

The Willows Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	135213
Local Authority	West Berkshire
Inspection number	345580
Inspection dates	17–18 March 2010
Reporting inspector	Wiola Hola

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 of pupils on the school roll	202
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Tyzack
Headteacher	Alexandra Butler
Date of previous school inspection	8 July 2009
School address	Pyle Hill Berkshire RG14 7SJ
Telephone number	01635 42155
Fax number	01635 48484
Email address	headteacher.willows@westberks.org

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester M2 7LA

T: 08456 404045

Textphone: 0161 618 8524

E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors. Inspectors spent half of their time looking at learning in lessons. On the first day, they saw eight lessons and nine teachers. Pupils were not in school on the second day but scrutiny of their work continued. Inspectors held meetings with groups of pupils, staff, three governors and two members of the local authority, one of whom is also the School Improvement Partner. They observed the school's work, and looked at records of pupils' attainment and progress, school policies, minutes of meetings of the governing body, and samples of teachers' planning and assessment records. Inspectors analysed and took account of the contents of 30 questionnaires received from parents and carers, 67 from pupils and 13 from staff.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- pupils' progress and learning and the extent of improvement in them since the school's Fresh Start
- the quality of education currently being provided, and the effectiveness of the work of leaders and managers, including governors, in improving it
- the school's procedures for safeguarding pupils
- the school's capacity to improve quickly.

Information about the school

The school was opened as a Fresh Start school in April 2006. It is of broadly average size for a primary school. There are more boys than girls. The Early Years Foundation Stage comprises one Nursery class and two Reception classes. The percentage of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is below average. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds and the rest are from a wide range of others including other White, Indian and Chinese heritages. The percentage of pupils who speak English as an additional language is close to average although there are only a few pupils at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is well above average. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is also well above average. The pupils' main needs or difficulties are moderate learning difficulties, or behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. No pupils, however, have a statement of special educational needs although several are awaiting assessment.

A children's centre operates on the school site, as does an independently run after-school club; neither of these was inspected as part of this inspection.

Following the departure of the substantive headteacher in November 2009, the school is currently led by an acting headteacher for four days a week. She is seconded from another school in the local authority.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

4

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

4

Main findings

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector 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.

The school's journey of improvement from the Fresh Start in April 2006 has been a mixed one, including periods of steady moves forward, but also times when progress has faltered or stalled. Smooth improvement has been hampered by too many staff changes, including changes in headship. There are aspects of the school that are better now than in the past, especially the overall quality of teaching and the setting out of a clear vision for future development, based on an accurate evaluation of the school's needs. Worthy of praise is the work of the acting headteacher in moving the school forward in the few months since she joined the school in November 2009. She has won the respect of staff and harnessed their desire, ideas and drive to improve the school. Nevertheless, a great deal remains to be done to ensure that all pupils achieve as well as they can, academically and in their personal development.

The strong leadership of the acting headteacher is not enough to enable the school to move forward without further assistance. Too much is currently on her shoulders alone because of the school's shortage of leadership and management expertise, and because some key members of staff are very new and have yet to establish themselves. A vacancy, for nearly a year, of a teacher to lead the school's work in relation to pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities has resulted in shortcomings in provision for this group.

Many pupils work hard, show interest and curiosity, want to please and succeed, and respect the feelings of others. However, the disruptive behaviour of a significant minority unsettles others, limits learning in some lessons, consumes the energies of staff or diverts them from other important tasks. Pupils' attendance is below average.

Pupils' attainment is still low. For too many pupils, progress since joining the school is inadequate. Having said that, standards are beginning to rise but not securely or quickly enough, even though learning in lessons is currently adequate in the main. Much effective work has gone into improving the quality of teaching. Teaching varies but is satisfactory overall, although there are still occasions when the tasks set do not meet the full range of abilities in a class, or expectations are too low. The speeding up of pupils' progress is impeded because of shortcomings in the curriculum and its organisation and in the extent to which pupils are supported and guided, particularly

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those whose circumstances make them vulnerable. Work is taking place to improve the curriculum and support for individual pupils, but much of this is still at an early stage. There are several good initiatives to overcome the barriers to learning some pupils experience but, given the extent of need in this school, more work is required.

The Fresh Start has presented many challenges for the governing body and there is no doubt that governors have made efforts to secure a strong platform for school improvement. While some features of the school have improved, the governing body's efforts have not been successful enough. The school does not have the capacity to improve quickly; there are still too many shortcomings in leadership and management and in the quality of educational provision.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Speed up pupils' progress and hence raise their levels of attainment in all classes by:
 - ensuring teachers understand and articulate what can be expected of pupils, given their accurately evaluated starting points from entering the school, from the start of a school year, or at the start of a topic;
 - ensuring that the tasks and activities set for pupils in lessons match their needs and that learning moves at a swift pace.
- Develop further the school's curriculum by:
 - ensuring that provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or difficulties is properly planned, organised and evaluated
 - completing the work started on designing and implementing a curriculum that supports the development of pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding across all areas as required, and enables them to enjoy their learning.
- Improve aspects of care, guidance and support by:
 - strengthening the school's effectiveness in enabling pupils to behave well at all times
 - working further to improve pupils' overall attendance and reduce the numbers of pupils who are persistent absentees
 - working systematically with those pupils whose circumstances makes them vulnerable so they engage fully in their learning and enjoy it.
- Secure the leadership and management of the school by:
 - as a matter of urgency, establishing a permanent and effective senior leadership team
 - developing the roles and skills of the leadership team and middle managers
 - improving the effectiveness of governance.

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In the last three years, test results at the end of Year 6 have been significantly below average in English, mathematics and science. The overall improvement in test results from 2007 to 2008 was not sustained in 2009, neither in Year 2 nor in Year 6. Some pupils, in the current Year 6 for example, have benefited from consistency in teaching over nearly three years. Consequently their attainment has risen as might be expected, especially in writing. This can be seen in their books and in the rich classroom displays. Many other pupils have been unsettled over the last three years because of staff changes or inadequate teaching and have not reached the levels they are capable of achieving. Although learning in most lessons is now at least satisfactory, it is not good enough to ensure all pupils, whatever their starting points or needs, make enough progress from when they joined the school.

Pupils' behaviour, noted by inspectors as greatly improved in the academic year 2008/09, has since then deteriorated. Many pupils themselves, as well as parents and staff, express concern about the poor behaviour of a minority of pupils and the detrimental affect it has on learning. The vast majority of pupils, however, feel the adults in the school care about them, support them and deal appropriately with instances of poor behaviour. Pupils are able to talk confidently about what constitutes a healthy lifestyle, of the ways in which they assist each other and engage in charity work. Most pupils are polite, considerate, cooperate in lessons and work with concentration. Some are quiet, say little, and need encouragement to contribute or show enjoyment. Pupils are not as well prepared as they should be for their future economic well-being because attendance is below average, many pupils are not resilient to change and there are weaknesses in pupils' use of basic skills.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	4
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	4
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	4
The extent to which pupils feel safe	3
Pupils' behaviour	4
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms	
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	4
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	4
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

How effective is the provision?

Good and even outstanding teaching exists, but some is only barely satisfactory and occasionally inadequate. Most lessons move at a reasonable pace but, on occasions, time is wasted in establishing pupils' proper attitudes to work and learning, or because the teacher talks too much. In the main, lesson activities are correctly pitched to offer pupils suitable challenge and engage their interest. In some classes, the partnership between the teacher and teaching assistant is very effective. In others, it is not sufficiently developed. Pupils are sometimes not well supported because the teaching assistants working with them have not been adequately briefed, or lack the skill to maintain good order, when working with them in small groups. Most, but not all, teaching makes satisfactory use of assessment, using data on pupils' prior attainment and a range of methods to discern pupils' grasp of new material lesson by lesson. Marking is generally adequate but does not always make clear to pupils how well they are doing. Teachers do not routinely check that pupils respond to the comments made. The setting of homework is inconsistent and a few parents raise questions about this. The curriculum has been undergoing a process of improvement since the Fresh Start and is still not adequate. Provision for the core subjects of English, mathematics and science is satisfactory for most pupils. However, the adjustments necessary to meet the specific needs of some pupils, especially those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, are not comprehensive enough, and lack precision or suitably trained and supported staff. The acting headteacher has worked with staff, all with considerable enthusiasm, to design a themed approach to learning. However, this work is at an early stage and the school does not have an overview showing how pupils' knowledge and understanding are to be developed from Year 1 to Year 6 across all areas of learning. Pupils say they enjoy the topics studied and the visits to places of interest associated with them. They speak positively about the clubs on offer and are delighted that the school football team will take part in its first match in years.

There are some good elements in the care, support and guidance provided but also some important shortcomings. The school is a welcoming place with bright classrooms and interesting displays. Staff are attentive to pupils' emotional and physical well-being. The school has a range of strategies to address the needs of those pupils whose circumstances make learning difficult. However, given the extent of the need in this school, more support is necessary. This is particularly the case for those pupils whose behaviour is problematic or who find it hard to engage in learning with good concentration, and for those who, occasionally, leave lessons without permission, or whose attendance is very low.

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These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	4
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	4

How effective are leadership and management?

School improvement is still fragile and the leadership and management of the school are not secure in spite of the efforts of the four headteachers since April 2006, only one of whom has held a permanent position. The current acting headteacher has achieved much in a short time but has not had the benefit of an experienced senior leadership team with whom to share tasks and responsibilities, owing to significant and complex staffing difficulties. Such circumstances have placed a huge demand on the acting headteacher and indeed all other staff.

The school’s plan for improvement, recently developed by staff working in good collaboration, is fit for purpose. Past plans for improvement have faltered because the school did not have the capacity to enact them successfully. It is by no means certain that the current plan, good as it is, will succeed given the uncertainties that surround leadership and management at the time of the inspection. The school does not have a strong tier of middle managers. To date, school improvement has been focused successfully on strengthening teachers’ skills in the classroom more than on building their expertise as leaders and managers.

The Fresh Start has not been easy for the governing body to manage. Some set backs have been difficult to anticipate or control but others might have been minimised by greater rigour in governance. Known weaknesses in teaching, the curriculum or management have not been tackled decisively enough. While the governing body has increased its effectiveness in challenging leaders and holding them to account for the quality of information, provision and outcomes, this aspect of its work is still not sufficiently well developed. The school’s financial position is weak. The school is active in tackling discrimination but there is too little evidence of improvement in the outcomes or experience of different groups of pupils, given that the provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities has deteriorated. The school has made a satisfactory start on work to promote community cohesion. The school’s procedures for safeguarding pupils are satisfactory. Work to improve the accommodation has been successful. The new classrooms, library and suite of computers are valuable resources, which are enhancing pupils’ learning. The school does not provide satisfactory value for money.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	4
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	4
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	4
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	4

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children make a satisfactory start to school life. Staff have a sound understanding of behaviour management strategies and use them well to enable children to settle quickly into the Nursery and Reception classes. Children show a trust in the staff and leave their parents calmly. Parents are generally pleased with the provision for their children and feel they have easy access to staff should they have any queries or concerns.

Planning is secure and provides for all areas of learning for the children through both adult-led activities and those children choose for themselves. Children have a wide range of activities to choose from, but there are times when fewer might be appropriate so that children can be directed to specific tasks with a view to boosting knowledge in a given area of learning. Many children start school with skills in communication and language that are lower than those levels expected for their ages. A reasonable range of tasks is provided to support language development, but staff do not engage in as many oral activities as they might to encourage children to speak, extend their vocabulary and develop an early understanding of letters and sounds (phonics). During the inspection, some good activities were provided for children to engage in early writing tasks but relatively few for them to use number in a range of contexts. Staff carry out accurate assessments of children's learning but would benefit from further training in the use of data to evaluate progress. Leadership and management of this stage are satisfactory. Welfare requirements are met.

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These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3

Views of parents and carers

The views of parents and carers are very mixed and include praise and also some concerns. Most parents are happy with their child’s experience at school but nearly a third of those who responded to the inspection questionnaire disagree that their child is making enough progress.

Several parents praise the acting headteacher for the help their children have received in meeting some specific needs. Some parents feel the school does not provide enough information about how well their children are doing. Inspectors found that meetings for parents to discuss their child’s progress were delayed in this academic year and occurred in the spring for most, but not all, classes. They also found that reports to parents do not always include enough about the extent of pupils’ progress. The school provides some but not a great deal of information about how parents might help with their child’s learning. The headteacher issues useful newsletters giving details about school activities.

A significant number of parents made negative comments about pupils’ behaviour and these were borne out in inspectors’ observations and through discussion with pupils and in staff and pupils’ responses to the questionnaire.

Inspectors agree with those parents who feel the school needs to be improved.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Willows Primary School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 30 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 202 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	15	50	12	40	1	3	2	7
The school keeps my child safe	7	23	19	63	3	10	1	3
The school informs me about my child's progress	6	20	15	50	6	20	2	7
My child is making enough progress at this school	9	30	12	40	6	20	3	10
The teaching is good at this school	10	33	15	50	2	7	2	7
The school helps me to support my child's learning	7	23	12	40	8	27	2	7
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	8	27	18	60	2	7	1	3
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	5	17	11	37	3	10	3	10
The school meets my child's particular needs	6	20	18	60	2	7	2	7
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	4	13	17	57	7	23	1	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	5	17	17	57	5	17	2	7
The school is led and managed effectively	7	23	16	53	2	7	4	13
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	9	30	15	50	3	10	3	10

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



19 March 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Willows Primary School, Newbury, Berkshire RG14 7SJ

Thank you for your welcome when inspectors visited the school recently. Thank you for sharing your thoughts in conversations with us and through the questionnaire. I am writing to let you know what we found out about your school.

Most of you behave well and work sensibly in lessons but some of you do not, so that learning is sometimes disrupted. Children in the Nursery and Reception classes make a satisfactory start to school. Teaching and learning in Years 1 to 6 are generally satisfactory, and some is good or even occasionally outstanding. Nevertheless, because progress over the last few years has not been adequate, many of you still have some catching up to do before you reach the standards of which you are capable. Standards, shown by test results, for pupils in Years 2 and 6 have been considerably lower than in most other schools. Inspectors have asked teachers to speed up your progress by making sure they provide you with tasks that are just right for your individual needs and that lessons are conducted with good pace.

The current headteacher has done a lot to improve the school in a short time. She and the staff have been working to make learning more interesting. You told us you enjoy some of the new topics such as Rain Forests and Chocolate. Although the curriculum has improved, more needs to be done before it is adequate in every respect. Those of you who need extra help with your learning for a range of reasons do not always get exactly what is required. Some of you need help in other ways; for example, to make sure you make good choices about how to behave, or to attend school regularly. We have asked staff to help you get the best out of school through supporting you further when you have any difficulties.

The school is not yet as good as it should be. It will get help called 'special measures' to make sure leaders and managers are all fully equipped with the skills they need to improve the school. You all can make the school better by behaving well at all times, working hard, supporting each other and coming to school regularly.

I wish you all the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Wiola Hola

Her Majesty's Inspector

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