

The Willows School and Early Years Centre

Fishermead Boulevard, Fishermead, Milton Keynes, MK6 2LP

Inspection dates 13–14 March 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The headteacher and deputy headteacher have high expectations and are working together effectively to improve teaching and to ensure all pupils achieve well.
- Pupils are making good progress in developing their reading, writing and mathematical skills. Standards have risen since the previous inspection.
- Pupils' progress is checked carefully and if support is needed it is promptly given.
- School data show that any gaps in performance between different groups are narrowing.
- Much of the teaching is good. There is no inadequate teaching.
- Pupils behave well and have a good understanding of the importance of personal safety.
- Pupils' attendance has improved and is now above average for primary schools.
- Subject and phase leaders are making a good contribution to school improvement.
- The recently appointed Chair of the Governing Body has brought a degree of rigour to the governance of the school. Procedures to keep pupils safe are robust.

It is not yet an outstanding school because:

- Pupils' progress in reading and writing is not as rapid as that in mathematics.
- Some pupils are unclear about what they should achieve by the end of the lesson. More-able pupils sometimes find the work too easy.
- Some pupils' work is not marked well enough. They do not know exactly what they have to do to improve. Insufficient emphasis has been placed on ensuring that all pupils present their work neatly.
- Members of the governing body have still to refine their skills in checking on how well the school is doing.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 16 lessons, of which two were observed jointly with the headteacher and deputy headteacher. In addition, the inspectors made a number of shorter visits to lessons. The headteacher joined the inspectors for some of these visits. Inspectors also heard some pupils in Year 2 read.
- Meetings were held with members of the governing body, staff, groups of pupils and a local authority representative.
- Inspectors observed the school’s work and looked at a wide range of documentation, including the data the school has collected on pupils’ attainment and progress, procedures for keeping pupils safe and the school development plan.
- In making their judgements, inspectors took account of the 22 questionnaires returned by members of staff and a recent school survey of parents’ and carers’ views. There were insufficient responses to the Parent View online questionnaire for the results to be displayed.

Inspection team

David Wynford Jones, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Nicholas Capron	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic heritage groups is much higher than in most schools. They come from a number of different minority ethnic backgrounds. About a third of the pupils are of White British origin.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is well above average. Only a few are currently at the early stages of learning English.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is well below average. The proportion identified for additional support through school action plus or a statement of special educational needs is well below average.
- The proportion of pupils supported through the pupil premium is well above average. This is additional government funding for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, those who are looked after by the local authority and other eligible groups.
- The local children's centre, managed by the governing body, was not visited as part of this inspection as it is subject to a separate inspection.
- The privately run on-site childcare provision was not included in this inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Help pupils make faster progress and reach higher standards in reading and writing by:
 - ensuring greater consistency in the quality of teaching
 - providing harder work for the more-able pupils to help them reach higher standards and making sure that all pupils know exactly what is expected of them
 - consolidating the recent changes in the marking of pupils' work and ensuring that all marking mirrors that of the best
 - improving pupils' skills in the presentation of their work
 - encouraging pupils to read more often and widely at home.
- Improve the leadership of the school by:
 - refining the skills of members of the governing body in checking on how well the school is doing and in asking the leadership team searching questions
 - making certain that the school website is updated to meet the latest requirements.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Children enter the Nursery with skills and knowledge below the levels expected for their age. By the end of Year 2 their skills in reading, writing and mathematics are average. This represents good progress and achievement.
- Standards at the end of Year 2 are rising. Year 2 pupils are on track to reach higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics than in previous years. This is as a result of more robust leadership, better use of assessment information and improvements in the quality of teaching.
- Children settle quickly into the Nursery. They quickly form good relationships with adults and develop a positive attitude towards learning. The attention given to detail and the emphasis placed on developing the children's language and communication skills help them to make good progress in all areas of learning.
- About half of the children transfer to the Reception classes where they are joined by a significant number of other children, many of whom have not attended other settings. The well-established routines and the friendly approach by staff help the children to quickly gain confidence. As a result, they are happy and enjoy school. On entry to the Reception classes, the skills of the majority are generally below those expected of a typical four-year-old child.
- Children make good progress in the Reception classes in all areas of learning. Since the previous inspection, outcomes at the end of the Reception class have risen. In 2013 the proportion reaching a good level of development was broadly similar to the national average.
- At the end of Year 2 standards in reading, writing and mathematics are also rising. In 2013, standards in reading, writing and mathematics were broadly average. Current data show that pupils are on track to reach higher standards than in previous years. This represents good progress. However, standards in reading and writing are not as secure as those in mathematics.
- In Year 2, pupils read confidently and use a range of strategies, including their knowledge of phonics (the sounds that letters make), to tackle unfamiliar works. They recommend books to their friends and can explain why they have chosen certain books. Pupils are listened to reading regularly at school but many do not practise their reading skills often enough at home.
- The results in the end of Year 1 reading check in 2012 and 2013 were broadly similar to the national average. Changes made to the way phonics is taught are leading to improvements. More pupils are working at the expected level at this stage.
- Most pupils' skills in writing are developing well. They are developing a good understanding of basic punctuation and sentence construction. Older pupils are beginning to use connectives and adjectives to make their writing more interesting but do not do so unless prompted. More-able pupils are not always set sufficiently difficult work and many could reach higher standards. Many pupils' handwriting and presentational skills are below those expected for the age.
- In mathematics, pupils have a secure understanding of number and associated mathematical terminology, for example the different words that can be used for addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. Pupils enjoy applying their knowledge to solve problems and work together well on different tasks.
- Pupils supported by the pupil premium make good progress because the school has used this additional funding to provide further support for literacy and numeracy. Although eligible pupils in Year 2 were about two terms behind their peers in reading and writing, and about a term in mathematics in 2013, more recent data suggest that this gap is closing.
- Good support for pupils who speak English as an additional language, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs helps them make similar progress to their classmates. Their progress is checked regularly and they are given extra help and support to boost their progress if needed.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching has improved since the previous inspection. Most is good. There is no inadequate teaching. As a result, children are now making good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage and better than expected progress in Key Stage 1. This is reflected in their good achievement.
- Most lessons are well planned. Teachers explain the tasks clearly and offer helpful suggestions to enable pupils to complete the activity. They use questioning skilfully to check and develop pupils' earlier learning. Information and communication technology is used appropriately to enhance learning.
- Teachers manage pupils' behaviour well and encourage them to share their ideas with each other and with the adults. Teaching assistants support work in small groups effectively and help the pupils to make progress.
- In the occasional lesson, teaching is not as effective. Pupils working at different levels are not reminded what they are expected to achieve by the end of the lesson. As a result some pupils, particularly the more-able, are not always challenged sufficiently.
- The school is committed to equality of opportunity. All staff strive to ensure that all pupils, including disabled pupils, those with special educational needs and those who speak English as an additional language, are fully included and have equal access to the same learning opportunities as other pupils.
- The marking of pupils' work is developing well. There are some good examples of marking which give pupils clear guidance on what they have to do next. However, it is not yet consistent and thorough in all classes.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils want to learn and work with sustained concentration.
- Most pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. They are polite and well mannered in the way they speak to adults and to each other. They move around the school sensibly. Displays and equipment are treated with respect. There is no litter or graffiti. Pupils are proud of their school and especially the attractive and interesting outdoor areas.
- Pupils know about different types of bullying, for example name calling, fighting, racial bullying and religious intolerance. They say that incidents of inappropriate behaviour are rare and are confident that any misbehaviour will be dealt with swiftly and fairly by staff. There have been no reported racist incidents or exclusions for several years.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. The school meets the requirements for safeguarding. A member of the governing body checks to make certain that procedures are followed and the site is safe.
- Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe. They are aware of potential dangers when playing in certain areas and when using computers.
- Pupils' attendance is rising and is currently above average. Better attendance and improvements in the quality of teaching are helping pupils to make accelerated progress.

The leadership and management are good

- Good leadership by the headteacher and the deputy headteacher, combined with an increasingly effective team of subject and phase leaders, has led to improvements in teaching and the acceleration in pupils' progress.
- Working closely with staff, the headteacher has systematically reviewed procedures for monitoring pupils' progress and attainment levels, undertaken rigorous observations of teaching and learning and helped subject and phase leaders to develop their roles and responsibilities. High expectations are set to which the staff have responded well.
- The school development plan is thorough and based on an accurate evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The actions to tackle the priorities are appropriate, realistic and

manageable. Subject and phase leaders are fully involved and know what they have to do to help the school to improve further.

- In all classes, there is a focus on developing pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. Pupils' learning is brought together well through themes and topics which capture their interest. For example, Year 2 pupils researched and wrote about different aspects of Aztec life.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well. Good relationships are promoted within the school and the local community. Discrimination of any sort is not tolerated. Pupils are given many opportunities to enrich their education, for example through educational visits and celebrating festivals from different countries and religious backgrounds. Pupils' different cultural backgrounds are celebrated and this contributes to their preparation for living in today's society.
- The primary school sports funding is being used appropriately to employ specialist sports staff, for training teachers and extending the range of after-school sports clubs. As a result, staff are more confident in teaching a range of sports and pupils are eager to become involved.
- The local authority has provided the school with good support. Officers have undertaken regular targeted reviews of the school's performance, supported the headteacher in checking on the quality of teaching and in analysing data, and strengthened the governing body.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Following the relatively recent appointment of the Chair of the Governing Body, the governing body is developing well. Some governors are now asking senior leaders more challenging questions. The headteacher is now expected to explain in greater detail aspects of the school's performance. However, not all governors are as skilled as others in questioning leaders and do not hold them sufficiently to account. Nevertheless, governors are supportive of the school. They attend courses and have recently undertaken training on interpreting and using school performance data. Governors check the school's spending at least termly and make sure that the primary school sports funding and the pupil premium allocation are supporting pupils' learning. Following the review of the school's appraisal policy governors know where teaching is consistently good and where additional support is needed. Governors know how targets are set for teachers to improve and understand the process for rewarding good teaching. Governors have a good overview of the school's strengths and weaknesses and contribute to and check on the progress of actions in the school development plan. However, the governing body has not ensured that the school website meets requirements.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	110379
Local authority	Milton Keynes
Inspection number	431034

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	181
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Lindsey Newham
Headteacher	Joanna Orbell
Date of previous school inspection	8–9 March 2012
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