

# The Willows RC Primary School

Victoria Road, Kirkham, Preston PR4 2BT

**Inspection dates** 1–2 December 2015

**Overall effectiveness** **Outstanding**

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Outstanding
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Outstanding
Early years provision	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is an outstanding school

- Pupils are at the heart of the school. The Willows is an outstanding place to learn and develop.
- The main reason why the school has improved from good to outstanding, and continues to improve, is the exceptional leadership of the headteacher. She has set up a culture in which there are high expectations and ambitions for, and of, all staff and pupils.
- The staff are motivated, dedicated and are positive role models for the children. Every child's success is at the heart of all decisions by leaders but also by teachers in their lessons. Adults ensure that pupils have teaching and a curriculum that give them skills for life and prepare them for life in modern Britain.
- Teachers' high expectations of pupils, very good knowledge of the subjects they teach and skilful questioning has resulted in pupils' very good progress in a range of subjects.
- All groups of pupils make rapid progress from their starting points. They are also very creative, artistic and musical. Pupils' progress and outcomes in French and in sport are also a strength.
- Adults teach and foster other skills such as independence, confidence and self-belief. Pupils are well prepared for their next stage of education and for life.
- Provision for the youngest children is outstanding. Excellent teaching in the Reception Class enables all groups of children to make at least good progress so that most children are ready for Year 1. Adults' depth of knowledge about the children enables them to provide a curriculum which allows children to get off to the best start.
- Adults work hard and are highly effective in making pupils feel safe. As pupils commented to an inspector, 'We tell adults our worries and they encourage us to be the best we can be.' Pupils' mental, emotional and physical health and well-being are a high priority.
- Pupils are well-mannered, polite and friendly. Their keenness and enthusiasm in lessons aids their progress. Attendance is high and behaviour and bullying incidents are low.
- Governance is outstanding. Governors are skilled, knowledgeable and have very good oversight over what is happening in school. They have taken decisions that have improved pupils' outcomes.
- Leaders' actions have improved teaching and pupils' outcomes particularly in music, writing and computing.
- Pupils' written work in history, geography and science are not as high quality as they are in English and mathematics.

## Full report

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of pupils' written work in history, geography and science by:
  - applying their above average mathematical and writing skills in their work
  - making sure the use of worksheets does not hinder pupils' thinking or their writing
  
- Deepen pupils' understanding of democracy by:
  - knowing more about the role and function of local and national government in the United Kingdom
  - knowing more about the interpretation of democracy around the world
  - being more involved in developing themselves as Kirkham citizens.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management is outstanding

- Inspectors, pupils, staff and parents all agree the headteacher provides inspirational leadership. One comment from a parent summarises the wealth of glowing tributes made by others, 'The school is a positive nurturing learning experience for my child. The staff are always very motivated, dedicated and are positive role models for the children. The headteacher is inspirational, and ensures that children's educational needs are met and supported. It's a wonderful, outstanding school that goes the extra mile to ensure that children have enriching learning opportunities that will give them skills for life.'
- High ambition and expectations of staff and pupils are at the core of what the school does. There is, as the headteacher puts it, 'No ceiling on what pupils can achieve'. Improving teaching and outcomes for pupils are a priority but this is backed up by support from leadership and effective training.
- Threaded throughout everything that the school does is the culture of care and support. Alongside high expectations, staff provide a stimulating and secure environment in which pupils can learn and develop. Everyone in the community is valued and respected resulting in equality and no discrimination. An example of this inclusive ethos is in the newsletter announcements which welcome new families. Senior leaders care for, and have a positive impact on, the social and emotional needs of all adults who work at the school.
- Very effective middle leaders work well as a team. No teacher, including the newly qualified teachers, is isolated in leading their subjects. They are supported by other staff so they can do their job effectively. Teachers are very open to help, advice and challenge from other staff and learn from each other. Leaders' actions have significantly improved teaching, the curriculum and pupil outcomes in music. Computing, an issue at the previous inspection, is more widely used and applied across other subjects, for example in art, English, geography and history.
- The curriculum is exciting and meets pupils' interests, particularly the very popular theme days. Well-chosen trips develop pupils' knowledge but also other outcomes such as independence, perseverance, courage and life skills such as in the Year 5 and 6 residential visit and to hear the Hallé orchestra play. They have plenty of chances to perform such as in productions, assemblies, in the choir and in the brass band. Pupils have raised skills and ambitions because staff host visits from role models and visiting speakers such as the author Julia Golding and a pilot in the Royal Navy.
- The curriculum also enhances pupils' very good spiritual, moral and cultural development and their readiness to play a part in modern Britain by reflecting British values of respecting the law, respecting people from different backgrounds and with different characteristics, and respecting democracy. Pupils have their voices heard through the school council, which has its own budget, and decide annually on their class charter. Pupils' understanding of wider democracy is at an early stage. They do not have a good understanding, for example, about local and national government elections or institutions or of different interpretations of democracy. Pupils do have a good knowledge about other faiths, customs, practices and celebrations.
- The sport premium is a government grant to schools to increase pupils' skills and participation in competitive sport. The school has used the money effectively to increase the skills of existing staff by shadowing and working alongside professional coaches and sport teachers. The range of sports available to pupils has widened. They compete and learn skills in rugby, athletics, netball, cricket, rounders, yoga, handball, dodgeball and frisbee golf. The Willows has been selected as 'School of the Year' winner in the 2014 Fylde Sports Awards.
- Senior leaders seek out and respond to parents' views. There is a comprehensive system of reporting pupils' progress and attitudes, with a report or a parents evening every half term. There is a forum which meets with the deputy headteacher termly. It has already had an impact on some important issues such as the format and content of the school reports, the quantity and content of homework, and revisions to the induction pack for parents new to Reception. The active parents' association has made some positive difference to the environment, creating a 'Bee World' and 'Willows Wonder Walk'.
- The school's plan for improvement takes into account the views of parents, pupils and external agencies. The headteacher and governors have set up a performance management system which has an impact on raising the quality of teaching yet is supportive and closely linked to staff training. The headteacher checks on the impact and quality of teaching frequently and follows these checks up with helpful discussions with staff and checks to see whether improvements have been effective.
- The support from the local authority and the diocese has been highly effective in improving the school.

Funding from the diocese has helped to improve security fencing, lighting and the provision of running hot water. It has also provided very effective challenge and support to enhance pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The local authority provides regular challenge visits and provided the newly qualified teachers with the training and support they need to settle quickly and reach their full potential. It provided invaluable support and help to support visually impaired pupils, resulting in a smooth transition to secondary school.

■ **The governance of the school is outstanding because:**

- There is a very high level of attendance at meetings and commitment to the school.
- Governors have very good oversight and understanding of the quality of teaching, the assessment information for different groups of pupils, and the impact of initiatives and changes. They know the strengths and the weaknesses of each cohort of pupils and of the school, so inspectors' line of enquiry into the attainment of most-able disadvantaged pupils was no surprise to them.
- Teachers who lead subjects make presentations to the governing body, which enables them to develop their leadership skills as well as enabling governors to have a more in-depth understanding of what is happening in those subjects.
- The governing body is highly organised, skilled and knowledgeable, and led by an outstanding Chair of Governors. She makes sure each governor has and attends the training they need based on an annual skills audit. She makes sure any finance allocation has a direct impact on pupils' learning, for example the sport and the pupil premium. (The pupil premium is a government fund which supports pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after.)
- The governors are highly ambitious for every pupil. They set the headteacher the task of moving the school to outstanding at this inspection and have provided the supportive challenge the staff have needed.

■ The pupil premium is used wisely. It has been very effective in widening disadvantaged pupils' life chances and skills by making sure they make at least expected progress from their starting points and catch up with other pupils nationally. It has been used to extend their musical, artistic and cultural awareness and skills.

■ The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. There is a thorough system in place to check on staff qualifications and their clearance to work with children. Safeguarding is a very high priority in the school. The headteacher's meticulous minute taking and following up of incidents or concerns are exemplary. It is unfortunate that some of the agencies the school contacts are not as diligent or timely in following up concerns. A high proportion of staff are trained in first aid and health and safety and there are no breaches to the welfare requirements for the youngest children.

**Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is outstanding**

- Pupils enjoy school and their learning. Almost every pupil who answered Ofsted's survey agreed that teachers make sure everyone understands their work, listen to what they say and help them to do their best. Teachers ooze with enthusiasm. Pupils respond to this and the atmosphere in most lessons is lively, exciting and fun.
- Teaching in music, art, French, and physical education (PE) in particular, is outstanding. Pupils develop artistically and creatively. They made high-quality free expressive sketches to Richard Wagner's classical music. They made characters using computer pixels and detailed and life-like observational drawings of the eye. They use known artists' work as inspiration such as the works of David Hockney and Van Gogh.
- Around the school there are many captions and labels in the language and in the best cases adults use French with pupils outside of dedicated lessons. The teaching of music has improved significantly. Pupils learn to read music and play brass instruments. During the inspection inspectors heard recognisable carols played on a variety of brass instruments coming from rooms all around the school.
- Teachers use their very good subject knowledge to explain and demonstrate new ideas and knowledge. They purposely use complex and technical vocabulary in their teaching and expect pupils to also use them in lessons. For example, a teacher taught younger children to use the term 'quartile' using a dictionary to try to find the spelling and meaning of words. In music, the teacher taught Year 1 pupils the names of musical notation and the idea of 'a musical rest'.
- Teachers use assessment skilfully. They check on pupils' understanding thoroughly as they patrol the classrooms and through well-crafted questions they develop pupils' understanding and thinking. They identify quickly which pupils are finding the work easy and need to move on to more complex ideas.

Teachers also know to give pupils time to think before answering questions and to include all groups of pupils so that none feel left out.

- Teaching for the most able pupils is a strength. Teachers plan challenge and progression carefully so as not to overload pupils too early, but still enabling them to make fast progress. Teaching enables the lower attaining pupils to catch up quickly and to make sure no child is left behind.
- Teaching assistants are well deployed and make a valuable contribution to pupils' learning. They rotate around the different groups to make sure all pupils understand what they are learning about.
- In history, geography and science, pupils' written work is not as high quality as it is in English and mathematics. Low-quality worksheets stifle pupils' ability to apply their writing and mathematical skills.

## **Personal development, behaviour and welfare is outstanding**

### **Personal development and welfare**

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Almost every pupil who completed the online survey agreed or agreed strongly that there is an adult in school they feel they can talk to. A similar proportion agreed that the school encourages them to look after their emotional and mental health as well as their physical health and well-being and to be independent.
- Adults work hard and are highly effective in making pupils feel safe. As pupils commented to an inspector, 'Teachers help us and we tell them our worries, they encourage us to be the best we can be'. Pupils respond extremely well to adults and get fully engrossed in their learning from Reception onwards. There is high quality peer-to-peer support in class and also between adults.
- As a result of the school's work, pupils have developed a very good understanding of how to stay safe when online, when using the roads and in emergency situations such as fire.
- There are no logged racist or homophobic incidents and very few bullying incidents. Pupils who spoke with inspectors said anyone who is different in any way would feel safe at The Willows. They did mention sometimes friends fall out but adults are quick to tackle any unhappiness to make sure pupils' learning is not affected.
- Pupils are very aware of their local community. They joined in remembrance services and have a good knowledge of the school's history and founding. A majority said they take part in other activities. There are some good but not outstanding chances to become more involved as Kirkham citizens or to have a deeper understanding and knowledge about local government. Pupils do a great deal to help out in school, in the local church and in raising funds for good causes.
- In class, pupils are very keen and enthusiastic and have been shown by adults how to be very successful learners. They cooperate with each other regardless of gender or background. They try and persevere to do their best and are self-confident. Their progress is linked to their very positive attitudes to their work. Pupils' written work lacks a little care and quality in history, geography and science.

### **Behaviour**

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Pupils in the online survey agreed that behaviour of other pupils around school is good all or most of the time and teachers encourage them to be friendly to other pupils. Every pupil agreed or strongly agreed that staff encourage them to respect people from other backgrounds. These positive pupil reviews are also reflected in the views of parents and staff.
- Pupils have high attendance. Disadvantaged pupils, boys and those with special educational needs attend well above the national average for similar pupils. One of the reasons for higher attendance is significantly reduced applications for a holiday in term time.
- Around school they are helpful, polite, well-mannered, friendly and very smart in their uniforms. They regulate their own and others' behaviour.
- In class just a small signal from adults brings pupils back into silence or back onto task with virtually no fuss. The environment in class is purposeful. Pupils talk and get involved in exciting lessons and visibly enjoy their learning. Pupils that spoke with inspectors confirmed they are able to concentrate and get on with their work without being disturbed by others.

## Outcomes for pupils

are outstanding

- By the time they finish Year 6, pupils' outcomes across the vast majority of subjects are outstanding.
- Phonics is a system of using the sounds letters make to read and spell words. By the end of Year 1 the proportion of pupils who are screened at the expected level for their age is well above the national average. The teaching of phonics is progressive and systematic across the school until pupils are able to read using phonics successfully.
- Pupils' reading skills are above average. They read freely, fluently and with pleasure and confidence and they develop strong opinions about characters and books they like and dislike. The most-able readers were keen about the access they have to online authors and staff track their reading well to make sure the books they select are challenging enough.
- Pupils' mathematical skills and knowledge are above average by the end of Key Stage 1, which sets them up very well to make good progress in Key Stage 2. In 2015 every pupil made expected progress and almost half made more than expected progress and almost one in five attained a level which is expected of Year 9 pupils. Increasingly they are developing skills of explaining and justifying their answers and the methods they choose to solve calculations. There are more examples of problem solving and thinking more deeply about their mathematics.
- Similar to mathematics, all Year 6 pupils in 2015 made expected progress in Key Stage 2 in their writing and almost half made more than expected progress. Their writing skills are increasingly precise and they pay very good attention to their punctuation, spelling and grammar when they write.
- Pupils make rapid progress in French. Despite no previous experience of the language, after just a few weeks pupils in Year 3 can identify and respond to some common words and phrases such as 'levez-vous et écoutez'. They build up their knowledge so that by the end of Year 6 pupils can confidently and accurately write sentences and paragraphs, 'par exemple, j'aime faire de l'équitation; il porte une veste noire.'
- Their musical skills increase rapidly because of excellent teaching. Pupils are able to play instruments accurately and with precision and are exposed to a range of musical styles and traditions. The choir is growing and the pupils' singing skills are impressive for their age.
- In PE, pupils develop tactics of attack, defence and body positioning. They develop skills in aiming and retrieving balls in different sports. They have the chance to play an increasing amount of competitive sport.
- Other outcomes are also a strength. Pupils develop into articulate, confident, self-reliant young people ready for their next stage of education. They learn crucial life skills from staff.

## Early years provision

is outstanding

- The transition from nurseries and from home into Reception is well thought out and effective. It means that children start making progress immediately. Adults make very good use of the information they gather from parents on induction days and from home and nursery visits. It is usual, for example, for an activity to be planned based in the first two weeks of school that is focused on each child's interests and prior skills. On occasion the school is hindered from accelerating children's progress quickly because of the weak or missed information from private nursery providers.
- By the end of Reception all groups of children have made at least good progress from their starting points and many have made rapid progress. In the last two years children's skills and knowledge have been well above the national average across all areas of learning but particularly in reading, writing and mathematics. Most children attain a good level of development and are ready for Year 1. Pupils in Year 1 after just a few weeks in school were observed by inspectors to have very good social and emotional development with the ability to manage their own behaviour. This is due to the excellent work put in in the Reception class, enabling pupils to be ready to learn as they join the main school.
- Key to the success of the Reception class is the comprehensive and detailed knowledge that staff have about the children and their families. Adults are very alert to any welfare or medical needs children may have. They have keen antenna to react to and prevent any possible safeguarding alerts. They identify quickly any barriers to learning such as lack of experiences, confidence or language but also identify quickly any strengths so that the more-able children are not wasting time on aimless activities.
- There is a purpose behind every activity. Adults plan and teach in a way that engages pupils fully, gives them a thirst to learn and explore more, and develops their knowledge and skills. For example, children

were fully engaged in debating, discussing and negotiating to build a giant vehicle from boxes and resources around the Reception. In something akin to *The Apprentice* television programme, a boy took up the role of project manager organising a team to stick, cut and measure sizes of twigs, boxes and other equipment to make the vehicle. They concentrated fully throughout and persevered when things did not work.

- It is the mix of teaching styles that is effective at The Willows. Small-group and large-class teaching in phonics, reading, writing, mathematics and PE mixed with plenty of opportunity for visits to the forest and to explore indoors and out, mean that children learn new things all of the time. Children make rapid progress. Children, for example, who could not make marks with pens on entry to Reception, after a few weeks could write a simple sentence linked to the book they are learning, "It is a bear".
- The curriculum is fluid and dynamic. It changes to match the interests of each group of children. There is a particularly good focus on music and understanding the world linking to work in the forest school. Children get a range of exciting experiences that build their knowledge and skills. There are exciting and engaging displays with meaningful texts on show. The area is easy to navigate around, with signs, captions, numbers and key words everywhere, all of which the children use in their work.
- The staff's work with parents is high quality. They produce weekly newsletters which become points for discussion at home. Parents have access to the books that children are reading in Reception as well as the phonic blends so they can see and build on what children are reading that week. There are frequent meetings, informal and formal, to make sure parents know how well their children are progressing and opportunities three times a year to receive a formal report and three times when they can discuss children's progress with staff.
- Adults assess children frequently but importantly then build activities based on those assessments. Considerably more time is spent on assessment than on record keeping. The leader has a very detailed understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of each cohort of children. She develops other adults' skills very well by providing training or coaching support and advice. The adults are highly skilled and knowledgeable and deploy staff effectively to make sure children's needs are met.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	119626
<b>Local authority</b>	Lancashire
<b>Inspection number</b>	10001229

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Foundation/Voluntary aided/Voluntary controlled
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	164
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mrs Gerrie Byrne
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Sharon Barnett
<b>Telephone number</b>	01772 684371
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.willows.lancs.sch.uk">www.willows.lancs.sch.uk</a>
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:bursar@willows.lancs.sch.uk">bursar@willows.lancs.sch.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	2 March 2011

## Information about this school

- The Willows is a smaller than average-sized primary school.
- The overwhelming majority of pupils are White British.
- The proportion of pupils known to be disadvantaged is in line with the national average (disadvantaged pupils are deemed by the government to be those who are eligible for free school meals or those who are looked after).
- The proportion of pupils identified as having special educational needs or a disability is in line with the national average.
- The school met the floor targets in the last three years (these targets are the minimum attainment and rate of progress expected by the government).

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching in each class and in a range of subjects, including French, music, science, physical education, English and mathematics. They looked through pupils' work to identify the impact of teaching.
- To identify pupils' views about their school, inspectors took into account 111 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Pupil View. They met with three groups of pupils to find out about their opinions in more depth and spoke with pupils in and around the school such as at breaktimes.
- Inspectors gathered the views of parents by evaluating 43 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View.
- Twelve staff completed Ofsted's online survey.
- Inspectors met with eight members of the governing body and with a range of staff, including senior and middle leaders and newly qualified teachers. An inspector held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority.

## Inspection team

Allan Torr, lead inspector

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Her Majesty's Inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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