

Willow Grove Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	132155
Local Authority	Wigan
Inspection number	315942
Inspection dates	27–28 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Angela Westington HMI

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	5–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	42
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr P Stansbie
Headteacher	Mrs Valda Pearson
Date of previous school inspection	19 May 2003
School address	Willow Grove Ashton-in-Makerfield Wigan Lancashire WN4 8XF
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Age group	5–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

Description of the school

Willow Grove is a day special school which caters for primary aged boys and girls with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. It can admit up to 56 pupils but currently there are 42 on roll, of whom 2 are in Foundation Stage, 4 in Key Stage 1 and 36 in Key Stage 2. Two of the pupils are girls, both in Key Stage 2, and the large majority of pupils are in Years 5 and 6.

Most pupils come from the borough of Wigan, although a few are placed at the school by other local authorities, and all are transported by taxi. The majority of children have had a number of exclusions from their previous schools. Increasingly, many are admitted before permanent exclusion occurs; this has led to an increase in the number of pupils admitted on assessment places.

Pupils' skills on entry are low; the result of disrupted educational histories. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs for social, emotional and behavioural difficulties or are in the process of gaining one. A small number have additional special needs such as autistic spectrum disorder (ASD), specific learning difficulties (SpLD), severe learning difficulties (SLD) or moderate learning difficulties (MLD). The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage and there are no pupils for whom English is a second language. Four pupils are in the care of local authorities. A very high proportion of pupils, nearly 50%, is eligible for free school meals.

The school has been awarded Healthy Schools Status for emotional health and well-being and achieved re-certification in 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Willow Grove School is a haven of safety and security, friendship and nurture for some of the most traumatised and vulnerable children in the locality. It provides outstanding levels of care, guidance and support for children who have experienced fractured lives and emotional turmoil. The school provides an orderly, calm, welcoming and structured environment in which the children can begin to build positive relationships, develop trust in adults and start to work again on their education. As a result, they make outstanding progress in their personal development and particularly in their emotional well-being. In addition, their behaviour and enjoyment are outstanding: the children here are happy and they do not want to leave.

The headteacher provides excellent leadership and management: she is very well supported by her able deputies, the business manager and, increasingly, the middle management team. Their evaluation of the school's work is accurate, if a little modest, and they have correctly identified and acted upon further priorities for development. These include improving pupils' writing and strengthening even further the match of academic work to pupils' abilities.

The quality of teaching is good overall. It is never less than satisfactory and there is much that is very good or better. The major feature of the teaching in this school is the care and deliberate attention that is given to teaching pupils how to interact with others and how to behave in society. This is underpinned by extremely good assessment of individual needs. For some pupils, the school's assessment reveals that, in part, the poor behaviour is linked to previously unidentified educational needs, such as moderate or specific learning difficulties. Whatever the outcome of the school's assessment, it puts in place a systematic and comprehensive programme of support, or initiates the move to a school better suited to the needs of the individual pupil.

When they enter the school, pupils' academic standards are very low. The school's detailed assessment procedures allow staff to identify the potential of individual students and establish a well matched education programme for them in the core skills. As a result, they make good progress. The curriculum is good. It has two distinct parts: the provision to support emotional and social development, including care, guidance and support, and the academic curriculum. The academic curriculum is well planned, is closely aligned to the National Curriculum and offers a wide range of creative, enriching and practical opportunities for the pupils to develop their social skills. Much work has been done since the last inspection to improve the overall balance of the curriculum and make it more creative and more appealing to the pupils.

The school provides very good value for money.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

At the time of this inspection there were two pupils in the Foundation Stage, both of whom were undergoing assessment for statements of special educational needs before being placed elsewhere. The children are very well looked after and cared for.

Each child has very different intellectual needs and each receives good teaching and very good classroom support. The curriculum and planning follow the six areas of learning.

What the school should do to improve further

- There are no key issues for improvement as the school has already correctly identified and is working on the areas that need further development.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils enter the school with standards in the core skills that are well below average overall, and with an extremely wide range of abilities: many have moderate learning difficulties and some have severe learning difficulties. Most pupils arrive in Years 5 and 6, but a few arrive in Key Stage 1 and stay through until Year 6. Given their starting points, their achievement is good.

The school, correctly, views its first priority as improving the pupils' skills in reading. Through the rigorous assessments on entry, those pupils with potential to learn to read more quickly are identified and individualised reading and spelling programmes are put in place for them. All pupils make progress in their reading, whatever their initial starting points, but some make good and better progress. For example, a pupil arriving at the beginning of Year 6, in September 2006, increased his reading age by two and a half years, so that by the time he left the school his reading age was in line with his birthday age. Amongst the others in the same year group, the range of reading ages was very wide, from 6 years to 12 years or more, but school records show that all had made progress.

The focus on reading means that increasing numbers of pupils are able to take the national tests for 11 year olds and gain recognition for their work. In summer 2007, 15 of the 16 pupils took the national tests. In English, 3 pupils scored at the nationally expected level; in mathematics 4 pupils did so and in science 5 pupils reached the average level and 2 gained the higher Level 5. One pupil gained Level 4, the average level, in all three subjects.

Progress in a range of subjects is clearly evident in pupils' books where there are clear signs of pride in their work being developed alongside improvements in writing skills. Progress in mathematics is evident through the work in pupils' books and in the records from the individualised computer software program. Pupils make good progress in art, in music and in the wide range of sports and practical subjects they are taught.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

During their time at the school children make outstanding progress in their personal development and well-being.

Their behaviour, the reason for pupils being at Willow Grove, improves considerably during their time at the school. Behaviour in class and around the school is very good overall; on the occasions when a pupil reacts aggressively the situation is very well managed and quickly dealt with. Pupils are taught to identify when they are becoming angry or upset and to take time out of the classroom to calm down. They are taught to ask for help when they need it. As they learn to control their behaviour, increasingly they take less time out of the classroom, often because they are too interested in the lesson and want to take part with their classmates. Pupils understand and appreciate the system of rewards and sanctions. They are keen to gain stickers for good behaviour and points at the end of each lesson for their 'scores' and thus work towards choosing a reward.

Pupils are taught the skills of social interaction through very good role modelling by staff so that gradually they acquire the ability to initiate and sustain interaction with adults. Pupils are well mannered, polite, friendly and keen to show off their work and their school. They are very happy at the school; they feel a full part of the community and are enthusiastic about what school has to offer them. All wear the school uniform with pride and the sports teams are proud of the kit they wear to local tournaments. They feel safe and secure, trust the adults in school, feel they have someone to talk to and have more friends than in previous schools. 'I have more mates here,' was a frequent comment. They recognise that they are making progress in their learning: for some of them being successful is a new experience and they are enjoying the feeling.

They are knowledgeable about keeping healthy and fit through the work done in school and the many sports activities they undertake. They talk enthusiastically about the holiday play schemes and the trips they go on.

The school council is very well established and its work is integrated into the routine of classroom life. Pupils themselves monitor the behaviour of school councillors because they understand that to be a councillor requires setting a good example to others, and this is taken very seriously.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The primary mission of the school is to assist pupils to overcome the social and emotional barriers which lead them to behave inappropriately and undermine their learning. In this mission the school is highly successful. All the teaching is focused primarily on this aim; it permeates every aspect of the school's work, and the staff - all of whom are highly trained and skilled - are consistent in the manner in which they talk to, deal with and support the pupils. As a result, pupils gradually engage with the academic teaching and overall make good progress. The teaching of good behaviour, polite speaking, careful and attentive listening, and a wide range of social skills is not left to chance. They are taught methodically and consistently. This is a major strength of the school.

The teaching of academic subjects is good overall; it is never less than satisfactory and there is much that is excellent. High expectations, the teachers' expertise and very good relationships are the hallmark of the teaching. The classes are arranged, as far as is possible, in age groups, and within these groups the work is tailored to the needs of the pupils. Pupils make greatest progress when the teaching is very sharply focused on their individual needs and their next steps in learning. Pupils make particularly good progress in reading and mathematics, less so in writing, although this is improving as a result of the school's recent focus on it. Last year the school identified writing as an area for improvement and took action to revise and improve its methods for teaching and assessing this subject. As a result, writing generally is improving. However, for a group of older pupils with extremely low skill levels, progress is limited and slow.

The teaching uses a wide range of resources to engage pupils. The investment in information and communication technology (ICT) provision is paying off as pupils greatly enjoy this aspect of their work and are developing useful skills in this area.

Good progress has been made on the issue highlighted in the previous inspection: better use is now made of the assessment data that is available to teachers to match the work to pupils' levels of skill and understanding.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. As far as is possible, it follows the National Curriculum and the full range of subjects is taught. The school has introduced a theme-based approach to planning the curriculum to engage pupils who have rejected or previously failed in other schools. Acting upon the recommendations of the previous inspection, the school has strengthened the creative work pupils undertake and the school environment reflects this. The building is bright and cheerful, with high quality displays of pupils' two and three dimensional work prominent. High quality specialist music provision is very popular with the pupils and contributes to the development of their listening skills significantly. Trips, visitors and a residential week for older pupils are regular features of the school's curriculum. There are strong links with local primary schools and the school participates in the local sports tournaments. A distinctive part of the curriculum is the specialist support for particular needs such as intensive literacy support, the 'Cool Project' for pupils with dyspraxia and play therapy for pupils deemed in need of substantial emotional support.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Willow Grove provides outstanding care, guidance and support for its pupils. This is the very heart of the school's work and the major priority for the school. Every attention is paid to the assessment and analysis of each child's needs and a programme of support put in place.

Pupils are very well looked after. All safeguarding procedures are in place; health and safety policies and risks assessments are up to date with a timetable for review. The school has excellent links with other agencies to support pupils in the wider arena. Pupils who are in the care of local authorities are extremely well cared for. The school knows these children very well.

The system for assessing pupils on entry to the school is excellent and enables teaching to begin in earnest with minimum loss of further time to the pupil. The wide range of additional provision, for example filial therapy for parents, and the positive engagement with parents generally, mean that the school uses every opportunity to ensure that pupils are successful and make progress.

Pupils have targets for progress in the core subjects and they are familiar with them. The more able pupils understand what they need to do in order to improve their work. A measure of the school's success is the number of pupils who return to mainstream secondary education after leaving Willow Grove.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The headteacher provides outstanding leadership for the school and is supported by a very strong senior leadership team and an increasingly effective group of middle managers. Together

they provide excellent day-to-day management: systems and procedures are well embedded, and records and documentation are meticulously maintained and regularly reviewed.

Their evaluation of the school is accurate and leads to the identification of the correct areas for further improvement. They maintain a strong overview of the quality of the work in the school. Teaching is monitored, areas for development are acknowledged and training needs highlighted. The school manages to balance very well the two distinctive parts of its work - the provision to tackle the emotional and social barriers to pupils' learning and their academic progress. As a result, it has the overwhelming support and appreciation of the parents.

Governance is strong. Governors are deeply committed to the school and proud of their involvement in it. They discharge their duties well. Given that the school has shown strong, sustained improvement since previous inspection, it has excellent capacity for further improvement.

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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?	1
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?	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
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?	1
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	1
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	1
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	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
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

Annex B

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you ever so much for being so kind and so helpful towards me when I visited your school recently. I really enjoyed spending time with you and seeing you at work.

As you know, I came to see how good your school is. Well, I am sure you will be very, very proud to know that I think your school is outstanding. This is the highest level of praise that I can give to a school and your school got it!! It is the same as saying it is excellent or it is super. Isn't that fantastic?

There are lots of things that are really good about your school, such as:

- Mrs Pearson and the adults who look after the school
- the way that all the adults look after you and care for you.

But most of all... the way that you are learning to behave well and get better in your work. Well done!

Mrs Pearson and the other adults at the school are already working on making the school even better for you, so I am sure you will help them by continuing to work hard and enjoying school.

By the way, you can tell the school chef that the meat pie and carrots were lovely!