pupil premium, do well in the school. In Key Stage 1, pupils reach standards similar to those of their peers in school in reading, but do less well in writing and mathematics. Disadvantaged pupils progress well across Key Stage 2 because of the support they receive. Consequently, the proportions of disadvantaged pupils who make the progress expected of them in reading, writing and mathematics by the time they leave the school is better than non-disadvantaged pupils nationally. The proportions making better than expected progress are similar to those seen for non-disadvantaged pupils nationally in reading, but less so in writing and considerably less in mathematics and therefore, require improvement.
- Disadvantaged pupils leave the school approximately two and half terms behind non-disadvantaged pupils nationally in reading and writing, while they are four terms behind in mathematics. Disadvantaged pupils leave the school, however, with standards that are closer to other pupils in school, two terms behind in reading and writing and three and a half terms behind in mathematics.
- The very small number of pupils who are identified as being most able at the end of Key Stage 1 in 2010 did well at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2014. They attained standards similar to those of their peers nationally and made good progress. Inspection evidence and the work seen in pupils' books, however, identifies that pupils who are most able are not always receiving sufficient challenge in some classes and in some subjects.
- Pupils with disabilities and/or special educational needs are supported well in school, through the use of a variety of strategies which can include support from high quality teaching assistants, input from specially trained staff or attendance at the school's shared resource, The Bridge, which provides a 'nurturing' environment. These pupils consequently make good progress.

The early years provision

requires improvement

- The vast majority of children enter the early years provision with skills below those typical for their age, with particular weaknesses in literacy and numeracy skills. By the time they leave early years, nearly half of them have made sufficient progress to reach a good level of development. This proportion is less than that seen nationally and requires improvement. Children's progress in the prime areas of learning, including literacy and mathematics, however, is accelerating, resulting in most children being ready for Key Stage 1.
- The quality of teaching in the early years is variable and requires further improvement to ensure that more children make the best progress. Links between class study themes and the areas of learning are not always used well to present children with sufficient challenge. Some adults do not always present the best role models to children through their use of spoken English. The environment in which some children learn is overwhelmingly busy and impacts negatively on pupils' ability to engage in their preferred learning tasks, because there is too much choice.
- Where the quality of teaching is better, children's learning is supported by timely support and good use of questioning, resulting in clear development of skills and knowledge. Activities are highly structured, with a clear focus on learning, and present appropriate challenge. In addition, teachers make good use of teaching assistants' high levels of skill to engage and impact positively on children's learning.
- Behaviour and safety in the early years are good. Children behave well; they collaborate effectively, follow instructions well and increasingly focus on their work. Children are kept safe by well-trained adults.
- Communication with parents is good. Links with families start early through home visits and are built upon by the effective use of 'stay and play' to welcome parents and to enable them to become involved in their children's learning.
- Leadership and management in the early years require improvement. Although many actions to strengthen the quality of teaching and leadership are being implemented quickly by senior leaders, they have not yet secured sustained and consistent impact. The accuracy and use of assessment data by middle leaders and class teachers in early years are not strong enough.

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	139438
Local authority	Manchester
Inspection number	453184

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	460
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sheila Cairns
Headteacher	Sue Spiteri
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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