



Willow Lane Community Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 119134
LEA Lancashire
Inspection number 280470
Inspection dates 13 June 2006 to 14 June 2006
Reporting inspector Mr Alastair Younger

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Willow Lane
School category	Community		Lancaster
Age range of pupils	4 to 11		Lancashire, LA1 5PR LA1 5PR
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01524 65880
Number on roll	119	Fax number	01524 844687
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs Tracy Moat
Date of previous inspection	1 May 2004	Headteacher	

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
4 to 11	13 June 2006 - 14 June 2006	280470

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is a smaller than average school in a relatively deprived area of Lancaster. Many pupils arrive with weak social skills and with little previous learning. Many more than average have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Very few pupils come from minority ethnic backgrounds. The school is currently led by an acting headteacher with the support of a consultant headteacher. A new headteacher has been appointed to take up post in September. Numbers of pupils have declined substantially since 2000 but have stabilised over the past two years.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school accurately describes itself as satisfactory. Parents are greatly appreciative of the good improvements that have been made over the past two terms. They are very happy with the education their children are getting. The school is giving satisfactory value for money.

In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

There has been little continuity in leadership and management in recent years but, since January 2006, the acting and consultant headteachers have done a good job in bringing about improvement. They have recently been working closely with the newly appointed headteacher to ensure a smooth succession from a position of strength rather than weakness. This has been greatly aided by perceptive and accurate self-evaluation. The school now has a clearly plotted and potentially bright future and is well placed to build on recent improvements. A concentration on improving the Foundation Stage has resulted in pupils making satisfactory progress.

Last year's results in tests at the end of Year 6 were poor. They showed that the school was adding little value to pupils' learning. It is very clear that this year's results are going to be very much better. The school can confidently predict this because it has vastly improved the way in which it checks pupils' progress and because it knows that Year 6 pupils have been well taught. All pupils are likely to achieve their targets in English, mathematics and science and many will probably exceed them. The new system for checking pupils' progress shows at a glance if they are slipping in their learning. If the cause of this turns out to be that they are experiencing personal difficulties, they are given good support by a learning mentor. The system would be more supportive if closer links were identified between individual support plans and individual education plans.

Teaching is satisfactory and improving. Good teaching is clearly evident in Years 3/4 and 6. It is probably no coincidence that attendance in the Year 3/4 class far outstrips other classes and is significantly higher than the national average. This class is taught by the acting headteacher, showing how well she leads by example. The difference between stronger and weaker teaching often comes down to confidence. Pupils are keen to learn and behaviour in class is good. More confident and experienced teachers recognise this and get on with teaching, allowing pupils to chat and share ideas. Less assured teachers interrupt lessons too much, being too sensitive to minor indiscretions. When they stop teaching to admonish individuals, they merely stop the rest of the class from learning, curb enthusiasm, slow the pace of lessons and leave the mood a bit flat. The school monitors teaching frequently and accurately but at the moment is not putting its findings to good enough use in raising standards further. The observations are perceptive and useful to individual teachers but there is not enough analysis to highlight common strengths and weaknesses and to identify common training needs. For instance, few teachers are varying work enough to make sure that all pupils can attempt work with similar degrees of independence.

Pupils are happy, safe and enjoy attending. Parents are almost unanimous in saying so and it is clearly evident in lessons and playtimes that this is the case. There is a lovely atmosphere. The politeness of pupils and the way they work and play together amply demonstrate how good their social skills are. Their enthusiasm for learning about people from other cultures shines out in photographs and written accounts of a recent 'world faith day' and pupils are raising funds for a school in Nigeria. The Activemark Gold Award shows the school's commitment to helping pupils to live healthy lives. Singing in the local church brings pleasure to many local people and there are close links with the adjacent nursery and community centre. Other contributions to the community are limited. Staff have created a hugely stimulating learning environment with displays of pupils' work which far outstrip those seen in most schools. The school is immaculately maintained and a sense of pride amongst staff and pupils is clearly evident, especially in the quality of presentation of pupils' work. Writing has been a focus for improvement this year. The evidence of success is all around and strongly celebrated, for instance, in high quality assemblies where pupils' best work is shared with the whole school.

The curriculum presents pupils with a suitable range of learning opportunities. There are frequent trips and the experiences pupils gain from these are imaginatively used: for instance, in a Year 2 literacy lesson where pupils wrote about a trip with the emphasis on conveying the passing of time. Opportunities to develop better writing skills are woven into many lessons but there is plenty of scope to extend links between subjects in order to make the best use of time and help pupils to understand that although subjects have different names they are often closely interrelated. Topic work, for instance, often misses opportunities to do this.

What the school should do to improve further

- Vary tasks in lessons so that less able pupils can work with more independence.
- Make better use of monitoring to improve teaching by building on strengths and addressing common weaknesses.
- Develop the planning of topic work to identify closer links between subjects.
- Keep looking for opportunities to contribute more to the community.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Achievement is satisfactory and standards are broadly in line with national averages. These reflect the considerable improvements in the quality of education that have been made this year. Children in the Foundation Stage make satisfactory progress. They arrive and leave with below average learning skills but most meet their goals. Their social skills improve considerably and they enter Key Stage 1 well prepared for the National Curriculum. Satisfactory progress continues through Years 1 and 2. Results from last year showed pupils performing close to national averages in reading and numeracy but slightly less so in writing. Teacher assessments, backed up by external consultation, point to the school exceeding its Year 6 targets and performing close to the standards expected nationally this year.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

This stands out as a strength of the school. The progress pupils make in becoming socially aware and developing personal skills stands them in good stead to become useful, decent members of society. Children in the Foundation Stage and Years 1 and 2 benefit greatly from role play sessions which they learn how to cooperate, share and make choices whilst developing independence and developing their language skills in the simulated environments of a café, supermarket and launderette. This year's attendance stands at 93.8%, which is a little below the national average.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching is satisfactory. There is no unsatisfactory teaching nor any that is truly inspiring. Nevertheless, there is a sound base on which to build. What is needed now is to increase the frequency of good and better teaching. In nearly all classes, this would be helped if teachers matched tasks more effectively to individual ability. Too often, tasks are the same for all pupils; only the degree of support they receive and the expected outcomes differ. Teaching assistants often offer good support to individuals but their time is not always used efficiently, for example, to help in the preparation of resources. Much of the satisfactory teaching would be improved if teachers brought more sparkle to lessons.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

This is satisfactory. All statutory requirements are met but the planning for topic work does not show how it improves learning opportunities. Foundation Stage children are helped to learn through exploration, play and investigation. In the rest of the school, there is a good focus on English, mathematics, science and information and communication technology and sufficient time is dedicated to other subjects to make learning meaningful and varied. Learning opportunities are often extended beyond the classroom through an appropriate range of trips and clubs. Recent art and book weeks have successfully inspired pupils and greatly added to their enjoyment of learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Good care is taken to ensure that pupils are well protected and can learn in an environment where potential risk is minimised. The quality of guidance and support offered to pupils has been greatly enhanced by keeping a much closer check on their academic progress than was previously the case. This has helped to identify pupils

who could be doing better and who now receive carefully targeted support to help them do so and thus raise standards.

Good arrangements are used efficiently to help pupils to transfer from the Reception class to Year 1 and from Year 6 to secondary school with as little anxiety as possible.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The school has a chequered history and an untested future. The effectiveness of the school is now underpinned by a clear vision of what pupils are achieving and how standards can be raised. Parents, the local authority, governors and staff share great confidence that the worst of times are over and there is a good resolve to ensure that they do not return. The accuracy of the school's self-evaluation and the pace of change under its current leadership show that the school has good capacity for further improvement. Subject leadership is satisfactory and teachers have made satisfactory progress in meeting their performance targets. A lot of support has been directed towards the Foundation Stage and this has paid off in improved teaching and management. Governors remain very supportive of the school but need to become more involved in finding out for themselves what life in school is like for staff and pupils.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	3	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	NA
The behaviour of learners	2	NA
The attendance of learners	3	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	NA

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	3	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	3	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	NA
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	NA

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

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Willow Lane Community Primary School

Willow Lane

Lancaster

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15 June 2006

Dear Pupils

It was a real pleasure to visit your school the other day. The first thing that impressed me was how incredibly polite you all were and how many of you knew my name. It's good to be reminded now and again because sometimes I begin to think my name is Mr Inspector. Thanks also to the two of you who bumped into me in the corner shop after the inspection, expressed dismay that I wasn't returning tomorrow and invited me back next year.

I called in to check how you were getting on and to see if I could make any suggestions as to how the school could be improved. You are getting on OK in lessons and I was most impressed by how neatly you work. The school looks wonderful and thanks to your good behaviour and enthusiasm it's got a lovely feel about it. You probably don't need me to tell you how well you're looked after. The teaching is all right but I'm asking teachers to give thought to varying work a bit more so that you can do more of it yourselves. I'm also suggesting they look at how they teach topic work and whether they can make it a bit clearer how all the subjects you learn about relate to each other. I hope your new headteacher is going to keep checking up on whether this makes any difference.

Good luck to those of you who are leaving in a few weeks and, for those of you who are coming back, I've got this sneaking suspicion that your school is going to get even better next year.

All the best

Alastair Younger

(Lead inspector)