

The Willows Primary School

Tayfield Road, Woodhouse Park, Manchester M22 1BQ

Inspection dates

2–3 November 2016

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

- Under the direction of the headteacher and deputy headteacher, all leaders and staff have worked with determination to move the school forward. The Willows is now a good school and it continues to improve.
- Governors are skilled, knowledgeable and dedicated to making the school the best it can be. They have a good knowledge about the school's performance through regular visits and meetings with pupils, staff and leaders.
- Effective leadership has secured improvements in the early years. Good teaching helps children settle quickly and make a strong and happy start to their learning.
- From starting points below those typical for their age, pupils, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and disadvantaged pupils, make good progress. By the end of Year 6, standards in mathematics, reading and writing are similar to the national average.
- The quality of teaching has improved. It is now good. Well-planned, imaginative lessons capture pupils' interests so that they are keen to learn.
- Pupils are proud of their school. They behave well and show great respect for each other and the adults in the school.
- A caring and nurturing atmosphere contributes well to pupils' personal well-being and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Staff work hard to make sure that pupils, including those whose circumstances may make them vulnerable, are safe.
- The curriculum is rich and exciting. Pupils' interests and aspirations are enriched by a wide range of clubs and activities that develop their sporting, musical and artistic talents.
- Many subject leaders are new to their posts. Their role in improving the quality of teaching and learning is still developing. Checks of pupils' progress in subjects other than English and mathematics are at an early stage.
- Occasionally, reading and writing tasks could provide even greater challenge to enable the most able and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, to make the best possible progress.
- The teaching of handwriting is not yet consistently good.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching to raise pupils' achievement by:
 - making sure that reading and writing tasks provide enough challenge to enable the most able pupils, and those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, to make even quicker progress
 - ensuring that teachers continue to reduce, and eventually eradicate, the gaps in pupils' learning in spelling, grammar and punctuation
 - ensuring that handwriting is taught consistently well across the school.
- Further improve assessment and tracking systems so that leaders have a clear overview of pupils' progress and attainment in subjects other than English and mathematics.
- Continue to develop the skills of subject leaders, including those new to their posts, to enable them to contribute fully to improving the quality of teaching in their areas of responsibility.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The good leadership and management identified at the time of the previous inspection has been maintained and strengthened with high-quality staff appointments.
- Senior leaders and governors have successfully maintained a firm focus on improving the quality of teaching. A determined focus on raising standards has resulted in improved outcomes for pupils. Pupils' progress is now good across the school. Standards continue to rise and the school is well placed to continue to improve.
- The headteacher and deputy headteacher work extremely well together. They lead by example, providing a strong steer for teachers and teaching assistants, many of whom have joined the school since the previous inspection. All staff work as an effective and highly committed team. Morale is high.
- Leaders closely track pupils' achievement in reading, writing and mathematics. Swift action is taken to help pupils who may be in danger of falling behind to catch up with their classmates. School leaders are currently developing similar systems to check on the progress of pupils in other subjects.
- Staff and governors contribute to the school's self-evaluation. This provides an accurate overview of the school's strengths and the aspects that can be improved. School plans identify the correct priorities and are checked regularly to ensure that the actions taken by school leaders are having enough impact to bring about the required improvements.
- The deputy headteacher's specific responsibility for improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is proving effective. Assistant headteachers and middle leaders, who lead the different age phases across the school, are also providing good leadership. All senior and middle leaders make robust checks on the quality of teaching. They have a sound understanding of the effectiveness of teaching. The school's documentation about the quality of teaching clearly outlines strengths and areas where improvements are required.
- Leaders ensure that teachers and teaching assistants receive targeted, high-quality training. Staff report that they feel supported in their careers. They value the opportunities provided for them to share their practice and learn from each other. They work collaboratively with other schools to moderate work and share expertise. Currently, subject leaders are working with other schools to develop assessment systems for subjects such as history and geography.
- The role of foundation subject leaders (staff who lead subjects other than English and mathematics) requires further development. They are knowledgeable and are beginning to lead improvements in their areas of responsibility.
- The pupil premium is used wisely. It is targeted specifically at improving the achievement, engagement and well-being of disadvantaged pupils. This funding provides extra teaching support to help pupils overcome gaps in learning and the pupil counsellor whose role is to support vulnerable pupils and their families.

- The primary sports funding is used very well to develop pupils' health and well-being. Sports coaches help improve teachers' skills and the wide range of clubs on offer during lunchtime and after school are well attended.
- The curriculum ensures that pupils receive many rich, varied, broad and balanced experiences. This is further enriched by a raft of extra-curricular activities. The school provides a curriculum which is underpinned by characteristics such as equality; however, more needs to be done to prevent name-calling of anyone with a perceived difference. The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. They are prepared for life as citizens in modern Britain.
- The very large majority of parents who spoke to inspectors and responded to Parent View and the school's own most recent questionnaire hold very positive views of the school. Members of the Parents' Action Group make a good contribution to the decision making in the school.
- The local authority periodically reviews the school's progress towards addressing the key issues identified in the previous inspection report. Schools in the multi-academy trust (MAT) support each other by sharing training and exchanging effective practice, including that of leadership.

Governance of the school

- Highly committed governors clearly know the school's strengths and weaknesses. They hold the school to account through thorough and searching questioning of senior and middle leaders. They visit the school regularly to review performance information robustly.
- Governors ensure, through regular training, that they keep their knowledge and understanding up to date. The skills governors bring to their role are deployed effectively to provide effective challenge and support for school leaders.
- The performance management of staff is rigorous.
- Governors check that additional funds such as the pupil premium and sports funding are spent effectively. As a result, the personal and academic needs of disadvantaged pupils are met well and pupils understand the need to adopt a healthy and active lifestyle.
- The 'Children of Success Schools Trust' board works closely with The Willows' local governing body. This enables governors and staff from the schools in the trust to share their expertise, for example in teaching and learning and leadership and management.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The governing body regularly checks all safeguarding systems and arrangements to ensure that they are legally compliant. School leaders and governors have developed a 'safeguarding culture' within the school where all members of the school community, including the pupils themselves, know how to keep pupils and staff as safe as possible.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Senior leaders' prompt, decisive action has led to improvements in the quality of teaching. It is now consistently good across the school. As a result, pupils' outcomes have improved and continue to do so.
- Learning is well planned and builds on what pupils already know and can do. Teachers provide clear explanations to move learning on. They use well-developed questioning skills to check on the accuracy of pupils' work and swiftly address any misconceptions.
- Teachers' feedback is effective and helps pupils to make good progress.
- Teachers encourage pupils to share their thoughts through collaborative work with their peers. Pupils are encouraged to explain their answers in order to build their confidence and develop their vocabulary.
- Specialist teaching is helping pupils to improve their understanding and use of grammar skills through music and drama. During the inspection Year 4 pupils enthusiastically played 'preposition tennis' as part of a fun and fast-paced session which enabled all in the class to develop this aspect of literacy.
- The learning environment supports pupils' learning well. Pupils regularly refer to the information provided around the classroom if they are 'stuck' or need an idea to move their learning on. Pupils are also a great support to each other. In a Year 6 mathematics lesson a group of pupils worked very well together to identify how work on simplifying fractions completed by one of the class could be made even better by finding a systematic method to achieve the desired result.
- Teachers foster good attitudes to learning and provide activities that make learning fun. Pupils usually concentrate well. When work is set at the right level of challenge, they remain engaged and often enthused from the beginning to the end of lessons and make good progress as a result.
- The teaching of early reading skills is effective. Teachers' and teaching assistants' subject knowledge of phonics is strong. They use this to develop pupils' reading skills across the curriculum in the early years and in key stage 1.
- Pupils read regularly through a mixture of reading lessons guided by adults and through regular opportunities to read independently. Pupils of all abilities make good progress as they use their phonic knowledge to tackle unfamiliar words during guided sessions.
- In mathematics, teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. Tasks and activities challenge pupils to reason and think. Teachers move learning on when pupils have securely grasped what they need to. As a result, pupils of all abilities make good and sometimes rapid progress.
- During daily English lessons and reading sessions, teachers develop pupils' writing and spelling, grammar and punctuation skills well and teaching enables pupils to make good progress. However, at times the work set does not demand enough of pupils, particularly the most able pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and as a result sometimes progress is not rapid as it could be for them.

- The presentation of work in pupils' books shows a marked improvement since the previous inspection. Leaders are aware that the teaching of a neat, joined handwriting style is not yet consistent across the school.
- Sports funding has been used to employ a specialist coach to develop pupils' skills and increase teachers' expertise in this area. Teaching and learning are of a high quality and have led to greater participation of pupils in school clubs and competitive sports.
- Good partnerships exist between teachers and parents. Workshops are provided to show parents how to help children learn at home. Weekly homework tasks provide opportunities for parents to work with their children.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils say the school keeps them safe. They learn how to keep safe through the well-planned curriculum. For example, they are well informed about safety when using the internet. Older pupils sensibly explain about their lessons which help them learn about sexual education and different types of relationships.
- Pupils have good relationships with each other and the adults in school. They have a good understanding of the different kinds of bullying, including that related to gender or race. Pupils say that bullying does happen occasionally and they trust the adults to deal with issues when they occur. Pupils are knowledgeable about the use of language which could be hurtful to others and say that sometimes name-calling does occur, for example 'gay' as a derogatory term. Again, they seek help from adults to resolve any issues.
- Pupils make a good contribution to school life and the life of their local community. Some eagerly take on leadership roles as members of the School Action Team. Others enjoy helping their fellow pupils when they act as reading buddies or play leaders.
- Pupils are proud of their award as a rights respecting school. They are adamant that people have a right to make different life choices – something they have learned about in assemblies and lessons. They understand that people hold different views and have cultures and religions different to their own and that these should be respected. They are well prepared for life in a tolerant and diverse Britain.
- The popular breakfast club provides a nourishing, happy start to the day.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils know the school's rules and rewards systems and think that staff apply them fairly. They say that the system for managing behaviour is helping pupils to behave. Staff sensitively help the few pupils who sometimes find it difficult to manage their own emotions and behaviour well.
- Pupils' books are tidy and well presented. A good quantity of work is produced and observations of learning in lessons showed that pupils concentrate well and are keen to learn.

- Pupils are well mannered and courteous. They have good attitudes to learning and this is reflected in their above-average attendance. They listen carefully to adults and their peers and show respect for the views of others. They respond quickly when called to attention by teachers and support staff.
- Pupils enjoy school. They attend regularly and look smart in their uniforms. Most are well prepared for their lessons and complete their homework on time. A few pupils are yet to develop the habit of bringing their reading book to school so that they are ready for their daily reading lesson.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupil outcomes have improved since the previous inspection and they continue to do so. Pupils now make at least good progress from their starting points in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Standards in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 1 and key stage 2 in 2016 are similar to the provisional national averages.
- The school's tracking of pupils' progress and the quality of work in pupils' books shows an improvement in current pupils' work. Most year groups are now making better progress in reading, writing and mathematics, and are continuing to do so because teaching is good. However, due to weaknesses in previous teaching some pupils have gaps in their learning. The legacy of underachievement has been overcome in mathematics and continues to be resolved in reading and writing.
- The very high proportion of disadvantaged pupils in all year groups make similar good progress to other pupils in the school from their starting points. Differences in attainment with other pupils nationally are diminishing.
- Extra learning in groups and good support in lessons by well-trained support staff mean that pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, including disadvantaged pupils with these additional needs, make good progress from their individual starting points. Observations during the inspection showed this group of pupils to be well-motivated learners.
- In mathematics lessons, teachers skilfully set work which stretches the thinking of the most able pupils and allows them to make at least good and often rapid progress.
- The most able pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities also make good progress in reading and writing. However, at times, teachers restrict these pupils' progress by setting undemanding tasks.
- Early reading skills are taught well. The proportion of pupils in Year 1 reaching the national expectation in the phonics check is similar to the national average. Most pupils achieve the standard by the end of Year 2.
- Pupils make good progress across the full range of subjects taught. They like science, especially planning and carrying out experiments, and are knowledgeable about the historic periods they have learned about. At times, the most able are capable of doing even better in subjects other than English and mathematics.

Early years provision

Good

- Children enter the school with a range of skills, knowledge and understanding and many have starting points well below those typical for their age. From these starting points, children make at least good and sometimes rapid progress. By the end of Reception, the majority of children reach a good level of development from their different starting points and are well prepared for Year 1.
- Leadership of the early years is good. The new early years leader has established an attractive, well-organised, purposeful learning environment to support and encourage children's learning and development. Routines are well established and maintained by staff and are understood and followed well by children. A strong team of teachers and teaching assistants ensure that children settle quickly and feel safe and secure. Safeguarding is effective and children's personal development and welfare requirements are met well.
- Children quickly learn to listen carefully to the adults and each other. They readily choose activities that interest them. They behave well, take turns and learn to share toys and resources. Children who have attended the setting for some time can sustain their concentration both when working on their own and with others. Children who joined the school at the beginning of this term and are at an early stage of school life have settled well and are growing in confidence when working with an adult or playing with others.
- The early years curriculum is engaging and well planned. Adults regularly check how well children are doing and adjust learning activities to take account of children's interests and what they need to do to improve. During the inspection, some children decided to make a track out of crates. More joined them as the path developed and became increasingly complex. The class teacher skilfully extended children's learning by setting challenges for them to solve as they helped each other up and over the various shaped objects provided. As well as having a great deal of fun and a sense of achievement, children developed the ability to work as a team and to balance safely on uneven surfaces.
- Children's vocabulary and speech and language skills are often below those typical for their age when they start school. Adults skilfully encourage children to talk about what they are doing and model the type of language to be used as they play.
- As a result of good teaching, children, including disadvantaged children and those who have special educational needs, make the same good progress as other pupils. Funding is deployed effectively and needs are met well.
- Parents feel welcome in the school. On arrival to the Nursery classes each morning, for instance, parents and their children enjoy exploring the range of activities provided for them. Parents hold highly positive views of the teaching and care their children receive. They feel well informed and able to contribute to their child's education.

School details

Unique reference number	139438
Local authority	Manchester
Inspection number	10022010

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 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	477
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sheila Cairns
Headteacher	Sue Spiteri
Telephone number	0161 437 4444
Website	www.willows.manchester.sch.uk/
Email address	admin@willows.manchester.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	11–12 February 2015

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with DfE guidance on what academies should publish.
- The school is larger than most other primary schools.
- The school converted to an academy in April 2013. It is part of the Children of Success Schools Trust (CoSST).
- Almost all children attend the Nursery full time. All children attend Reception full time.
- 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 below the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is high at almost double the national average. The proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs or education, health and care plan is below average.

- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils in the school is over two thirds. This is much higher than the national average. In some year groups the proportion of disadvantaged pupils is over three quarters.
- Since the previous inspection the school has experienced significant staffing changes.
- The school provides a breakfast club for its pupils.
- The school meets the government's floor standards. These are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors gathered a range of evidence to judge the quality of teaching, learning and assessment over time. They observed learning in classes, one jointly with the headteacher, and when pupils learned in small groups.
- The inspectors looked at examples of pupils' work and talked to them about their work. They listened to pupils read and observed the teaching of reading skills. Inspectors talked to pupils about the books they have enjoyed and those that they are currently reading. Inspectors took note of displays around the school and the learning taking place outdoors.
- Inspectors talked with pupils informally as they played at breaktimes, visited the dining hall at lunchtime and observed pupils' behaviour as they moved around school. They spoke to pupils informally in the breakfast club and met formally with three groups of pupils.
- An inspector spoke by telephone with the chair of the Children of Success Schools Trust and met with the chair and another member of the local governing body. An inspector also spoke by phone with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors met with members of school staff.
- Inspectors spoke to a number of parents at the start of the school day, and with representatives of the Parent Action Group. They took account of 48 responses to Parent View and the school's most recent surveys of pupils' and parents' views. Thirty-two returns to the staff questionnaire completed during the inspection were considered.
- Inspectors examined a range of documents, including information about pupils' progress, school improvement and external views of the school. They reviewed the contents of the school's website and scrutinised records relating to behaviour, attendance and safeguarding completed by school staff.

Inspection team

Lyn Pender, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Yvonne Mills-Clare	Ofsted Inspector
Stephen Rigby	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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