

The Willows Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123999
Local Authority	Stoke-On-Trent
Inspection number	314776
Inspection dates	10–11 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Roger Sadler

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	487
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ben James
Headteacher	I Gurney
Date of previous school inspection	22 March 2004
School address	Greatbatch Avenue Penkhull Stoke-on-Trent ST4 7JU
Telephone number	01782 233280
Fax number	01782 233282

Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Most pupils in this school are of White British background. The proportion eligible for free school meals is below average. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties is below average. Because the school has a unit for pupils with hearing impairment on site, more pupils than is typical have a statement of special educational needs. Most children enter Reception with levels of knowledge and skills in line with those expected. A new Children's Centre is due to open on the school site in the near future.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The quality of education provided by the school is satisfactory. Pupils' achievement and progress are also satisfactory. Children make a sound start in Nursery and Reception and make expected progress throughout the rest of the school. Pupils make best progress in Years 2 and 6. Most pupils reach standards expected for their ages, but in some classes, too few pupils exceed them, especially in mathematics. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with hearing impairments, make satisfactory progress because they receive additional support in lessons.

This is a happy and popular school. The vast majority of parents and carers are supportive of the school and many remark on how much their children enjoy school. The headteacher has led the staff to ensure that pupils' personal development and well-being are good. Strong partnerships with parents, outside agencies and other schools support pupils' personal development well. Pupils are proud of their school and enjoy their time in it. Pupils behave well, show consideration for others' safety and feelings and are polite, friendly and helpful. Older pupils take on additional responsibilities within the school.

The pupils appreciate the good range of interesting visits, visitors and clubs used to enhance the school's curriculum. The curriculum is broad and some teachers use interesting ways of helping pupils enjoy learning in a wide range of subjects. For example, Year 4 pupils are preparing their performance of the 'Glint of Gold' musical as part of their Egypt topic in history. Although the school's satisfactory curriculum mostly provides appropriate challenge for pupils, this is not the case in all classes for the brightest pupils. Teaching and learning, as well as care, guidance and support, are satisfactory overall. However, the school lacks a system to provide pupils with learning targets. Consequently, pupils in some classes are insufficiently aware of what they have achieved to date and where they need to concentrate to improve their work further.

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall but monitoring and evaluation are insufficiently systematic and rigorous. This has led to the school having a much more positive view of its overall effectiveness than inspectors found. Leaders are not making enough checks to see that important aspects of provision are effective in all classes. This, and the lack of a clear policy on teaching and learning, results in inconsistencies; for example, in the way that pupils' work is marked or how targets are set. Nevertheless, the school has a sound overview of where improvements are needed and has made changes that are beginning to improve achievement. For example, effective ways of monitoring the progress of pupils have been introduced and the information provided is beginning to be used to direct additional support to those who are at risk of falling behind. This system enables the school to monitor the progress of particular groups of pupils. Those eligible to free school meals make satisfactory progress but often attain lower standards than other pupils do.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Effective induction arrangements and strong home-school links help children to settle quickly into Nursery. Children's progress is satisfactory overall and the majority of children reach the standards expected of their ages by the end of Reception. Teaching gives good emphasis to children's personal, social and emotional development and children are well prepared for the

more formal learning in Year 1. Although teaching is satisfactory, teachers' planning is inconsistent and sometimes not sufficiently detailed or focused on exactly what learning is expected. The use of outdoor areas is not always maximised in lesson plans. Children are growing in confidence in the use of information and communication technology and enjoy using the interactive whiteboards in classes.

What the school should do to improve further

- Provide additional support and challenges to more able pupils so that more of them attain standards above those expected for their ages, especially in mathematics.
- Introduce a policy for teaching and learning that includes rigorous monitoring and evaluation of the quality of provision.
- Ensure that teachers' marking is consistently effective and that pupils throughout the school have a clearer understanding of where and how to improve particular aspects of their work.

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

Recent national assessment results, school records and pupils' work indicate that most pupils are attaining nationally expected standards in English, mathematics and science. Although the achievement of most pupils in Years 1 to 6 is satisfactory, too few pupils attain above the standards expected for their ages and some more able pupils do not achieve their full potential. Pupils make satisfactory progress in science throughout the school and investigation skills are taught effectively. The school has recently worked to improve pupils' presentation of work, and standards of presentation are above average by Year 6. Pupils with learning difficulties and pupils with hearing impairments make satisfactory progress. Pupils at the early stages of learning English are given appropriate support and make satisfactory progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The school gives strong emphasis to these aspects and consequently, pupils' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are good. Pupils attend regularly, behave well and relate well to adults and each other. Pupils feel safe in school and act with due regard for the safety of others. Pupils, especially school councillors, are rightly proud of the way that they take responsibilities within the school. Pupils show a good understanding of the need for a healthy diet and regular exercise, and speak enthusiastically about changes to the snacks and lunchtime menus. Pupils make a good contribution to the community and are currently supporting a school in India. Satisfactory basic skills provide them with a sound preparation for the next stage of education and the world of work beyond.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Although satisfactory overall, the quality of teaching and learning varies considerably throughout the school. This is because the school lacks an agreed teaching and learning policy and because leaders do not check that teaching is consistently effective. One example of inconsistency is in the use of teaching assistants. In classes where they are deployed effectively, they have a positive effect, especially on the progress of lower-attaining pupils. In other classes, they are sometimes under-deployed, especially when the teacher is teaching the whole class. The quality of planning is also variable. Although good in some classes, in others, planning is insufficiently tailored to cater for all levels of ability in the class. Helpful checklists to enable pupils to assess their own work are provided in a few classes but in others, pupils are unclear about what is expected. Behaviour is managed well in all classes and relationships are good throughout the school.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

One parent appropriately commented, 'The school offers a lot of extra-curricular and family activities that give both children and parents the chance to grow and work together'. A regular programme of visits, including a residential visit, and a programme of out-of-school clubs and visitors, provide good enrichment to the curriculum. The curriculum is suitably modified to meet the learning needs of lower-attaining pupils and those with learning difficulties. More able pupils are too rarely provided with additional challenge or required to work independently. In some classes, teachers rely too much on published worksheets, which again constrains the level of challenge for higher-attaining pupils. Chances are also missed in some classes to develop particular aspects of writing in subjects other than English. Hearing-impaired pupils are included and supported well in classes and this helps them enjoy their learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Pastoral care is good and academic guidance satisfactory. Pupils are cared for sensitively and individually and their pastoral needs are well known to staff. Risk assessments and child protection arrangements are secure. Ways of ensuring pupils, including vulnerable pupils, are safe, properly cared for and well behaved in school are thoroughly planned and consistently carried out by staff. Consequently, this is a happy, orderly and safe school. Pupils know that they can turn to any adult in school if they have any concerns and they are confident that adults will help them. In some classes, pupils are unclear about where they need to focus to move to the next stage of learning. This is because the school has not fully established a consistent approach to providing pupils with targets for learning in mathematics and writing.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher is highly regarded by parents and carers because he is available, approachable, and knows their children individually. He has led the school well in ensuring that pastoral care

and pupils' personal development and well-being are good. The leadership of teaching and learning, although satisfactory, is less effective. The school has a significantly over-optimistic view of its own effectiveness because monitoring and evaluation are insufficiently rigorous and self-challenging. Too few follow-up checks by leaders means that inconsistencies in the quality of teaching are not corrected quickly enough. Despite this, targets for pupils' future achievement are suitably ambitious and the school has some idea of which aspects of provision are most in need of improvement. For example, the school identified the need to improve reading skills in younger classes and introduced a programme of teaching letter sounds each day in all younger classes this year. This successful programme is already beginning to improve pupils' reading and spelling and indicates that the school has satisfactory capacity to continue to improve. Governors are supportive of the school but their monitoring and evaluation and their role in challenging the school to improve achievement from satisfactory to good is underdeveloped.

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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	3

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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
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	2
The behaviour of learners	2
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	3
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	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

12 March 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Willows Primary School, Stoke-on-Trent, ST4 7JU

Thank you all for making Mrs Hughes, Miss Connor and me welcome when we inspected your school. We enjoyed our visit and give a special thank you to those who talked to Miss Connor about school life during their lunchtime.

We found your school a happy place where people get on very well and treat each other politely and with respect. You make satisfactory progress in your work. You are getting on well enough in mathematics, science and writing. Those of you in the younger classes are beginning to do better in your reading because your daily lessons on letter sounds are helping you to read new words more easily. New children in Nursery are helped to settle in quickly and are already on the way to learning to read and count.

You behave well and you are clearly proud of your school. You feel safe in school and know that adults look after you well. Some of you take on additional responsibilities for helping the school run smoothly and you join in with community activities. We are pleased that you have been able to work with a school in India.

- Both you and some of your parents told us that you regard your school highly and appreciate the work the staff and your headteacher do. We saw that you enjoy school life and attend regularly - so well done! Staff are aware of your learning needs and give extra help to those of you who are not doing your best. Your headteacher and the staff are working to improve the school and know that there are some things that need to be done. We have recommended that they should:
 - help more of you to reach higher standards, especially in mathematics
 - check that you are always well taught
 - help you have a clearer understanding of where and how to improve particular aspects of your work.

Yours sincerely

Roger Sadler Lead Inspector