

Willington Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109491
Local Authority	Bedfordshire
Inspection number	324969
Inspection dates	18–19 September 2008
Reporting inspector	Ian Nelson

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	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	50
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Paul Hayward
Headteacher	Mrs Elaine Wheeler
Date of previous school inspection	10 October 2005
School address	Church Road Willington Bedford MK44 3QD
Telephone number	01234 838280
Fax number	01234 838280

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This small primary school serves the village of Willington and surrounding areas, including parts of the nearby town of Bedford. Nearly all the children are from White British backgrounds and all have English as their home language. The proportion eligible for a free school meal is much lower than in most schools. The proportion of children identified as needing extra help with their learning is much lower than in most schools. Children start school with the skills and knowledge expected of their ages. The school has three classes, with the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and Year 1 taught together, Year 2 in a single class and Years 3 and 4 taught together. The headteacher has class teaching commitments three days each week. The school recently started providing before- and after-school care of children managed by the governors. The school has gained Investors in People status, the National Healthy Schools Award, The International School Award and the gold Artsmark.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

The last inspection described this school as good with good capacity to improve and this has proved to be correct. Staff have tackled successfully the issues for improvement as well as keeping up with all the changes required by national initiatives like the revised EYFS, and establishing a before- and after-school club. As a result, the school now provides an outstanding quality of care and education that is greatly appreciated by parents and their children. All the parent questionnaires received by the inspector were positive. Many included written comments such as 'nothing but praise for the staff' who were said to 'go the extra mile'. One parent wrote that, 'the school and staff have been a complete delight'.

Standards by Year 4 are exceptionally high because of the excellent progress children make in their learning. They get an outstanding introduction to school in the EYFS with its excellent resources and build upon this solid foundation through both key stages. Children thoroughly enjoy school because teachers give them activities that interest and motivate them. They set them targets that are challenging yet manageable so that the pace of their learning is excellent. Children say their teachers tell them what is good about their work and what they need to do next to improve. Staff keep comprehensive records of children's progress so that lessons build effectively on what has been learned earlier. They also help children to develop the skills they need to become responsible members of their school, local and the wider communities with respect for others whatever their background or beliefs. This results in children's outstanding personal development.

There is a real family feel to the school with a great focus on identifying and meeting individual needs. This means that those who need extra support with their learning make impressive progress and all children are fully included in the whole life of the school. This caring ethos derives from the excellent leadership of the head who is admirably supported by a hardworking and well-informed governing body and staff. The commitment to continually improving the school has resulted in a school development plan that is overly complex and contains too many priorities, some of which are largely ongoing maintenance issues. However, given the school's rate of improvement since the last inspection it is extremely well placed to maintain its high quality performance in the future.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

The school has developed a first rate outside area for the EYFS following the criticisms of the last inspection. This is a natural extension of the indoor classroom with children having free access to its excellent range of stimulating resources. The outstanding teaching in EYFS gets just the right balance between activities set by the teacher and those chosen by the child. It allows children the time to become absorbed in their activities like those who were building a wall from real bricks and sand, washing the plastic car, running the pretend bring and buy sale or simply hammering nails into a large tree stump. On the other hand, the strong focus on helping children to develop their language and communication skills leads to excellent teaching of sounds and letters.

The teamwork between the adults means that children are exceedingly well cared for so that they make excellent progress in their learning and personal development. Most reach the expected goals by the end of EYFS, with a number exceeding these.

What the school should do to improve further

- Cut down the size and complexity of the school development plan, to focus more sharply on a smaller number of issues, with clearly measurable targets in order to reduce the burden on senior management.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Standards at Year 4 have risen year on year since the last inspection so that many children are working at the level expected of 11 year olds by the time they leave. Those who find learning hard often reach the standard expected of Year 4 in their final year because of the excellent support they get. Standards at Year 2 are mainly above average. Staff regularly evaluate where children are doing particularly well and where they could be doing even better, and they provide appropriate support and encouragement. For example, they are continually striving to bring standards in writing up to the level of reading and mathematics, with some success. The strong focus on knowing each individual child and their learning needs means that there are no significant differences in the pace of learning of different groups of children. The improvements in standards at Year 4 since the last inspection show how effectively the school is using challenging targets to raise attainment.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

One of the school values is that 'all people will be treated with respect and listened to', and this is demonstrated in the excellent behaviour and attitudes of the children. They need very little encouragement to behave well, and to respect each other and the adults they work with. This gives them the confidence to talk with their teachers, knowing that their ideas and comments are respected. This was well demonstrated when a child suggested to the teacher in assembly that the children should stand for a particular action song they were learning. Children know about healthy living and love the fruit they have each day. They also speak highly of the sports activities the school provides and they play with great energy at break times. They play and work with a clear consideration for the needs of others. They say they 'don't actually really bully', though 'we sometimes fall out'. They also say that teachers deal with such upsets quickly and fairly. A real strength of the school's provision is the link with local village organisations and the wider community. These ensure that children begin to appreciate their place in society and develop a healthy respect for others. They learn about cultures beyond the village through religious education lessons and outings to Bedford to visit a mosque, church and a gurdwara.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

The outstanding progress children make during their time at the school is testament to the high quality teaching they receive. Small class sizes and the excellent teamwork between teachers and teaching assistants ensure that children get the support they need to thrive. Improvements in the systems for recording their individual progress mean that lesson planning is tightly focused on moving children forward from what they have learned earlier. The effective use of interactive whiteboards captures and holds their attention. Teachers encourage children to use laptops to make learning more interesting, while also developing their computer skills. Excellent relationships between children and adults mean that no time is lost in lessons. Children appreciate the targets that teachers set them and the feedback they give on their work and progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The school was criticised in the last report for not having adequate space and resources for gymnastics. There is no room on the site to build a hall for physical education so the staff have tackled the issue by using the village facilities and linking with a local sports college so that children benefit from working with professional sports coaches. The school also provides swimming lessons, plenty of after-school sport and a residential visit to an outdoor activity centre. Staff make learning more interesting by arranging trips locally and further afield. Children visited a local quarry and saw the importance of correct safety clothing while learning how sand and gravel are extracted for the construction industry. They also visited Wimpole Hall for a Victorian day as part of their history work. Close links with the village organisations including both the church and the chapel help the children to understand their own community while visits to Bedford extend their understanding and appreciation of the wider world and its diversity. Links with schools overseas enhance this even further by adding a global dimension.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school sets a high priority on children's welfare and safety and all the required procedures are in place. It is well on the way to ensuring all the required policies and procedures are also in place in the before- and after-school club reflecting those of the main school. The club is housed in a new modular building on the school site and well-qualified staff ensure that children enjoy a safe and welcoming environment. The quality of care that staff provide throughout the school is appreciated so much that some families bring their children from out of the immediate area because they settle well here even if they were less settled in their former school. The staff's focus on meeting individual needs means that all children, whatever their background, ability or particular learning or emotional needs are treated with the greatest respect and care. The previous report gave the school a target of improving teachers' marking and target setting and this has been successfully accomplished so that children know how well they are doing and what they need to aim for next.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Schools do not become as successful as this one by chance. Willington's success is directly attributable to the quality of the leadership of the head and her governors. The head has driven the improvements since the last inspection by evaluating accurately the school's strengths and areas for development. Her commitment to improvement and her dedication to the job however, have led her to produce a school development plan that is too detailed and contains too much that relates to ongoing maintenance rather than focusing on a limited number of key priorities each year. A more focused development plan with fewer key priorities would free up her limited management time. Staff with leadership roles have an excellent grasp of how well their areas are doing and where they could be even better. Governors have an excellent understanding of how well the school is doing and they and the staff are fully involved in planning for future developments and evaluating their work. The governors have managed the finances effectively enough to be able to establish the before- and after-school club which is already proving popular with children and their parents having only just opened.

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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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	1
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	1
How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	1
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	1

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

The quality of provision

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

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 eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	1
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

22 September 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of Willington Lower School, Bedford, MK44 3QD.

Thank you for making me so welcome when I came to visit your school recently. I enjoyed talking with you and seeing how hard you work. This letter is to tell you what I thought about your school.

The children I spoke with said how much they enjoy school and I can see why. It is a lovely place to learn because you are so well behaved and well mannered. Your teachers give you lots of interesting tasks to do and all the adults help you when you are stuck or upset. Because you work so hard and get so much help from your teachers and teaching assistants you make excellent progress. Some children reach standards we expect of much older children by the time they leave. Not only do you do really well with your lessons, you learn how to get on with each other and with your work, so that you are ready for middle school when you leave. I was very impressed with Class 1's outside area and saw how much the children enjoy it. I was also pleased to see that the before- and after-school club is now open.

Your school is as good as it is because of the hard work of your headteacher and the adults who work with her. Because they are always so keen to do their best for you, they sometimes try to make too many improvements at once. I have suggested they tackle fewer things at once rather than trying to do everything at the same time.

I am sure you will all do really well if you continue to work as hard and behave as well as you do now and I wish you all well for the future.

Ian Nelson
Lead inspector