

# The Willows Primary School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	132084
<b>Local Authority</b>	ESSEX LA
<b>Inspection number</b>	315915
<b>Inspection dates</b>	21–22 January 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	John Francis

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	530
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Arnold Lutton
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Mark Abbott
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	9 June 2003
<b>School address</b>	Church Road Basildon ESSEX SS14 2EX
<b>Telephone number</b>	01268 470880
<b>Fax number</b>	01268 450051

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<b>Age group</b>	3–11
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

This is a large primary school close to the centre of Basildon. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meal is average. The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage and there are very few who do not have English as their first language. The proportion of pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average but there is significant variation between year groups. The proportion with a statement of special educational need is broadly average. Attainment on entry is well below the level expected for children of this age.

The school has an Active Sport Mark award and Investors in People status.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 3

This school provides a satisfactory standard of education. Pupils are well cared for and procedures to keep them safe are secure. This shows in pupils' personal development. While this is satisfactory overall, pupils behave well and show great enthusiasm for their learning. This enthusiasm does appear a little at odds with the below average attendance but much of this is the result of families taking holiday during term time.

Although pupils make sound progress in relation to their starting points, standards are below average in Year 2 and Year 6; particularly in English. Writing is an area of weakness across the school. The current focus on improving literacy is improving pupils' progress and achievement. However, there are too few opportunities for pupils to write at length. There are examples of good and occasionally outstanding teaching within what is an overall satisfactory picture. Particular strengths seen right across the school are in the quality of relationships and the way pupils' successes are celebrated. This gives them the confidence to try new things without fear of failure. However, weaknesses in target setting limit pupils' understanding of the next steps in their learning. Within an otherwise satisfactory curriculum, one area that is less effective is in the change to the curriculum and teaching styles between Reception and Year 1.

Leadership and management are satisfactory and there are some areas of strength. Progress since the last inspection has been good and the school demonstrates a good capacity for continued improvement. This comes from the leaders' clear understanding of what the school does well and where it needs to improve. There are also good systems for assessing and tracking pupils' progress, which enable school leaders to have a more accurate measure of improvement. This has helped lead to improvements in pupils' progress over the last year and the more challenging targets now being set. A sound development plan guides school improvement and the school's future direction. However, it does not clearly show what the school has set as its targets for success or how and when the progress towards these will be checked on.

## Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

### Grade: 3

Children make a positive start and settle quickly into the Nursery. By the time they are ready to go into Year 1, while the majority of children remain well below the expected levels in most areas of learning, many have made gains in personal development. This is the result of good levels of care and the good relationships established. Children's language skills remain very low. Many have poor speech but staff accept poor diction without correcting this to provide good models for the children. Additionally, there are too few opportunities for children to write or mark-make for different purposes. The curriculum is firmly rooted in providing experience in all areas of learning and the outdoor provision is good. However, some of the activities in Reception are not always sufficiently well adapted to the children's needs.

The provision does not always enable a suitable balance between the more formal adult-led activities and those children select for themselves. Good assessment and record keeping enable teachers to keep a close check on children's progress.

## What the school should do to improve further

- Provide more opportunities for pupils to write at greater length in all subjects to reinforce and develop their literacy skills.

- Make target setting more consistent so pupils are clear about what they need to do to improve their work and move on to the next steps in their learning.
- Improve the school's development plan to include measurable outcomes and timescales to enable more effective monitoring by all those with school leadership responsibilities.
- Ensure a smoother transition between Foundation Stage and Year 1 through matching the curriculum and teaching styles more closely to children's needs.
- Widen the range of strategies aimed at improving attendance and keep parents better informed about the impact of absence and lateness on children's learning.

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**

Standards in Year 6 are below average and test results over time show that they have been for many years. However, the more recent focus on writing is now improving progress and raising literacy standards. This has had a good impact on achievement in Key Stage 2, where many more pupils now achieve in line with their capability. Nevertheless, many still lack basic skills in spelling and punctuation and have a limited range of vocabulary. In mathematics and science, standards are also improving and in science, they are average. However, too few pupils reach the higher Level 5 in any of the tested subjects. At Year 2, the latest national assessment results show standards to be exceptionally low in reading and writing. However, recent assessments also show improvement, although not as dramatic as those seen in Years 3 to 6. Children in the Foundation Stage make satisfactory progress but very few reach the expected levels by the time they move into Year 1. Good support from teaching assistants for those pupils who have learning difficulties enables them to progress faster than many others in the class.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 3**

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory with moral and social development as the stronger elements. This shows in pupils' good behaviour and their generally friendly and helpful manner around school. Pupils feel free from harassment and know how to keep themselves safe. They also understand the need for exercise and have many opportunities for this during and outside the school day. Pupils feel confident in their contributions to school, for example, through the school council, and enjoy their involvement with the wider community.

However, poor attendance and instances of lateness across the school limit the progress of some pupils. Pupils have good social skills and with their current achievements, have a satisfactory preparation for their future schooling and beyond.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 3**

Within this satisfactory picture, there are examples of good and occasionally outstanding teaching. These lessons create great enthusiasm and take learning along at a rapid pace. In all classes, relationships are strong and teachers are very good at celebrating pupils' successes.

Pupils respond well to teachers' positive expectations and are becoming confident learners. They understand what they have to achieve in lessons and teachers regularly reinforce this expectation. However, not all teachers return to this at the end of the lesson to provide a final check on pupils' learning. The marking of pupils' work is also inconsistent. While there are many good examples, some fail to pinpoint what pupils need to do to improve further or address gaps in their understanding. As a result, not all pupils are sure about the details of their targets for improvement. Pupils' speaking and listening skills are promoted well but these are not always linked effectively to helping pupils further improve their writing.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 3**

Good links are being made between subjects to support pupils' learning. The teaching of English and mathematics in ability sets in Years 4 to 6 is having a positive impact on pupils' progress and achievement. However, not enough use is made of information and communication technology (ICT) in lessons. Another aspect that is less successful is the provision for pupils in Year 1. The change to a more formal learning style is too much for the majority of pupils who have not yet developed the skills they need to benefit from this. Extra-curricular activities provide good opportunities for pupils to improve their health and well-being through sport or through taking part in intellectual activities such as chess. As well as being popular, they also provide good opportunities for those who show particular talents or gifts in these areas. The excellence of the gymnastic club is seen in the very high standards achieved, particularly by the girls, who are Essex Schools' champions.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 2**

All requirements for the care and safeguarding of children are in place and good links with other agencies ensure pupils receive the support they need. This is particularly good for those who have learning difficulties or behavioural problems. Good management of the special needs provision is targeting areas of weakness and improving pupils' rate of progress. While the school works hard to improve attendance, this has had only limited success. Where teachers have made great strides is in the assessment, recording and tracking of pupils' progress. The impact of this is seen in improvements to lesson planning and pupils' achievement.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 3**

The headteacher and deputy headteacher have introduced a number of well-managed initiatives following accurate whole-school evaluation. Improvements to the school's systems for target setting and the provision for inclusion are both good features. Good work by the school leadership teams ensures that the impact of these systems is beginning to show. Regular monitoring keeps a check on the areas for development, but too much of the classroom observation focuses on what the teacher is doing rather than how effectively pupils' are learning. The school's development plan identifies the right priorities. However, there are few clearly measurable outcomes. Additionally, the way it is set out makes it more difficult for school leaders to check easily on the success of the initiatives. Governors have a sound understanding of the school's work and keep a close eye on the use of the school budget.

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

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards <sup>1</sup> 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	2

### 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	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
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?	2

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
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 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	3
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

23 January 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Willows Primary School, Basildon, SS14 2EX

Many of you will remember that Mrs Dawson, Mr Bancroft and I visited your school a little while ago. We were very impressed by the warm welcome you gave us, and your politeness. You are a credit to yourselves and the school - well done. All of you that we talked with were very keen to share your work and ideas. This letter is to tell you what we found out about your school.

Your school provides a sound education for you. All of the adults take good care of you and work hard to make your learning interesting. Many of you work hard for your school and the children who go there. For example, the play leaders help the younger children and many of you have good ideas of how to improve your school. You told us how much you enjoy school, and how you like to work hard and try your best. We could see this in the many interesting displays of your work. You also told us that everyone in school generally gets on with each other. The way you play together and help each other in lessons shows this well. You have really worked hard to make your behaviour good.

To help you do even better we have asked the teachers to let you use your writing skills more often. We have also asked them to make sure you understand your targets so you know when you have reached them and how you can move on to the next steps. As well as this, we have asked teachers in Year 1 to look at how they can better plan the work for the children there to help their learning. Finally, we have asked Mr Abbott and the governors to be clearer about the way they check on how well the school is doing.

You can do your bit by making sure you come to school as regularly as you can and on time, so you can enjoy all of the exciting things going on. We wish you well for the future and hope you continue to work hard and get even better.

John Francis

Lead inspector