

The Willows School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106970
Local Authority	Rotherham
Inspection number	336779
Inspection dates	5–6 October 2009
Reporting inspector	Rosemary Eaton

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	7–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	79
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Margaret Smith
Headteacher	Mrs Anne Sanderson
Date of previous school inspection	3 December 2006
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 14 lessons or parts of lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff, and groups of pupils. They observed the school's work, and looked at a range of documents including assessment information, records of incidents and interventions, plans and policies. Forty parental questionnaires were analysed.

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

- whether there are variations in the performance of different groups of pupils or in different subjects
- if there are any early signs of the impact of the school's specialist status
- how effectively the school promotes pupils' knowledge and appreciation of other cultures
- how far distributed leadership has been a significant factor in school improvement.

Information about the school

This small special school caters for pupils with moderate learning difficulties. Most pupils have a range of additional needs, including autism and behavioural, social and emotional difficulties. They each have a statement of special educational needs. The numbers admitted with autism or challenging behaviour have increased since the previous inspection. Many of the pupils live in areas that are socially and economically disadvantaged and over half of them are eligible for free school meals. Almost all pupils are White British and there are none in the early stages of learning to speak English. Five pupils are in the care of the local authority. A comparatively high proportion of pupils join the school at other than the usual time. These are often older pupils who have been excluded from other schools or who have previously been non-attenders. From the start of September 2009, the school has been designated a specialist school in the area of cognition and learning. It has gained the Activemark, Sportsmark and Healthy Schools awards.

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?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

This is an outstanding school. Its improvement since the previous inspection has been nothing short of remarkable. Rigorous and extensive evaluation of all aspects of its work and performance enables the school to identify sharply focused priorities for further development. The exceptional drive and flair of the headteacher and senior team are demonstrated particularly effectively by the management systems they have devised to achieve the school's goals. These result in all groups of staff being actively involved in moving the school forward, confirming its outstanding capacity for sustained improvement. For example, staff elect to join 'mandate groups', charged with bringing about change within a tight timescale. Teachers and teaching assistants take part in a programme of coaching, which has proved a powerful tool for improving the quality of teaching to its present outstanding level. A mark of the school's shared vision, commitment and cohesiveness is that it is not unknown for senior leaders to ask teaching assistants to use their specialist expertise to coach the leader in a certain aspect of teaching.

Pupils' progress and achievement are outstanding. They are extremely confident learners, ready to tackle the new and challenging tasks they experience on a frequent basis. Especially exciting features of the excellent curriculum are regular whole-school project weeks. Devised and planned by different groups of staff, these have involved, for example, converting the school into a township. On that occasion, pupils' learning took place in settings such as a simulated café, post office or doctor's surgery. Pupils' days are filled with stimulating and often memorable activities, matched accurately to their interests and needs. 'I'd like more time at school', remarked a Year 11 pupil, and his friends agreed.

The school's pupil support team is a superb feature and its work with pupils, families and agencies is often exemplary. It contributes strongly to the outstanding quality of care, guidance and support and pupils' excellent behaviour. They feel totally safe in school and are impressively keen to adopt healthy lifestyles. Pupils make an outstanding contribution to the school and take on varied responsibilities, such as acting as playground buddies. They are heavily involved in the local community, for example, when older pupils support reading or lead drama workshops in mainstream primary schools. Pupils welcome chances to interact with people who are different to themselves and to discover more about other cultures. However, there are few members of minority ethnic groups in the immediate locality and currently these opportunities are limited. The school has a high quality plan to promote community cohesion but it has yet to fully assess its impact on pupils' cultural development. It is too soon to expect the school's specialist status to have had a measurable effect on pupils' outcomes. However, the

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range and effectiveness of its partnerships, which are already outstanding, are increasing and parents' direct involvement in school is developing apace.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Extend pupils' understanding and appreciation of groups who are under-represented in the local community by:
 - increasing opportunities for Willows' pupils to work and socialise with pupils from such groups
 - completing the evaluation of the school's plan to promote community cohesion and putting in place 'next steps forward'.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

The nature of pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities means that it is not appropriate to judge their attainment. However, the school's assessment information shows clearly that the National Curriculum levels pupils reach by the end of Year 11 are rising year-on-year. As a result, summer 2009 saw the first pupils gaining GCSE passes, in mathematics. The scope and challenge of external accreditation awarded to pupils has increased dramatically since the previous inspection. Other than those whose attendance fails to improve, despite all the school's efforts, pupils leave with an impressive number of certificates to recognise their success in academic, vocational and other courses.

Lessons observed during the inspection confirm the school's view that learning and progress are outstanding for all groups of pupils and across all key subjects. Pupils demonstrate excellent concentration during lessons, with higher attaining pupils often needing minimal prompting by adults. For example, in a class made up of mixed ages and abilities, those working at comparatively higher levels, including some with autism or behavioural, social and emotional difficulties, worked independently as they designed an implement to hold bread for toasting. Pupils are fully accustomed to applying their existing skills, such as writing or using information and communication technology, and often do so naturally as they work. They show an exceptional degree of keenness and desire to do well, consistently striving to produce their best work.

Pupils readily support and encourage each other, regarding consideration for others as the norm. Although a few need significant help in order to behave well at all times, behaviour in lessons and around school is consistently impressive. Pupils have an acute awareness of their personal safety, for example, when using the internet or email. Older pupils learn to travel safely and independently, helping to get them ready for moving on to college or training. Because attendance is broadly average, preparation for future economic well-being is good rather than outstanding, despite the wealth of skills pupils acquire to enable them to cope in the workplace and in their personal lives. All appreciate the importance of eating a healthy diet and routinely point out sensible choices to friends and family. Social and moral development is a strength. Pupils value

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their friends and explain that they are expected to help others because, 'it's part of growing up'. They respect the cultures and faiths represented within the school. However, opportunities to engage with other cultural groups beyond the local community are infrequent.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	*
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Pupils report, correctly, that teachers are 'spot-on'. The teamwork between teachers and teaching assistants is first-rate. Support is accurately targeted, based on thorough analyses of assessments of each pupil's learning. The enthusiasm and commitment shown by staff inspire pupils to try hard at all times. Relationships with adults are excellent. Staff consistently show their respect for every pupil, encouraging them to express their ideas and attempt work that stretches them. Teachers monitor learning constantly so tasks and support can be fine-tuned. They help pupils to understand how

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

* In some special schools inspectors do not make a judgement about attainment in relation to expectations of the pupils' age.

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they can improve, involving them in evaluating their own work and that of others and in setting targets to help them take the next step in learning.

The curriculum offers learning opportunities that meet pupils' changing needs as they move up through the school. Whenever possible, pupils are given tasks that enable them to learn through practical, first-hand experiences. Arrangements are made routinely to meet individual needs. For example, a small group of talented artists in Key Stage 3 attends lessons in a mainstream school, setting them on track for GCSE success. The oldest pupils relish college courses such as land-based studies involving weighing sheep or harvesting potatoes. Enterprises, extensive and varied sports which include inter-school competitions, running the tuck-shop or a restaurant, visits and visitors, plus an extensive range of extremely popular clubs, add to the richness of the mix.

An exceptionally wide range of personal support is tailored to the needs of particular groups and individuals. 'Hygiene groups' are set up, for example, to help pupils cope with puberty. The pupil support team creates individual programmes for pupils, which may involve working in partnership with a host of specialist agencies, for instance, to secure a pupil's regular attendance. The team trains staff in managing challenging behaviour and carefully analyses records of incidents in order to identify patterns and organise additional support when necessary. Carers and parents of particularly vulnerable pupils are offered more intensive help, with an emphasis on flexibility and sensitivity. Pupils whose progress appears to be flagging are identified quickly and interventions made. Connexions advisers work closely with the school to guide pupils and parents carefully through decisions about future destinations.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	1
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	1
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Leaders have created a dynamic school where all concerned, including governors, aspire to excellence in every aspect of its work. This is seen, for example, in the very challenging specialist school targets. Morale within the staff is very high. Many comment that they are proud to work at the school. Evaluations by leaders at all levels of the plans to bring about improvement demonstrate clearly that these are consistently effective. The determination to provide every pupil with equal opportunities to succeed is almost tangible and this aspect of the school's work is outstanding. Its efforts to create the right conditions for each individual to learn and develop include the good arrangements to safeguard them, for example, by ensuring that staff's suitability is

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assured. The school's promotion of community cohesion is good. It applies its customary imagination and scrupulous planning to this aspect of its work. Earlier in the year, a carnival instigated and organised by the school recreated events that had traditionally occurred in the village but which have now died out. The children of the two mainstream schools worked with those from Willows and the event brought together many sectors of the community. Elements of the school's community cohesion plan have been evaluated but not its full impact.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Views of parents and carers

Almost all the parents who responded to the questionnaire were extremely positive about all aspects of the school, reflecting the inspectors' views. A number commented on how much their children enjoy school and described its 'community feel'.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Willows 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 40 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 79 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	58	73	18	23	4	5	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	62	78	18	23	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	48	60	28	35	2	3	2	3
My child is making enough progress at this school	48	61	28	35	0	0	2	3
The teaching is good at this school	52	67	22	28	0	0	2	3
The school helps me to support my child's learning	46	60	24	31	2	3	2	3
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	52	65	28	35	0	0	0	0
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)	50	63	24	30	2	3	2	3
The school meets my child's particular needs	56	71	20	25	0	0	2	3
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	60	76	16	20	2	3	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	44	56	30	38	2	3	2	3
The school is led and managed effectively	48	62	24	31	0	0	2	3
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	60	75	16	20	2	3	2	3

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.



07 October 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Willows School, Rotherham, S66 9NT

Thank you for being so helpful and friendly when we inspected your school. It was a real pleasure to meet you and see you working together. Special thanks go to the pupils who met me to talk about the school. You should be proud of how well you spoke out and explained your opinions.

The Willows is an outstanding school. You all learn extremely well, because you have excellent teaching. The oldest pupils get lots of certificates for their work. Your behaviour is outstanding and is one reason why you feel so safe in school. Another reason is the superb way in which the school cares for each one of you. I was delighted to find how much you know about keeping healthy. The school provides you with some wonderful activities and I know you appreciate them. You told me you would like more chances to meet young people who come from other cultures or have different beliefs to you. I have asked the school to find ways to do this.

Your headteacher and the staff all work very hard to give you such a marvellous education. I send them and all of you my best wishes for the future.

Yours faithfully

Mrs Rosemary Eaton

Lead inspector

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