

Willowbrook School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	132778
Local Authority	Devon
Inspection number	316013
Inspection dates	4–5 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Andrew Redpath 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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	224
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Beverley Walker
Headteacher	Julie Humphreys
Date of previous school inspection	30 June 2003
School address	Summer Lane Beacon Heath Exeter EX4 8NN
Telephone number	01392 466208
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Age group	3–11
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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

Willowbrook School is an average sized school located in a suburb of Exeter, which contains areas of significant deprivation. A nursery provides part-time places for 38 children. The proportions of pupils eligible for free school meals and of those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are more than twice the national average. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds with English as their first language. The proportion of pupils joining or leaving the school at other than the usual times is higher than that found in most schools. There have been several changes in staffing during 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: 4

Willowbrook School provides an unsatisfactory education for its pupils. In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

Pupils' achievement is unsatisfactory. Children get off to a good start in the Nursery class and by the end of Year 2 they have made satisfactory progress. By the end of Year 6 pupils' attainment is below average and less than might be expected given their starting points. The quality of teaching ranges from outstanding to inadequate and is satisfactory overall. Several positive strategies have been introduced to raise pupils' achievement. However, there is a history of underperformance and recent changes have not had time to demonstrate sufficient improvement across the school. Teachers do not consistently use assessment information to ensure activities are matched closely to pupils' different levels of ability, which limits learning in some lessons. The curriculum is unsatisfactory because there is too much variation between classes in the time allocated to individual subjects and the range of experiences is not sufficiently broad.

Pupils' behaviour is good and they have positive attitudes towards learning. This is because the school provides a caring environment and has introduced several strategies to promote good behaviour. Pupils particularly appreciate the pleasant school environment and the playground equipment. The school has good links with other agencies which support pupils' social and emotional development and help tackle the below average attendance. About three quarters of those parents who returned the questionnaire sent out prior to the inspection hold totally positive views of the school. Parents are particularly pleased with how well children settle in the Nursery. In the words of one parent, 'My child attends the nursery and she loves it.' Parents also feel staff are caring and approachable and deal with any problems quickly.

Some senior leaders and those with responsibility for coordinating subjects have assumed their responsibilities recently and are still developing their roles. Promising systems have been introduced that measure pupils' progress and identify those pupils who are underachieving, but these are not yet having enough impact on their rate of learning. Senior leaders do not evaluate the school's performance with sufficient rigour. They have a satisfactory understanding of the quality of teaching through their regular lesson observations but they have a poor grasp of some other aspects of the school's work, notably the curriculum and pupils' attendance. They do not monitor them sufficiently to ensure the school has a secure picture of its performance. The school's procedures for safeguarding pupils do not meet current government requirements. The school has made progress in improving pupils' behaviour since the last inspection, but has not been successful in tackling some other areas identified for improvement. In particular, the leadership has not resolved the underachievement in Key Stage 2. The governing body does not have a good enough understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and is not in a position to question and challenge its performance. Given the weaknesses in leadership, management and governance, the school does not demonstrate capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Children start school with very low skills, particularly in communication, language and literacy development and personal, social and emotional development. They settle well in the Nursery, where there are many opportunities for children to make choices about their learning, both indoors and outside. By the end of Reception, children have made satisfactory progress overall but attainment remains well below the expected levels in all areas of learning.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Planning is detailed and the focus on developing children's social and communication skills is appropriate for meeting children's needs. The outdoor area is used appropriately for planned activities in the Reception class but opportunities for these children to share the good resources outside the Nursery are underdeveloped. Separate plans for literacy and numeracy are leading to a more formal curriculum in Reception, but are not always flexible enough to meet the ages of the children and the stages of their learning. Good assessment procedures introduced in the Nursery are enabling the teacher to track progress effectively.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards by ensuring teachers use assessment information consistently to provide suitable challenge for pupils.
- Ensure there is appropriate balance between subjects in the curriculum to provide all pupils with a broad experience of learning.
- Improve arrangements for senior leaders to monitor the work of the school so they have a more thorough understanding of the school's performance.
- Strengthen the role of the governing body so it can provide effective support and challenge to the school.
- Ensure that procedures for safeguarding pupils meet current government requirements.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

When they enter the school, most children are well below the expected starting point for their age. The rate of progress is affected by the higher than average number of pupils who join and leave the school during the school year, since many new arrivals have low levels of literacy. Children make satisfactory progress in the Foundation Stage but start Year 1 with attainment that remains well below the expected levels. By the end of Year 2 standards in reading, writing and mathematics are consistently below average each year. However, because of the more consistent approach to the teaching of literacy, pupils are beginning to catch up and progress is now satisfactory. Pupils have also improved their social skills owing to the targeted support they receive in small groups. Between Year 3 and Year 6 progress is inconsistent between classes and unsatisfactory overall. Achievement in mathematics is better than in English and science, but results in national tests at the end of Year 6 are lower than they should be. The school has introduced sharper assessment and has improved the use of targets to raise standards in mathematics and English. However, the use of targets is inconsistent and in some cases they are not matched closely enough to what pupils are expected to learn. Targets for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are not always in small enough steps to enable success to be measured accurately. The school has not been keeping information on pupils' attainment for long enough to demonstrate progress over time.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils are polite and behave well both in and around school. They appreciate the attractive surroundings and most say they much enjoy coming to school, although attendance is well below the national average. Pupils' moral and social development is good but they have limited knowledge of different cultures and religions. Pupils feel really safe and say that any incidents of bullying are dealt with promptly. They learn about keeping safe through the comprehensive personal and social education programme. Pupils have a good understanding of healthy lifestyles. This is promoted through sporting clubs, the provision of healthy food and opportunities for exercise in the playground. The school has gained the 'Healthy School' award and 'Activemark' certificate in recognition of this work.

Pupils take their responsibilities as monitors and members of the school council very seriously and this makes a satisfactory contribution to the smooth running of the school. They participate in local festivals in the community and actively raise money for charities. Pupils are developing independence and are able to work in small groups appropriately. However, low attainment in basic numeracy and literacy and too few opportunities to develop information and communication technology (ICT) skills do not equip pupils well enough for the future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are improving. Teachers are matching tasks more closely to pupils' levels of ability and identifying those pupils who need extra help. Inconsistency exists between classes, especially in the use of assessment information, the pace of learning and the level of challenge. As a result, teaching is not yet strong enough to ensure pupils make up for their relatively slow progress in recent years. There is generally a pleasant atmosphere in classes, which ensures that pupils feel happy and behave well. Teaching assistants offer satisfactory support in lessons and when taking responsibility for small groups. Their work with some pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is limited because targets are not sufficiently precise to promote small steps in learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 4

The school allocates a lot of time to developing pupils' social skills and basic numeracy and literacy; however, standards remain low because basic skills are not reinforced adequately across the curriculum. There is insufficient time allowed for teaching some subjects and not all pupils receive a broad enough range of experiences. The school does not currently teach ICT in all classes and the time available for the study of science, history, geography and design and technology is often too short. This results in pupils' knowledge and skills in these subjects being underdeveloped. The ICT facilities are currently being redesigned with support from a neighbouring school. The work of the special class for supporting pupils in the early years is particularly successful in developing pupils' social skills. The full effect of several, recently introduced initiatives to stimulate interest in learning through practical activities has yet to be demonstrated. The school provides a satisfactory range of extra-curricular clubs and visits which enrich the curriculum.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Pupils are well cared for and the school makes good provision for developing pupils' social and emotional skills. There are good links with a range of agencies who work effectively together to support the wide range of pupils' needs. The school works closely with the education welfare officer to help particular pupils who have difficulty attending school. However, it does not have a clear view of overall attendance levels and whether or not they are improving. Procedures for safeguarding pupils are inadequate because they do not comply fully with the current government requirements to keep a single central record of checks on the suitability of staff. Academic guidance and support are satisfactory because the school has recently introduced a number of procedures to track individual pupils' progress in English and mathematics. This enables the school to use the information to identify pupils who need additional support and plan intervention. Marking is satisfactory and most pupils feel they know what they have to do to improve their work. Support for pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language is satisfactory, although the school is at the early stages of using data to check the progress of different groups.

Leadership and management

Grade: 4

The headteacher and senior leaders have established a caring ethos in the school, which is shared by staff. Recently there has been a stronger focus on raising the academic standards of pupils and the school has been involved in several initiatives. However, there is a lack of evaluation to ensure these initiatives are effective in raising standards, which leads to inconsistent practice and variable impact on pupils' progress. The use of targets has been introduced to raise pupils' academic performance and an appropriate system is in place for checking pupils' progress. However, the school's use of targets is not fully effective because much data are quite recent and accurate assessment information in some subjects is not available. Although the school has a satisfactory understanding of the quality of its teaching because of the regular monitoring by senior leaders, its self-evaluation is hindered by the lack of information and weak monitoring in some other areas of its work. As a result, the school's judgement of its effectiveness is sometimes inaccurate.

The school benefits from a relatively high level of funding to help meet pupils' wide range of needs. There are examples of additional support working well, especially in Year 1 and Year 2 and in some withdrawal groups. However, the overall use of resources is not achieving sufficiently high standards. The governing body has regular meetings and it has established committees to consider different aspects of the school's work. It is not fully aware of its responsibilities and does not have an informed oversight of the school's performance.

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?	4
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No
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	4

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	4

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	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	4
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	4

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?	4
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?	4
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	4
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	4
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	4
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	4
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	4
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	No
Does this school require special measures?	Yes
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

7 March 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Willowbrook School, Exeter, EX4 8NN

As you know I visited your school recently with another inspector. Thank you to those of you who talked to us about your work and life at the school. You were very polite and helpful. I am writing to let you know what we thought about your school. There are some good things happening in your school, but we feel the school needs special help so you can all make enough progress with your work. This means that an inspector will visit to make sure the school gets better and your learning improves.

Here are the main points.

- You enjoy learning and your behaviour is good.
- You like the way your school looks and enjoy using the playground.
- The Nursery helps you settle in well when you start school.
- Your headteacher and staff care for you well and they work closely with other adults outside the school to get you support.
- Some teaching is excellent and in these lessons you learn well.
- In some lessons, teaching is not good enough to help you make the progress you should.
- You are not studying all the subjects you should be in some classes.
- Pupils do not make enough progress by the time they leave school at the end of Year 6.

We have asked the school to do four things to make it better.

- Help teachers to make better use of information on your progress so work is set at the right level.
- Make sure you spend the right amount of time studying different subjects.
- Check that all the things the school is doing are working well and helping you to learn.
- Make sure the adults who run the school get better at knowing how well the school is doing.

You can help by trying your best and telling the teachers if your work is too hard or too easy.

Best wishes

Andrew Redpath Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex B

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Andrew Redpath
Her Majesty's Inspector