

Willow Tree Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104772
Local Authority	St Helens
Inspection number	308664
Inspection dates	5–6 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Sheila O'Keeffe

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	295
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Jackie Lowe
Headteacher	Mrs Margaret Huyton
Date of previous school inspection	16 November 1998
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Leach Lane Sutton Leach St Helens Merseyside WA9 4LZ
Telephone number	01744 819003
Fax number	01744 819003

Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is larger than average in size and is situated in an area of social disadvantage. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is well above the national average. There is a much higher percentage than normal of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. All pupils are of White British heritage. The number of pupils joining and leaving the school at other than the usual transfer times is above average. The school has a newly opened Community Centre. It has gained the Early Years Kitemark, an Activemark and National Healthy Schools accreditation.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Willow Tree is a satisfactory and improving school with some good features.

Within the overall good care, guidance and support pupils receive, they are cared for extremely well. The most vulnerable pupils are supported outstandingly and this, together with excellent partnerships with outside agencies, enables these pupils to overcome significant barriers to their learning. The school provides a calm, friendly and caring atmosphere which promotes pupils' good personal development. Standards are below average in both Key Stages 1 and 2 but have steadily improved over the last three years. Almost all parents appreciate what the school provides, including access to family learning programmes and parenting skills courses in the school's new Community Centre.

Pupils achieve satisfactorily overall. Some groups of pupils make good progress, for example, those in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). In addition, pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities also make satisfactory progress because their achievable learning targets have been matched well to their individual needs. Most children join the Nursery with skills below, and some well below, the level expected for their age. By the end of Year 6, standards are slightly below the national average indicating satisfactory progress overall. New techniques are being introduced to improve the quality of pupils' writing, but it is too soon to see any impact in terms of improved standards.

Pupils' personal development is good. They behave well and enjoy school. Pupils have good cultural awareness and an effective appreciation of how to eat healthily and to keep fit and safe. They raise money for good causes, are developing eco- awareness, understand dangers and treat each other with respect. Pupils see school as a safe place where they can be nurtured, develop their self-esteem, grow in confidence and prepare for their future lives. Attendance is satisfactory and improving. The school has strategies in place to improve the attendance of all pupils and, in particular, a small group of persistent poor attenders.

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. There is some good and outstanding teaching. In the best lessons, pupils are actively involved and work is planned to match their different needs. However, some teaching does not offer sufficient challenge. This is particularly the case for more able pupils. The marking of pupils' work is good and informs pupils of what they need to do to improve. There is a straightforward system to assess and track pupils' progress. It is not always used consistently by all staff to check closely on the ongoing progress made by the pupils in their class.

The curriculum is satisfactory and meets the needs of most learners. The school is good at providing experiences that improve pupils' chances of leading a safe, healthy and outward looking life. However, pupils are given too few opportunities to practise their basic skills, such as writing, number, and information and communication technology (ICT) in a range of subjects.

The quality of leadership and management is satisfactory and improving. Governance is good. School self-evaluation is accurate. Under the direction of school leaders key issues have been correctly identified and prioritised, in order to improve standards. Senior leaders have a clear picture of what needs to be done. Through overcoming difficulties with staffing issues and gradually improving standards and pupils' achievements over the last three years, the school is demonstrating good capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children enter the Nursery with overall skills below those expected. Some of those skills are well below those expected for their age, particularly in speaking and listening and personal development. The school works effectively to strengthen these weaker skills. As a result, children make good gains in their learning and reach broadly average levels typical for their age at the end of their Reception year. Provision for the youngest children is good because it is effectively led and managed. Teamwork amongst staff is a strong feature, enabling good planning and assessment to take place. The staff plan well for the children's individual needs and the next steps they need in order for them to make good progress. The learning environment is safe, bright and stimulating and children respond well to structure and routine. There are high expectations of behaviour and children are encouraged to work cooperatively to develop their independence. There is a good balance of teacher-led and child-initiated activities and teaching and learning is good. There are too few opportunities to encourage exploration in order to allow children to discover things for themselves and to solve problems.

Careful observations and records are made to assess children's learning with a strong emphasis on their social, emotional and physical needs. Children have access to a nurture programme to give them extra specialist support to help them to be more ready to learn.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards, especially in writing.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning so that all pupils, especially those who are more able, are challenged.

A small proportion of schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils' standards at the end of Year 6 are below average, but improving, and achievement is satisfactory. The proportions of Year 6 pupils attaining the expected Level 4 in science and mathematics are slightly below the national average and lower in English, especially in writing. At the higher Level 5, science is above the national average and below in mathematics and English. This shows that, in spite of an improvement in standards over time, pupils are not achieving well enough in English, especially writing. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress because of the effective support they receive.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

This is a strength of the school. The school does much to help large numbers of children with additional needs, for example, the nurture group and the behaviour improvement programme. The school has worked successfully to establish clear boundaries of what is acceptable and gives rewards for good behaviour. As a result, pupils behave well in and around the school. They enjoy school and their attendance is improving. The number of pupils with severe

attendance problems is falling because the school works effectively with families, for example, inviting parents to accompany their children to a free breakfast club.

Spiritual, social, moral and cultural development is good. Pupils understand right and wrong and show good awareness of other cultures, for example, in their European countries project. Pupils have a good understanding of healthy lifestyles. They know what foods are beneficial to their health and which to treat with caution. They know the dangers of substance abuse because of the effective personal, social and health education programme. Pupils feel safe in school and treat others with respect. They show commitment to their community in the way they enjoy responsibility, for example, older pupils care for infants at lunchtime, raise money for charities and some participate in an active school council. The school council has helped to bring about improvements in playground facilities and to obtain more secure fencing around the school. Preparation for pupils' economic well-being is satisfactory because while pupils have strong personal development, their literacy, numeracy and ICT skills need improvement.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is inconsistent. Pupils' satisfactory achievements have been produced by overall sound teaching that includes some good and outstanding practice. Where learning is less effective, teachers do not always challenge the pupils sufficiently well. In the best lessons pupils are actively involved in their own learning and self-assessment and work is well matched to their needs. Some lessons do not provide sufficient challenge for different ability groups, particularly the more able pupils. Pupils enjoy their lessons and most know their targets and explain how to improve their work. Pupils have good relationships with each other and their teachers. Teachers' marking is clear, consistent and encourages pupils to improve their work. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported in class and through the intervention groups and nurture programmes, to enable them to progress satisfactorily.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum meets statutory requirements. Whilst meeting the needs of most learners, it does not always fully address those of more able pupils. Because the curriculum is taught as separate subjects, the links pupils make between subjects are restricted which slows their progress. The school's plans to develop the curriculum on a themed approach are well advanced. The introduction of a wider range of enrichment activities such as visits and visitors add to pupils' enjoyment and personal development by encouraging their inquisitiveness of the world around them. There is a wide range of extra-curricular activities, especially in sports, which add to pupils' healthy lifestyles.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Appropriate procedures are in place to ensure the health, safety and protection of all pupils. Although pupils are provided with excellent pastoral care and support, their academic guidance is no better than satisfactory. Because pupils are cared for so well, they feel fully supported and very secure. This helps them to develop self-confidence and to form healthy relationships.

More vulnerable pupils, in particular, are enabled to substantially overcome any difficulties they have in learning or to follow codes of behaviour. The excellent partnerships with outside agencies contribute to the success in this area. Assessment information is not always used effectively enough to ensure that work is matched to meet all pupils' needs.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory and improving. The headteacher, supported by the deputy headteacher provide good leadership, which is focused on improving and raising standards. Procedures to evaluate strengths and weaknesses are comprehensive and provide an accurate assessment of the effectiveness of the school. Reorganisation of middle leaders' work is in progress to define roles more closely and make it more effective. Leaders' and managers' commitment to inclusion is good. Target-setting is realistic and adequately demanding. This results in most pupils achieving satisfactorily. Community cohesion is satisfactory; it is in the early stages of development. Governance is good. Governors have a good knowledge of the school and are very supportive. They are not afraid to ask pertinent questions and have a good knowledge of the school's key issues for development. The school provides satisfactory value for money.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

Achievement and standards

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

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

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Inspection of Willow Tree Primary School, St Helens, WA9 4LZ

On behalf of the inspectors I would like to thank you very much for your help when we visited your school. We enjoyed our visit very much and I would like to share with you what we thought of your school.

Your school is giving you a satisfactory education. This means that there are some things that the school does well, but there are other things the staff need to do to make the school better.

These are the good things.

n All the staff take really good care of you and help you to be fit, safe and healthy.

n You behave well and you are growing into sensible young people who want to learn.

n Teachers are good at marking your work to help you to do better. They give you lots of opportunities for sport, visits and after-school clubs and they invite interesting visitors into school.

- Pupils who find work difficult are helped very well by teachers, classroom assistants and the learning mentor.
- The school grounds and buildings have been improved so you can play really well and enjoy things such as the breakfast club in the new Community Centre.

There are two things that I have asked the headteacher and staff to improve.

- To make sure that as many of you as possible do better in English, mathematics and science and especially to improve your writing skills.
- To make your lessons even better and more interesting by setting you harder work, especially those of you who find learning a bit easier than most, so that you can all make good progress.

You can all help by working really hard in all your lessons.