

# The Willows Primary School

Church Road, Basildon, Essex SS14 2EX

**Inspection dates** 8–9 December 2015

**Overall effectiveness** **Good**

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school

- The new leadership team has been highly effective in improving the quality of teaching and addressing weaknesses so that teaching is now of a high standard.
- The quality of teaching is good. Time is not wasted, and pupils enjoy their learning and believe they can succeed. After a turbulent time with many changes of teachers, pupils are now making good progress.
- The school uses assessment information effectively to identify pupils who are underachieving, and address their learning swiftly with additional support. This is having a positive impact, particularly for the most disadvantaged.
- Governors have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses in the quality of teaching and pupil achievement. They monitor the work of the school to see for themselves how things are going.
- The behaviour of the pupils is good. They are focused in lessons, listen well, and there are good relationships between each other and between adults and pupils.
- Pupils feel safe in school, confident that staff will deal with their concerns. All parents who responded to Parent View agree that their children feel safe.
- A range of subjects are taught well. Pupils' basic literacy skills in reading and writing are effectively reinforced across different subjects.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The teaching of mathematics is not as good as other subjects. Pupils are not achieving as well as they could because the work is sometimes too easy. Teachers do not always respond in lessons quickly enough to help pupils apply their knowledge and deepen their understanding.
- Pupils' attendance has been persistently below the national average.
- Some of the youngest children in the early years have limited outside access. Activities outside do not always provide high-quality learning or promote written language to help children improve their reading and writing.

## Full report

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen the quality of teaching in mathematics so that pupils make good progress by:
  - raising teachers' expectations of what all pupils can achieve
  - improving teachers' subject knowledge
  - pitching work at the correct level of difficulty
  - planning tasks that deepen pupils' understanding and help them master mathematics
  - responding quickly when pupils have understood the work and move their learning on.
- Improve the level of attendance.
- Improve the early years provision by:
  - using the outside area to provide high-quality learning and promote written language.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The new arrangements for the school's leadership have had a significant impact on raising expectations and improving pupils' achievement. The executive headteacher brings to the school experience and knowledge of running an effective school and he is ably supported by a head of school and a deputy headteacher with a range of expertise.
- This strong team has established a clear vision for the school which is shared by staff, parents and governors, and together they have driven forward much needed improvements. They have established a safe and focused working environment for pupils. Their rigorous monitoring and evaluation of teachers' performance, as well as support where teaching is weaker, has had a significant impact on the quality of teaching.
- Changes in subject leadership have meant that some subject leaders are still gaining experience. However, subject leaders are competent and confident in their subjects, and the systems they have introduced for the planning and delivery of lessons have provided a good basis to improve the quality of teaching. This was clearly evident in lessons seen during the inspection.
- Leaders at all levels demonstrate the skills and commitment to bring about the improvement that is required. They have an accurate view of where the school is. The school improvement plan includes all the right elements to bring about improvement, and actions are monitored frequently, but not always effectively evaluated.
- Strengths within the school, as well as an effective working partnership with Merrylands Primary School and good working arrangements with the Basildon Excellence Panel, have provided the school with a clear insight into its strengths and weaknesses. This partnership working has been used effectively to bring about swift improvements in the quality of teaching.
- Improvements in the teaching of phonics (letters and the sounds they represent) in Key Stage 1 and in the early years are now resulting in better achievement for the younger pupils. Observations of lessons and pupils' work show that these pupils are developing their basic literacy and numeracy skills more quickly than previously. Some older pupils who have not benefited from good teaching are still catching up. The high-quality teaching at the top of the school is accelerating the progress for the older pupils whose attainment is now broadly in line with the national average.
- The curriculum is well planned, and lessons effectively incorporate a range of subjects which are well taught. During the inspection, pupils were designing and producing a television advert for a young audience to learn about the impact of bullying. Pupils gained a good understanding of racism and tolerance through learning about the life and work of Nelson Mandela. These activities not only engage pupils' interests but help them gain a rounded view of the world and develop as good citizens prepared for the world of work.
- Provision, both through lessons and assemblies, promotes effective reflection on faith, culture and personal choices. Pupils demonstrate a good understanding of British values. They are considerate of gender and equality issues, and show respect for people from all backgrounds. This provides them with valuable skills to participate fully and contribute positively to life in modern Britain. Pupils are taught to respect the law, and their understanding is reflected in the way they acknowledge school rules. The work of the school council reflects the school's ethos of democracy. Classes nominate school councillors and class ambassadors to represent them and make decisions on their behalf.
- Leaders have used pupil premium funding to provide additional teaching and welfare support for the most disadvantaged pupils, some of whom have emotional and behavioural needs. The school has given high priority to working with these pupils and their families so pupils gain the most from their schooling. This support, along with additional teaching, has been effective in increasing the progress of these pupils.
- The primary schools' sports funding has been used effectively to improve the skills of teachers to deliver good-quality physical education lessons, mentored by coaches who bring to the school a high level of expertise. Additional extra-curricular activities provide opportunities for all pupils to participate in more sports and represent the school in competitive games.
- **The governance of the school**
  - Changes in the governing body since the school's last inspection have brought about a sharper focus in holding the senior leaders to account.

- Governors receive regular reports from the executive headteacher and head of school about pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching. They monitor the work of the school through regular checks.
  - They are familiar with the school's data information which tracks pupils' achievement, and can talk about how well different groups of pupils are doing across the school and where improvements need to be made.
  - Governors are aware that the most disadvantaged pupils have not always achieved as well as other pupils but that this is now improving.
  - Governors' reports show that they check up on pupil attendance and know this must improve.
  - Governors understand that the progress pupils make should be the main driver for rewarding teachers' pay, and have been robust in using appropriate processes where teaching has not been good.
  - The nominated governor ensures that the school's safeguarding procedures are robust and fully meet requirements.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good**

- Teachers deliver their lessons with a high level of energy and creativity. This is particularly effective in engaging boys in their learning. Teaching across a range of subjects is of a high quality with questioning used well to probe pupils' thinking. For example, when older pupils were asked to think about creating a diet for a bodybuilder, they readily applied newly learned scientific knowledge about the elements of food and balanced diets to devise a daily meal plan.
- Teachers use a range of styles to deliver lessons. When pupils organise their work and make choices about who they learn with, they demonstrate their ability to cooperate and adapt well within a group. In one lesson pupils, were asked to carry out a scientific exploration with different kinds of objects dropped from a height. Pupils organised their own learning and the resources they needed. They were able to explain the results using technical language, and demonstrated a good understanding of the concepts of resistance and gravity.
- Pupils told inspectors that 'Teachers try to make [lessons] fun and squeeze in more work.' They talked about the way teachers use interactive technology, film and music to make lessons interesting. Pupils said this helps them to focus. During the inspection it was noted that no time is wasted in lessons, giving pupils every opportunity to learn. Resources are used well to help pupils. Pupils make good use of their class 'toolkits' to help them with their spelling, grammar and punctuation as well as basic mathematical skills such as times tables.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge in most areas of the curriculum but in mathematics this is less secure. This means that some pupils are doing work that is too easy and although challenge is provided for pupils, this often does not deepen their mathematical understanding and help them master the subject.
- The school uses assessment information to track pupils' achievement and this in turn is used by teachers to plan lessons pitched at the right level for pupils and identify any gaps in learning. While this is effective in most subjects, in mathematics lessons teachers do not always assess what pupils can and could do. Consequently, opportunities for further learning are not always exploited.
- Since the school's last inspection teachers have improved their teaching of phonics. This has resulted in better outcomes in the Year 1 phonics screening check. Pupils are now better prepared with the necessary skills to become confident readers. Pupils say they enjoy reading and being read to. When reading to inspectors, they brought a range of books and could explain their choices and preferences.
- Pupils' books are presented well because teachers have high expectations. Pupils' handwriting is neat, and work is set out clearly. There is consistent use of the school's marking policy and pupils respond to teachers' marking. They record why they felt they were successful or not, and amend their work accordingly which results in improvements.
- Each class also has a personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education journal. These show a good range of topics that pupils have explored. The collection of pupils' work shows good evidence of pupils' ability to write using a range of genres, use research and develop their ideas so they can present a balanced argument.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good; nearly all parents who responded to the questionnaire, Parent View, agreed. Parents spoken to by inspectors were also particularly positive about this aspect of the school's work. The school is working hard to engage 'hard to reach' families and this is having a positive impact on the most disadvantaged pupils.
- Pupils spoke about the recent improvements to the school. They say they feel secure, there is no bullying, and they are confident in the school's systems to sort out any problems they have. Pupils have good relationships with each other and with the adults. They demonstrate the skills they have been taught to resolve any difficulties and establish firm friendships.
- Pupils have done a lot of work in lessons on bullying and the different forms it takes. Consequently, they have a good understanding of bullying, including any related to gender or race. In one class they were not afraid to express strong views on what they considered as appropriate sanctions for bullies.
- Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe, including on the internet, and the school is also working with parents to help them protect their children when using the internet at home.
- Pupils show a good understanding and respect for people's differences. Pupils at The Willows bring a richness of cultural diversity and this is recognised and appreciated by pupils. Discussion with one inspector revealed that pupils had a good understanding of the importance of living in harmony with people of different races and religions. They are well prepared to develop into good citizens in a tolerant and diverse Britain.

### Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. The school has been very effective in changing the culture of the school. Expectations have been raised and good behaviour is the norm. Pupils have a clear view that learning is what they come to school to do. The impact of this was evident when a pupil told an inspector that 'We believe everyone is smart in their own way.' Pupils' self-belief and confidence as learners were clearly evident in lessons, where they showed resilience even when they found something difficult.
- Pupils are well mannered and courteous: for example, when class ambassadors greeted visitors with a polite explanation of what was happening in lessons. Pupils' behaviour in lessons is good. They have good attitudes to learning, are attentive, listen well to the adults and their peers, and show respect for the views of others. When moving from room to room they do this in an orderly fashion. They take responsibility for their own equipment, and arrive punctually for lessons.
- A small minority of pupils have difficulty in adjusting to these high expectations and can present difficult behaviour. The expertise of support staff in managing incidents quietly and discreetly ensures that the school provides an orderly place for staff and pupils to work in. In some rare cases, exclusions are used for a very few disaffected pupils who find the higher expectations of school a challenge.
- As a result of the school's sharp focus on tackling pupil absence, attendance has improved. However, attendance of some pupils is not as good as it should be.

## Outcomes for pupils are good

- In 2015, when compared with the national average, standards at the end of Key Stage 2 improved and were broadly average in reading, writing and mathematics. The progress these pupils had made in reading and writing since leaving Key Stage 1 was broadly in line with the national average but not in mathematics. Pupils making better than expected progress, and pupils attaining higher levels, were below the national average. While the quality of teaching is now good, it has not been consistent over time, and this means some pupils having to make up lost ground. However, the current Year 6 is making rapid progress because of the high quality of teaching.
- The school's tracking data of pupils' progress and the quality of pupils' books show that pupils currently in the school are doing much better. Most year groups are now making better progress, particularly in reading and writing, and are continuing to do so because teaching has improved. The legacy of underachievement is now being resolved in those year groups who have had disrupted teaching in the past. Progress for these pupils is not quite so fast in mathematics.
- At the end of Key Stage 2 in 2015, the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers in school continued to close. However, this group of pupils was still behind in reading and writing, and well behind in mathematics. The school now tracks the progress of these pupils much more rigorously and

provides a range of support. Additional teaching and focused group work to support the most disadvantaged pupils, some of whom also have specific learning needs, is resulting in accelerated progress. They are now making up lost ground and gaps in attainment are continuing to narrow.

- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs have not always made sufficient progress in the past. The school has appointed a new coordinator to take on responsibility for this group of pupils. A series of specific interventions and well-planned lessons supported by skilled teaching assistants are now having an impact on accelerating their progress. Observations during the inspection showed this group of pupils to be well motivated and ably working without needing direct supervision all the time.
- The achievement of individual pupils from minority ethnic groups is variable in different subjects and across the year groups. Some of these pupils come to the school with little or no English and some have special educational needs. However, the specialist support these pupils receive enables them to be well integrated and they soon grasp the language because of the improved quality of teaching and provision in class.
- The achievement of most-able pupils is below what would be expected when compared with that of others nationally. The recent changes in teaching and lesson planning to meet the needs of most-able pupils are resulting in better achievement. Teachers are now better at pitching work at a higher level in reading and writing. In other subjects, such as geography, pupils were observed applying some advanced skills. These developed pupils' knowledge and understanding of geographical locations.
- The younger pupils in Key Stage 1 have not always attained standards that match the national average. Many of these children did not achieve expected outcomes at the end of their Reception Year. However, because teaching is improving, pupils are now leaving the early years better equipped with the basic skills to read, write and be numerate. This good foundation is currently being effectively built on in Key Stage 1 with higher expectations of what pupils can achieve.

## Early years provision

**is good**

- Children get off to a good start as they enter school. Children settle well because the Nursery and Reception classes offer a safe, bright and stimulating place to learn. Children's behaviour is good; they enjoy good relationships with adults as well as each other.
- Routines and expectations are established from the start, and lead to these young children quickly showing confidence within their learning environment. During the inspection, the Reception classes performed their Christmas play and sat quietly, listening to the teachers as they were organised for their big event.
- Some children enter the Reception classes from the school's Nursery; others are admitted from a range of providers. Children are at different stages of readiness for school. Many of them have skills, particularly in communication and language as well as mathematics, below those typical for their age when they start school.
- Children make good progress during their Reception Year. Their achievement at the end of early years has improved year on year, and is now the same as the national average. This is continuing to improve because of the high quality of teaching.
- In classrooms, children enjoy a range of stimulating activities and adult-directed learning. Children in the Nursery were enjoying drawing with combs in shaving foam and this prompted some good descriptive vocabulary of what it felt like on their hands. Children in one Reception class were learning about the nativity using cut-out characters, and they were able to sequence events and retell the story accurately.
- The outside area for the Reception classes provides a safe place to learn. While children are content to occupy themselves, tasks are not always planned to stimulate interest or challenge their thinking and provide high-quality learning. Children in the Nursery have limited access to the outside area.
- Where adults are directing the learning, pupils gain a good understanding of how to cooperate well in pairs and groups. They confidently explain to each other what they are doing or what they want someone else to do. For example, while making a gutter-run for water, they expressed their ideas of how to solve the problem, and showed resilience and perseverance throughout.
- Adults provide good role models for spoken English; they prompt and question so pupils are learning to respond in full sentences. This good practice is not as evident in the outside area where there is little use of signposts and labels to effectively direct children's learning.

- The leadership in the early years has brought about a clear focus on improving the quality of learning for these young children, particularly inside the classrooms. This is evident in the quality of teaching, particularly in speaking and listening, and developing early reading, writing and mathematical skills. Children's writing books show good progression from the start of term, with children attempting simple sentences and spelling using their phonic skills. Their mathematics books also show pupils have a good understanding of number, can work out simple sums, and are gaining mathematical knowledge about shape and space.
- The staff in the early years are developing improved relationships with parents. Staff visit homes prior to a child's admission, and information is shared through special events and open evenings. There are few less formal opportunities for parents to access the Nursery and Reception classes. This limits parents' capacity to be fully involved as partners in their child's education, linking learning between home and school.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	132084
<b>Local authority</b>	Essex
<b>Inspection number</b>	10001932

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	514
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Colin Moore
<b>Executive Headteacher</b>	Sean Tobin
<b>Head of School</b>	Courtney Freese
<b>Telephone number</b>	01268 470880
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.willows.essex.sch.uk">www.willows.essex.sch.uk</a>
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<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	21–22 November 2013

## Information about this school

- The Willows is a larger than average-sized primary school.
- The majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds, although there are an increasing number of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds who speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils supported by the pupil premium is higher than average. This funding provides additional support for children who are looked after and those known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is well above the national average. Pupils' needs range from moderate learning difficulties, including speech and language and social and emotional needs, to specific learning difficulties.
- The school has recently restructured its leadership. Since the last inspection there has been a significant change in teaching staff with many new appointments. The running of the school is now overseen by the executive headteacher of Merrylands Primary School, supported by a head of school based at The Willows.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 6.



## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited lessons in all classrooms, some with the executive headteacher and others with the head of school. In addition, inspectors observed small groups of pupils being taught.
- Pupils' work was scrutinised with subject leaders; inspectors heard pupils read and spoke to pupils about their enjoyment of school and their opinions of behaviour and safety.
- Discussions were held with staff, governors, parents and representatives of the Basildon Excellence Panel.
- Inspectors looked at a wide range of school documents including the school's self-evaluation; its development plan; behaviour records; governing body documents; and documents relating to the monitoring of teachers' performance.
- The views of the 69 parents who responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View, were taken into account, as well as discussions with parents during the inspection.

## Inspection team

Karen Heath, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Elizabeth Chaplin	Ofsted Inspector
Cecilia Moore	Ofsted Inspector

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