

# The Willows Primary School

Pyle Hill, Newbury, Berkshire RG14 7SJ

## Inspection dates

6–7 March 2018

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

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that requires improvement

- Until recently, school leaders and governors had not ensured that pupils' significantly low achievement was being addressed.
- Leaders did not check that assessment was accurate, and the actions taken to improve progress were not routinely evaluated for effectiveness. Consequently, pupils have not made good progress over the last three years.
- Over time, leaders have not maintained good teaching across the school. Teachers' use of probing questions to help deepen pupils' understanding is variable. There are inconsistencies in the extent to which the most able pupils are challenged.
- Poor behaviour, resulting in many exclusions, led to disruptions in pupil's learning over recent years.
- Leaders have not made sure that the curriculum provides sufficient opportunities for pupils to write at length and apply their mathematical skills in a wide range of subjects.
- In the early years, insufficient provision for writing and mathematics means some children, particularly the most able, are not reaching their potential.
- Governors, until recently, had an inaccurate picture of the pupils' performance and the quality of teaching. This contributed to the decline in the school's overall effectiveness.

### The school has the following strengths

- New leaders and governors are tackling the school's weaknesses with determination, and there are clear signs of improvement. Staff are well supported and feel valued. Morale is high.
- Middle leaders are addressing weaknesses effectively. They are making a significant contribution to improvements to the quality of teaching, learning and the curriculum.
- A new system for encouraging good behaviour is bearing fruit. Pupils, parents, and staff say that behaviour has greatly improved.
- Pupils with social, emotional, and mental health needs benefit from effective support. Parents appreciate the wide range of support families receive.

## Full report

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

- Accelerate progress and raise attainment across the school by:
  - accurately identifying pupils' starting points to ensure that work is pitched appropriately for all groups, including the most able
  - ensuring that questions during lessons are sufficiently challenging to extend and deepen pupils' understanding.
- Improve leadership and management by embedding current successful strategies, including:
  - the promotion of good behaviour and positive attitudes towards learning
  - the culture of high expectations
  - the assessment and planning systems.
- Improve the provision and outcomes in the early years by:
  - providing more opportunities for children to develop their skills in writing and mathematics
  - ensuring that the most able children are routinely challenged and reach their potential.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

### Requires improvement

- The executive headteacher has set a clear agenda for improvement. He has increased significantly the expectations of what staff and pupils can achieve. With the highly effective support of the head of school, he is implementing an ambitious improvement plan with determination. As a result, the culture of the school is evolving and issues that were preventing pupils from making good progress are being addressed positively.
- Leaders have introduced new systems for checking pupils' progress and stringently hold teachers to account. However, some teaching remains less effective and some individual teachers are dependent on continued support and guidance. Leaders have not yet had time to secure, sustain and embed the necessary changes to ensure consistently good-quality teaching and learning across the school.
- Evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses is now more accurate. This has enabled leaders to prioritise the actions they need to take to improve the school further. Although standards are starting to rise in most classes, too few pupils leave the school with all the skills they need to make a strong start to secondary school.
- Middle leaders have been newly empowered to drive change. One remarked, 'Previously, we had the responsibility but not the authority.' Phase leaders are ensuring that teachers in each year group liaise closely and they are regularly checking lesson plans. Subject leaders provide good role models for colleagues. The leaders are ensuring a more structured approach to teaching reading and writing. The mathematics leader is supporting colleagues in placing greater emphasis on key skills and on deepening pupils' understanding. This work is at an early stage and yet to secure consistency in the rates of pupils' progress.
- Curriculum revisions are under way because leaders recognise that a focus on English and mathematics has, to some extent, been at the expense of other subjects. Leaders acknowledge that there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to write at length and apply their mathematical skills in a wide range of subjects. Improvements are evident in subjects such as history and geography. There is more to do to widen the curriculum and to ensure that the most able pupils are sufficiently challenged. That said, pupils benefit from a diverse range of extra-curricular activities, including sports clubs, a Japanese day and a computer club.
- Personal, health and social education, together with the new approach to behaviour management, contribute much to pupils' social and moral development. Assemblies and subjects such as music and drama provide some opportunities for spiritual and cultural development, but these aspects of the school's work are not fully embedded.
- The school's promotion of 'Olympic' values, which include respect and equality, together with activities such as electing the school council, helps pupils gain an understanding of fundamental British values, such as democracy and equality.

- Pupil premium funding has been used to address the complex needs of disadvantaged pupils. However, it has not had a measurable impact on improving their rates of progress. Leaders have amended their strategies to enable a greater focus on accelerating pupils' progress. Their initiatives have not yet had sufficient time to become embedded and demonstrate an improvement in the outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. Leaders use the physical education and sport funding well to improve pupils' participation in sport and increase their physical well-being. Sports coaches teach physical education lessons alongside teachers and run after-school clubs. Pupils have access to a good range of sports and an increasing number are taking part in competitions with other schools.
- The support for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities is well coordinated. Support for pupils who have social, emotional and mental health needs is particularly strong and much appreciated by parents.
- Leaders and governors appreciate the support that the local authority provides. The local authority acted quickly when weakness in leadership emerged. They brokered the temporary appointment of the executive headteacher and the support of a local headteacher.

## **Governance of the school**

- New appointments were made recently to the governing body. Governors have a wide range of experience and expertise in education, finance, personnel and local government. The new chair is a national leader of governance.
- Governors receive very comprehensive reports from the executive headteacher. These provide a clear view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. However, until recently, governors had little access to the school's performance data, which severely constrained their ability to hold the school to account.
- The focus of the work of committees and individual governors who are linked to areas of the school has been sharpened. This is having a positive impact on the strategic leadership of the school. The records of governors' meetings show that governors ask insightful, challenging questions, and contribute to the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning.
- Governors have a good grasp of financial issues and are well placed to tackle the considerable budget deficit. Their oversight of the school budget also includes the impact of additional funding such as the pupil premium. Currently, governors are seeking assurance that plans to increase the impact of such funds are helping to diminish gaps in the achievement of different groups.

## **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- All checks on staff and visitors are thorough, stored securely and kept up to date. Staff receive regular training and leaders check that all adults who work at the school are fully aware of their responsibility to keep children safe.

- Pupils feel safe in the school and are taught about risks, including those related to the use of the internet and social media. They are aware of what is right and wrong, and understand the need for school rules. Pupils are confident and proud of their responsibilities, for example as members of the school council.
- Pupils and parents say that incidents of bullying do not occur as frequently now as they did in the recent past. Pupils know whom to go to when problems occur.
- Leaders in charge of safeguarding work well with the local authority and other agencies to support pupils and their families. Their good knowledge of the community allows them to intervene swiftly when problems arise. They follow up cases that are referred to external agencies to ensure that they are dealt with effectively.

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

### **Requires improvement**

- The quality of teaching is not consistently good enough to ensure that all pupils make good progress. Expectations of what pupils can do are sometimes too low, and work is not always matched to pupils' abilities. Too many pupils do not make the progress of which they are capable. The school's most recent evaluation found that teaching and learning required improvement.
- Relationships between teachers and pupils are usually warm and supportive. Most pupils have positive attitudes towards learning and want to do well. Pupils were keen to tell inspectors how improvement in behaviour during lessons was giving them more chance to learn without disruption.
- Teachers increasingly use assessment information in their lesson planning. Plans include tasks for the most able pupils, although these are often introduced late in lessons, after pupils have completed work they find straightforward.
- The teaching of reading varies in effectiveness. Some phonics lessons lack pace, which means pupils become disengaged. Opportunities for assessing pupils' individual skills and including writing tasks are limited. In contrast, older pupils benefit from recently restructured reading lessons which focus on skills such as 'reading between the lines' to deepen pupils' understanding of inference.
- Teachers are now using high-quality texts to inspire and support pupils' reading and writing. The impact of this is evident in pupils' workbooks, which include recent examples of well-produced written work. This approach, however, has not been established long enough to enable pupils to fully make up for previous underachievement.
- Improvement in the teaching of mathematics is also evident. The use of practical resources is supporting pupils' learning and increasing their engagement. In lessons and pupils' workbooks, there is now more emphasis on mastering skills and applying them in relevant contexts. Pupils now have opportunities to explain their reasoning. Since January, pupils have typically completed more work than in the previous term. Pupils are responding well to teachers' encouragement to present their work accurately, to reduce the chance of making simple errors. Within this positive picture, some inconsistencies remain.
- Teaching assistants are well briefed and work well alongside teachers. They provide effective support for individuals and small groups during lessons and in withdrawal

groups.

- In the most successful lessons, teachers use questions both to elicit pupils' existing knowledge and to prompt deeper understanding. Where questioning is less effective, only brief answers are required and the lesson moves on.
- In accordance with the school's assessment policy, teachers mark pupils' work regularly and provide encouraging feedback. Classroom displays provide advice and support for pupils' learning.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

**Requires improvement**

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Staff work effectively to ensure pupils' well-being. Pupils say that they feel safe and that staff listen to them and support them when needed. The SEN coordinator and pastoral team provide timely support for pupils and their families.
- Parents were fulsome in their praise for the school's support. Among their comments were, 'The welfare of the children has been at the centre of changes for the better', 'The pastoral staff are fantastic. They have gone above and beyond for me and my child' and 'I am very impressed with the level of support my children receive. The staff really go the extra mile.'
- Pupils say that the school is a friendly place and that they enjoy being part of the school community. Pupils are proud of their roles as school council members. They take their responsibilities seriously and recognise that they are making a contribution to the school.
- Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep safe, including online safety. They know about the different types of bullying and report that bullying is not common in school. They say that where problems occur, they are sorted out quickly by staff.

### Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Leaders work closely with families and other agencies to bring about improvements in pupils' attendance, and give this area of the school's work due attention. While the pastoral team's work has improved overall attendance, persistent absence rates, although reducing, remain above the national figures.
- Last year, there were 60 incidents resulting in exclusions. Pupils said that lessons were frequently disrupted by poor behaviour. The new behaviour policy, implemented in January, is having a very positive impact. The number of incidents of poor behaviour has fallen sharply this term. Pupils are well aware of the consequences of receiving a white, yellow or red card. They said that behaviour has greatly improved, although they raised some concerns about how equitably the system was being implemented.
- The school is a calm and welcoming place. Pupils' interactions with each other are generally positive. They treat each other and adults with respect. They collaborate

during lessons and play well together at breaktimes.

- Leaders are keen to make sure that the school is inclusive, and that exclusion is used as a last resort. They are well placed to ensure that recent improvements in behaviour are sustained over time.

### Outcomes for pupils

### Requires improvement

- Leaders and governors acknowledge that current outcomes are not good enough. Inconsistencies in the quality of teaching meant that, in recent years, pupils did not make sufficient progress by the end of both key stages. The rates of progress of disadvantaged pupils, middle-ability pupils and the most able pupils have been below national averages in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Outcomes of the phonics screening checks in Year 1 have been below average since they were introduced. Results were better in 2017 but remained below the standard expected. The school's assessments indicate that pupils are making better progress in phonics. Pupils increasingly draw on these skills when reading, although their workbooks indicate that many have difficulty in applying their phonic skills when writing.
- Over the last two years, attainment in all subjects in both key stage 1 and key stage 2 was in the lowest 20% for all pupils nationally. The proportion of pupils reaching expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics combined was very low in 2016 and 2017 compared with national figures. Information on progress reflects a similar picture, with all groups, including the most able and those who are disadvantaged, not making good enough progress from their starting points.
- The school's new assessment system is providing a more accurate picture of pupils' progress. This is enabling teachers and leaders to more quickly identify and address gaps in pupils' learning. Pupils' workbooks show sign of improvement, particularly since September. However, a legacy of underachievement means that many pupils have a lot of catching up to do.
- Within this picture of low achievement, some of the most able pupils are working at a greater depth and producing better-quality work. Discussing their reading with inspectors, a group of avid readers made insightful comments about their reading preferences. The written work produced by this group shows that they are rising to the challenge of using wider vocabulary with increasing flair in their use of literary devices, such as metaphor and alliteration. Similarly, a few most able pupils are confident when tackling mathematical problems. That said, the proportion of pupils building well on their starting points, including the middle and higher attainers, is not as high as it needs to be.
- Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are typically making at least steady progress towards their individual targets. Many of these pupils have complex social, emotional and mental health needs, and even small steps are often hard won.

### Early years provision

### Requires improvement

- Recently, leadership in the early years has not been effective, which meant that the focus on children's outcomes, particularly those of the most able, has not been sharp enough. Tracking procedures have only just been implemented in order to accurately assess children's progress. They have not been established long enough to have any appreciable impact.
- Relationships between adults and children are warm and respectful. Children are well cared for and kept safe. From the two-year-old provision to Reception, children are generally engaged in a range of activities covering the areas of the foundation stage curriculum. They show interest in learning and collaborate and cooperate with one another well.
- Staff work hard to develop children's speaking and listening skills through questioning and modelling language – for example, engaging children in retelling the story of 'Three Billy Goats Gruff' using toy animals.
- Opportunities for children to develop early writing and numeracy skills are not as frequent, particularly in the Reception class. During independent 'free flow' learning sessions, adults provide materials to support these areas but do not encourage children often enough to use them.
- Around three-quarters of children are progressing well towards the early learning goals at the end of Reception. This is an improvement on previous years. However, the provision for the most able children is not secure enough to ensure that they exceed expectations by the end of Reception. Currently no children are expected to exceed expectations in reading or mathematics. The school's assessment information shows that writing is relatively weak, reflecting the lack of emphasis on writing during day-to-day learning. This issue has been identified by the school and by the local authority, but planned actions have not yet been implemented.



## School details

Unique reference number	135213
Local authority	West Berkshire
Inspection number	10040695

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	422
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Michele Blain
Executive headteacher	John Micklewhite
Telephone number	01635 42155
Website	<a href="http://www.thewillowsnewbury.org.uk">www.thewillowsnewbury.org.uk</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:headteacher@willows.w-berks.sch.uk">headteacher@willows.w-berks.sch.uk</a>
Date of previous inspection	5–6 December 2013

## Information about this school

- The Willows is slightly larger than the average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is above average.
- The percentage of pupils from minority ethnic groups is below average.
- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is well above average.
- The school does not meet the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum requirements for pupils' achievement in English and mathematics by the end of key stage 2.
- The early years provision includes part-time classes for two-year olds and Nursery-age children. There are two Reception classes which children attend full time.
- In 2017, the school was notified as being within the government's definition for coasting schools in relation to pupils' progress measures.
- The executive headteacher is a national leader of education and works at the school

three days each week. The head of school is in charge the rest of the week.

- At the time of the inspection, the school was seeking to appoint a permanent headteacher.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed lessons and conducted learning walks around the school. They were accompanied by members of the leadership team during most of these observations. They spoke to pupils during lessons and at breaktimes and lunchtimes.
- Inspectors scrutinised pupils' current workbooks and heard groups of pupils from Years 1, 2 and 6 read.
- Discussions were held with the governing body. Meetings were also held with senior leaders, teachers with responsibilities for subject areas, the leader in charge of safeguarding and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors analysed a range of documents provided by the school, including information about pupils' attainment and progress, attendance, the school's self-evaluation, improvement planning, local authority support, safeguarding and checks on the quality of teaching.
- Parents' views were gathered by speaking to parents at the beginning of the school day. Inspectors analysed the 99 responses submitted to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and took account of the 14 responses to the staff survey.

## Inspection team

Rob Crompton, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Alison Ashcroft	Ofsted Inspector
Christopher Crouch	Ofsted Inspector

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