

Willows Academy

Queensway, Grimsby, Lincolnshire, DN37 9AT

Inspection dates 24–25 March 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	This inspection:	Good 2
Leadership and management	Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Good	2
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Achievement of pupils	Good	2
Early years provision	Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The principal and executive principal are robust in tackling underperformance and have brought about rapid improvement. Senior and middle leaders are rigorously focussed on securing the best outcomes for pupils.
- Attainment at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2 has improved considerably since the academy opened. Pupils are making at least expected progress, and many are exceeding expected progress in Key Stage 2.
- Middle leaders have played a strong role in improving the teaching of English and mathematics and consequently achievement at Key Stage 1 and 2 is good.
- The use of assessment to inform teaching is strong. As a result, teachers match activities to pupils' needs accurately, contributing to their good progress.
- The good teaching of phonics (the sounds letters make) gives pupils the basic skills of reading and writing.
- Good teaching in reading is enabling pupils to read frequently and fluently, and to answer questions about the texts they have read. Pupils are achieving well in reading.
- Pupils behave well in lessons and around the academy, and have a good attitude to learning. Pupils say they feel safe.
- Governors have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the academy, and are challenging the leadership to ensure that teaching continues to improve.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Children in the early years have not made good progress, especially in literacy and mathematics, because teaching and assessment have not been consistently good.
- Although a wide range of subjects is taught, the quality of pupils' learning is not as strong in subjects in the wider curriculum. Pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to develop fully their understanding of other faiths and cultures in modern Britain.
- Opportunities for parents to be involved in their children's learning are underdeveloped.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 17 parts of lessons or small-group activities. One observation was conducted jointly with the principal.
- Inspectors held meetings with the executive principal, principal and other senior leaders, members of the education advisory board, senior and middle leaders, and representatives of School Partnership Trust Academies (SPTA).
- Inspectors spoke with pupils in lessons and at playtimes, listened to pupils read, and met with groups of pupils from all classes.
- Inspectors took account of the 13 responses to the online survey (Parent View). Inspectors also spoke to a few parents.
- Inspectors took account of the 22 questionnaires returned by members of staff.
- Together with senior leaders, inspectors looked at pupil progress data, information about the performance of teachers, records relating to behaviour and safety, and documents relating to child protection and safeguarding.

Inspection team

Lesley Butcher, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Bernard Campbell

Her Majesty's Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils who are eligible for support through the pupil premium is above average. The pupil premium is additional funding provided for children who are looked after by the local authority and those known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is above average.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is below average and most pupils speak English as their first language.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.
- Children in the Reception class attend full time and those in the Nursery attend part time in the morning or afternoon.
- Willows Primary Academy became an academy in 2013 and works in close partnership with Macaulay Primary Academy. It is sponsored by SPTA which delegates responsibility for the leadership of the academy to the principal and educational advisory board.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase children's readiness to learn by the time they leave the early years by:
 - improving the deployment of additional adults, so they intervene more effectively and lead activities that are more sharply focused on learning
 - ensuring that stimulating and challenging activities in the classroom and outdoor area develop children's basic skills in literacy and mathematics more rapidly
 - ensuring that adults model language accurately, listen to children carefully and improve the quality of talk that children take part in
 - making better use of data on children's progress, so that staff step in more quickly if children are not developing well enough
 - improving staff training so that adults identify, record and plan next steps in learning for individual children accurately.
- Further develop the broader curriculum, so that pupils' knowledge of the wider world is deepened, by:
 - planning for the development and mastery of skills across subjects other than English and mathematics
 - providing more systematic opportunities for pupils to learn about different faiths and cultures in modern Britain.
- Providing more opportunities for parents to understand and support their child's learning, particularly in the early years.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The principal's strong leadership, supported and challenged by the executive principal, has driven rapid improvements since the academy opened. This partnership has provided the bedrock on which the principal has been able to resolve staffing issues promptly. Both leaders have the full confidence of staff and the education advisory board. The principal and executive principal have a very accurate view of the strengths of the academy and what needs to improve. They have set clear priorities which have been tackled with determination. Well-considered plans and effective action have ensured rapid improvement in the quality of teaching, pupils' achievement and behaviour.
- The principal and executive principal hold all staff rigorously to account for the progress of pupils. Newly qualified teachers are developing well. Their teaching is improving as a result of effective coaching and mentoring from the leadership team and training and support organised by the trust. They hold regular meetings with their counterparts at Macaulay Primary Academy.
- Middle leaders have had significant impact in bringing about improvements in English and mathematics. As a result, all pupils are making expected progress by the end of Key Stage 2, with many making more than expected progress. Middle leaders have introduced new assessment arrangements which have ensured that pupils overcome identified gaps in their learning. They have carefully checked on the teaching in English and mathematics to make sure that pupils progress as quickly as possible in all classes.
- Plans to further develop the curriculum are under way and changes this year have resulted in improved pupil behaviour and engagement in lessons. The curriculum is enhanced through a growing number of trips out and 'wow' days in the academy. Teaching of science, the arts, and humanities is not as well developed as in English and mathematics. In particular, pupils do not have enough opportunities to explore other faiths and cultures in modern Britain.
- Primary school sport funding has been used effectively to increase participation in a range of sports. Pupil attitudes to physical education have improved and most pupils in Key Stage 1 and 2 now take part in clubs or activities outside lesson times. These activities include cheerleading, cricket and golf. Pupils have taken a greater part in local competitions.
- Pupil premium funding is used effectively to provide emotional and academic support to vulnerable pupils and as a result, disadvantaged pupils achieve as well as their peers do. Pupils also benefit from subsidised visits linked to the curriculum.
- Leaders' regular checks on pupils' progress promote equal opportunities and make sure that all pupils do well regardless of race, gender, disability or disadvantage. The positive academy ethos promotes pupils' spiritual, moral and social development well and fosters good relationships throughout the academy.
- Teachers promote British values through a well-planned scheme of assemblies, and pupils understand about democracy, describing how they vote for their School Council.
- The academy's work to safeguard pupils meets requirements. Staff receive appropriate training in safeguarding issues and a plan for on-going training is in place. Links with external agencies are used well to assess and respond to any issues that arise.
- The academy provides a limited range of opportunities for parents to learn about how they can better support their children's learning.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The education advisory board, made up of representatives of SPTA, experienced governors and education specialists, has been instrumental in supporting leaders to bring about improvements since the academy opened.
 - Governors work effectively alongside the leadership team to critically evaluate the impact of actions. They regularly check on the impact of the additional funds used to support disadvantaged pupils. There are regular meetings with the senior leadership team to discuss the data relating to pupils' performance. The sponsor challenges the academy rigorously about the attainment and progress of pupils. It provides effective support for leaders and has provided well-targeted training and development for staff through the wider network of academies.
 - Governors have a clear understanding of the quality of teaching and ensure that pay and promotion are matched to teachers' performance. They hold discussions with senior staff about any underperformance by teachers.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good**Behaviour**

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils of all ages and abilities are proud of the academy and have positive attitudes to learning in lessons. Pupils are sensible and respectful in the way they interact with each other. They concentrate on their tasks and cooperate well. Pupils respond promptly to teachers' instruction which ensures that they get on with work quickly and no time is wasted.
- Behaviour at lunchtime and break time is good. A range of activities and equipment is provided to help make these times fun and educational. Teaching assistants run a popular gardening club. Year 6 pupils are trained as sports leaders and are mature and sensible in the way they run activities for younger pupils.
- Pupils value the rewards and sanctions for behaviour ('It's good to be green'), and feel motivated to maintain good standards of behaviour. Academy data show that, over the last year, the consistent implementation of behaviour policies has reduced the number of minor incidents recorded significantly. Incidences of racist name-calling are infrequent, but are recorded and prompt action taken.
- A small number of more serious incidents is managed and documented well. The academy draws on the expertise of the partner school and other agencies to provide specialist support to meet specific needs of pupils. As a result, the behaviour of pupils who are more challenging has improved over time and serious breaches of behaviour expectations are rare.
- Pupils' attendance has improved and is now broadly in line with the national average. The majority of pupils arrive at the academy on time, ready to learn. An attendance officer, employed by the trust, is working diligently with families to remove barriers to attendance for pupils who are absent too frequently.

Safety

- The academy's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good.
- Pupils say that bullying is rare and they are confident about the help they will receive from adults. They are knowledgeable about dangers on the Internet and understand different forms of bullying.
- A very small number of parents suggested that the academy does not respond well to concerns raised about bullying. Inspectors examined this area of the academy's work and found a caring ethos. Adults know and understand the needs of pupils and are alert to any dangers they may face.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching of phonics is good. Well-organised groups at different levels of ability, and well-chosen activities enable pupils to make good progress in learning letters and sounds.
- The teaching of reading at Key Stage 1 enables pupils to develop their understanding of text and to predict meaning. Less confident readers in Year 1 and Year 2 enjoy reading, are developing fluency, and know how to use phonic strategies to work out words they are unsure of.
- At Key Stage 2, the teaching of reading successfully encourages pupils to identify the words they do not understand. Questioning and discussion by adults helps them to infer meaning and extend their vocabulary.
- Pupils read frequently at play and lunchtimes in the library, and make good use of guided reading time. More boy-friendly texts and more exciting and relevant topics have led to an increase in the number of boys wanting to read.
- Improvements in the teaching of writing have accelerated pupils' progress. The structured approach followed across the academy enables pupils to develop skills in particular types of writing, and helps them to improve the accuracy and presentation of their writing. Pupils at Key Stage 1 are encouraged to join their handwriting and to write pieces of increasing length using adventurous vocabulary. This was observed in a Year 2 lesson where 'someone' had 'trashed' the classroom at break time but luckily had left a few clues. Pupils excitedly set to work writing a description of the intruder, and most pupils demonstrated confident use of adjectives, spelling and punctuation.
- In mathematics, teaching is well matched to the range of pupil abilities. Tasks enable pupils of all abilities to develop confidence and to understand and practise mathematical skills. Pupils enjoy the regular opportunities to develop their problem-solving skills, and relish the chance to be the 'Maths Magician', a prestigious title given to the week's best problem-solver. Pre-assessment tasks are used well to focus teaching precisely on the gaps in pupils' learning. Post-assessment enables pupils and teachers to evaluate the progress pupils have made in developing specific skills accurately.

- Teaching is helping pupils to make useful links between subjects. This was seen in an art lesson that exploited links with history and mathematics. The strong subject knowledge of the teacher ensured that pupils used mathematical vocabulary when discussing how to make an Aztec Sun God mask.
- Regular and thorough marking of pupils' work is helping pupils to improve their understanding. Pupils in Key Stage 2 value the importance of responding to the teachers' comments using 'green pen'.
- Additional adults generally provide good support, although this is not as effective in the early years. Both teachers and adults take responsibility for teaching lower attaining pupils and those with special educational needs. Good planning enables adults to work flexibly and provide effective support for individuals. Questioning is used well to develop understanding and to correct errors.
- On occasion, new, less-experienced teachers lack fluency in explaining tasks and engaging pupils in dialogue. Leadership support is contributing well to the rapidly growing confidence and ability of new teachers.

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Since the academy opened, attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 and 2 has increased markedly. In 2014, the proportion that gained at least the expected Level 4 at the end of Key Stage 2 rose from significantly below average to average in reading, writing, grammar, punctuation and spelling. Attainment in mathematics also improved, but was a little below average. The percentage attaining Level 4, or above, in reading, writing and mathematics, combined, was above average.
- The proportion that gained the higher Level 5 was below average, particularly in writing.
- In 2014, Year 6 pupils made much improved progress in reading and writing, compared to the previous year. Proportions of pupils making expected and better than expected progress was similar to the national picture. In mathematics, progress was close to the national average.
- Current data indicate that pupils' attainment in reading and mathematics is on track to rise in 2015. Current Year 6 pupils are making good progress towards their targets. Accurate assessment indicates that all Year 6 pupils are making at least expected progress in reading, writing and mathematics and some are doing better than this.
- Results in national tests and assessments in 2014 show that there were gaps at the end of Year 6 in attainment in reading, writing and mathematics between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils in the academy. Disadvantaged pupils were around two terms behind their peers in the academy in reading and mathematics, and around one term behind in writing. They attained results in line with disadvantaged pupils nationally in reading and writing, but were around a term behind them in mathematics. Disadvantaged pupils made as much progress as others in the academy, and others nationally, in reading and writing. They did not make as much progress in mathematics. In the current year, disadvantaged pupils are making better progress than others in the academy.
- At Key Stage 1, the marked improvement in 2014 has been sustained in 2015. Thirty per cent more pupils in the current Year 2 are achieving expected levels in reading and mathematics, and 20% more in writing. A higher proportion of pupils is on track to reach expected levels in reading, writing and mathematics. The gap with other pupils nationally is narrow in reading and mathematics, but pupils are attaining levels around one term behind their peers nationally in writing.
- In Year 1, in 2014, the proportion meeting the expected standard in the national screening test of letters and sounds almost doubled and rose from a low level to close to the national average, reflecting the improvements in teaching. Reliable assessment predicts a further increase in 2015.
- In most year groups, other than Year 2 and Year 6, a new assessment system has been introduced following national changes in assessment. Leaders' judgements and evidence from pupils' work indicates that progress in the current year is at least in line with national expectations. In Years 4 and 5, a legacy of inconsistent teaching has limited progress when measured from the end of Key Stage 1. The good quality of current teaching and learning in upper Key Stage 2 indicates that pupils are making secure progress to meet the academy's higher expectations.
- In 2014, all the most able pupils attained standards above those expected for their age. The progress of the most able in mathematics was in line with the national average for this group.
- Pupils with special educational needs are making good progress in overcoming obstacles to their learning. Their diverse needs are assessed well and they are supported well by both teaching assistants and teachers. Lower attaining pupils, including some with special educational needs, have made faster progress as a result of expert extra support for basic skills in literacy and numeracy.

The early years provision**requires improvement**

- Many children join the Nursery class with knowledge and skills typical for their age but too few children are well-prepared to start Year 1. Achievement has not improved at the fast rate seen in the rest of the academy. In 2014, attainment was exceptionally low in writing, and in shape, space and measure.
- Only one third of Reception children achieved a good level of development in 2014. However, current assessments show that a greater proportion of children is on track to achieve at least the expected levels in 2015. During this academy year, the quality of leadership and teaching in the early years has improved, with the result that children have made better progress in the last two terms.
- Children behave well, play safely, and readily get involved in learning activities.
- There have been several changes to staffing, new leadership is in place and things are beginning to improve. The early years leader has reorganised the classroom so that children's learning is supported through many different activities, both independently, and by an adult.
- Teaching in the early years is not consistently good. Teaching assistants are not skilled in developing children's ability to speak in sentences, and in developing their thinking skills. Alongside this, some examples of good practice can be seen. The weekly 'challenges', for example, to build an obstacle course, or to hide an Easter egg, using the prepositions 'in front, behind, beside', provide a useful scaffold for developing language skills through play. The better-planned activities guide staff to ask questions and steer children in their exploration and learning.
- Assessment is not used effectively enough to identify children's needs and to plan learning. A new online assessment system has been introduced, but is in the early stages of implementation. Records do not currently provide a personal and detailed account of children's progress. This means that staff are unable to set up activities specifically to guide children to the next stage of their learning, which hampers their progress.
- Most children are learning to understand letters and the sounds they make. However, activities are not always planned sufficiently well or stimulating to ensure that they apply these skills in their reading and writing.
- Not enough has been done to involve parents in their child's learning and as a result, staff are not able to use opportunities to use the children's interests and strengths to increase the pace of learning.
- Senior leaders and the new early years leader have accurately identified the weaknesses in provision and are working with a strong shared vision for improvement. Effective action has been taken which has begun to bring about improvements.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	139420
Local authority	North East Lincolnshire
Inspection number	449893

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	134
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Chris Dixon
Headteacher	Ruth Beckett
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01472 328013
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