

Willowbank Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113119
Local Authority	Devon
Inspection number	311113
Inspection dates	12–13 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Jonathan Palk HMI

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	242
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ian Gibson
Headteacher	Simon Atherton
Date of previous school inspection	30 June 2003
School address	Manitoba Gardens Cullompton EX15 1EZ
Telephone number	01884 33473
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Age group	4-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Willowbank is an average-sized school. Most pupils are White British, although there are a small number from other ethnic backgrounds. There are very few pupils learning English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average. Children start school in the Reception class with skills and abilities that are generally in line with those expected for their age. The school provides additional lessons in mathematics for gifted and talented pupils from local schools. Following a period of change within leadership and management, there is now a stable leadership team.

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 provides a satisfactory education. It has made good progress on a number of important fronts since its last inspection and is well placed to improve further. As one parent reflected, 'Willowbank is definitely a different school'. The headteacher provides good leadership and, along with governors and senior leaders, has a clear view of what still needs to be improved. Honest, accurate and thorough evaluation is a positive feature of the leadership and management. Staff have shown a readiness to adapt practice. This has already led to improvement in several important aspects, including pupils' progress in English.

Standards are average. Children get off to a good start in the mixed Reception and Year 1 classes. Pupils' achievements are satisfactory. However, a number of pupils of all abilities are still in the process of catching up and are not attaining their full potential. Progress is good in reading and writing but is more variable in mathematics because pupils do not benefit from such carefully targeted support. The school has established accurate assessment information about all pupils and is setting challenging targets. Teaching and learning are also improving and are satisfactory. There is much teaching that is good but some that is not as effective. Teachers forge good relationships with pupils and are planning work that is well matched to pupils' abilities. This is certainly helping the minority of pupils who are behind to catch up. Not all teachers are good at asking the challenging questions that develop pupils' thinking, and some lessons proceed at too slow a pace.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are satisfactory. Pupils have positive attitudes to lessons and work well independently and with each other. Teachers encourage this and, consequently, pupils really enjoy school. Behaviour is satisfactory. Not all pupils show sufficient respect towards each other and there are too many incidents of pupils falling out with each other. Within the broad and soundly balanced curriculum, pupils acquire positive attitudes towards healthy lifestyles. They are rightly proud of the improvements to playtimes to which they have contributed and they enjoy the regular video-conference links they have with pupils in a school in France. The quality of care, guidance and support is satisfactory. The systems for monitoring and tracking pupils' progress are good and the information is used well by teachers and leaders. The systems for keeping track of pupils' pastoral care, including recording responses to unsatisfactory behaviour, need more structure and this is a concern shared by some parents.

Governors are kept well informed and ask the challenging questions to help them judge the school's performance. The senior leadership team is taking a pivotal role in the school and gaining valuable expertise in targeting improvement where it can be most effective. Leadership and management is satisfactory overall. The curriculum is clearly growing stronger with initiatives such as the recent focus on phonics and pupil targets. These initiatives are too recent to have shown through in terms of their impact on standards and personal development .

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Parents comment on how well informed they are about their children's progress and the good induction arrangements. These enable children to settle very quickly and, consequently, they quickly begin to make progress. The relatively new staff team works closely together. There are more gaps in children's communication, language and literacy development than other areas of their learning when they start. Teachers are very good at matching the right experiences

to the children and almost all are on track to meet or exceed national expectations by the end of the year in most areas of learning. Children enjoy writing and reading, and play and learn together well. There are clear routines for children within which they are encouraged to make independent choices, and this they do well. The indoor learning environment is stimulating and the planned activities are adapted to children's interests and aptitudes. The outdoor area does not match the quality of provision inside and this is a planned priority for development.

What the school should do to improve further

- Provide more carefully targeted support for pupils to accelerate their progress in mathematics.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by ensuring that all lessons are briskly paced and that all teachers pose pupils questions that prompt them to think for themselves.
- Strengthen the arrangements for checking on pupils' pastoral care and personal development.

A small proportion of the 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

Last year's national curriculum test results were average. Pupils made good progress in English and reached their targets. Progress in mathematics was variable and some children who could be expected to reach higher levels did not. The school recognised some pupils in Year 2 were not making sufficient progress and has reorganised classes to accommodate this. Year 2 pupils are already making good progress and evidence shows their attainment is average. Through the daily focus on reading and writing, pupils in Years 3 to 6 continue to make good progress. There are a minority of pupils who do not make the progress they should in mathematics. Systems are now much improved for identifying pupils who are at risk of falling behind. There is more effective grouping of pupils in lessons because of this information but there are insufficient intervention strategies in mathematics in place. The school is working to make this possible by training support staff.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils like school, say they are happy, and enjoy learning. Attendance is satisfactory. Reading is popular with pupils of all abilities and pupils are proud of their achievements in writing. In most lessons, independent learning opportunities are good so pupils increasingly work without support. Pupils report some bullying but know how to ask for help. All those spoken to said how they felt safe in school but some say that play is overboisterous and 'a bit rough'. The small play areas do not help. Social and cultural elements are the strongest aspects of their satisfactory spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. There is a good contribution to the school community through the very active school council. Their good ideas, like the friendship bench and purchasing small play equipment, are starting to improve playtime activities. Pupils' social responsibility develops well through the 'buddy' system and duties like library monitors and prefects. Older pupils have a mature understanding of multicultural society, through projects on Africa, Australia and Asia and a video-conferencing link with a French school. Physical education and sporting activities, including swimming, are much enjoyed, but pupils think more could be done to encourage healthy eating.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Classrooms are calm and businesslike and pupils benefit from the very positive relationships they have with staff. This ensures that there are good opportunities for them to work collaboratively and show initiative. Teachers use the skills and expertise of support staff very well to enhance learning in lessons and as part of the intensive support programme for reading and writing. Recent initiatives have strengthened teachers' lesson planning and ensure a close match of work to meet pupils' needs. The step-by-step planning guidance has had a marked impact on teachers' confidence in teaching mathematics. Wall displays are used productively to encourage learning through, for instance, reminders of what has already been learnt. Pupils are clear about what it is they are trying to learn and are starting to share with their teachers their views on whether they have been successful. There is good marking in older pupils' writing books that shows how well they are meeting their targets. This practice is not consistent throughout the school. In some lessons, time is not used effectively. This is because the teacher spends too long talking and pupils' attention wanders, reducing their learning. Generally, teachers do not make enough use of questions to challenge pupils and encourage them to think for themselves.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

All subjects are covered and particular attention is given to improving basic skills, with achievement and standards rising as a result. A promising start has been made in improving provision for gifted and talented mathematicians. The programme taught in school makes a good contribution to the provision for gifted and talented pupils from the wider community of schools. The use of information and communication technology is now much better, with interactive whiteboards installed in most classrooms and used regularly. Older pupils enjoy learning French and their links to a French school. There are appropriate curriculum days, visits to support lessons and good opportunities for sport such as the local swimming gala. However, the school recognises that more needs to be done to extend enrichment opportunities and to further enhance the curriculum.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The staff care about their pupils and understand their needs well. The academic guidance given to pupils of all abilities, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, is good, aided by skilled teacher assistant support. Pupils all have individual learning targets and most, including the youngest, know what they are. Self-assessment is developing effectively. There is sound external support for pupils identified as being vulnerable, although the support for the few pupils learning English as an additional language is insufficient. Safeguarding is secure, with appropriate staff checks. The monitoring of pupils' pastoral care and its associated record keeping lacks cohesion. A few parents raised bullying and behaviour issues with inspectors. There is not enough clarity on how these are resolved. Attendance monitoring is satisfactory but the school does not accurately record all unauthorised absences.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher is very good at giving direction to the work of school leaders and has formed an effective team. There are clearly expressed action plans to continue the successful developments of the last two years. The school's procedures for checking the academic progress of individual pupils and for monitoring the school's overall effectiveness are good and used effectively to improve teaching and learning and raise expectations. For example, a regular programme of lesson observations, scrutiny of work and discussions with pupils combine well with progress data to give all leaders a clear view of academic progress. Good professional development opportunities for middle leaders have helped harness the enthusiasm and drive towards improvement. There is some good work going on that is improving pupils' personal development and well-being but this is too piecemeal to secure better outcomes.

Resources are used effectively. There is good use of support staff to target the underachievers. This is rapidly reducing a legacy of underachievement and eliminating low attainment. Governors have placed themselves strategically at the heart of the standards agenda. They have a good understanding of the data and keep a regular check on the successes of various strategies.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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?	3
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	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 disabilities make progress	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	3
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 the 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?	3

¹ Grade 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.

Annex A

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	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

13 February 2008

Dear Pupils Inspection of Willowbank Primary School, Cullompton EX15 1EZ

Thank you all for making us so welcome in your school. Ms Bedawi and I really enjoyed our visit, talking with you and joining you for lessons. Your school is really improving quickly and the changes that have taken place since inspectors last visited are having a positive impact on your achievement. We particularly liked the fact that you have been involved in some of these changes, for example, improving the games available at playtime and discussing with your teachers how well you are making progress in your work. We think that your school provides you with a satisfactory education. We agree with your teachers that you are making good progress in reading and writing, but the school should do more to help you make good progress in mathematics.

You behave well in lessons but we did feel that you could try harder to enjoy your playtimes together. We know some of you have started to learn how to resolve conflicts but more of you could make an effort. You told us that you really enjoy school and feel safe and well cared for. The school could help with this by keeping a better track of this aspect of your education.

Your teachers work hard. They are always on the look-out to find ways to make your learning more enjoyable, for example, by providing exciting reading books and projects that are fun to do. We both liked the links you have established with a school in France and hope you keep these going. We saw some really good lessons but I have asked that the headteacher and teachers try and make sure all your lessons are as good as the best.

Thank your parents for us for filling out the questionnaire. They are supportive of your school. Quite a lot of them wrote to us and we have passed on a summary of their views of how the school could get even better to your hard-working governing body. Best wishes

Mr J Palk Her Majesty's Inspector

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Her Majesty's Inspector