

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
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8 March 2019

Miss Ruth Beckett  
Associate Executive Principal  
Willows Academy  
Queensway  
Grimsby  
Lincolnshire  
DN37 9AT

Dear Miss Beckett

### **Short inspection of Willows Academy**

Following my visit to the school on 26 February 2019, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since your school was judged to be good in March 2015.

### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

The school's motto, 'believe to achieve', sums up the culture of aspiration which permeates the school. High expectations are clearly shared by leaders, governors, staff, pupils, parents and carers.

Since the last inspection, you have built further on the school's existing strengths. Your strong leadership, together with effective support and challenge from Delta Academies Trust, the associate advisory board and other school leaders, ensures that the school continues to improve.

School leaders are passionate for pupils to succeed and have a drive to ensure that pupils' learning is meaningful and develops their independence and collaboration skills. As a result, pupils are becoming confident learners who see learning as exciting and motivating. Pupils take pride in their work and consistently work hard in lessons.

Pupils are polite and enjoy having responsibilities in school. They are proud of having official 'jobs', which they have to apply and interview for. They discussed how these jobs, such as zoo managers (looking after the school's tortoises), shop managers, lunchtime support workers and prefects, have a positive impact on the school community.

Members of the school's associate advisory board have a strong understanding of the school strengths and areas for improvement. They are well skilled and effectively hold leaders to account. They use well-planned milestones from the school development plan effectively to monitor progress towards school improvement.

In your previous inspection, you were asked to develop the school's curriculum. The curriculum is well thought out and pupils are motivated to learn through a 'mission curriculum', where pupils are set meaningful questions to solve through their learning. Staff have carefully considered the type of skills they want their pupils to develop throughout their schooling. Consequently, they plan learning that develops these learning characteristics. For example, staff identified the need for pupils to understand the wider world and care for their community, therefore they developed learning characteristics of 'a global guardian' and 'a community ambassador' that are taught within the curriculum. Through carefully considered activities, pupils are developing a strong understanding of other faiths and cultures.

Pupils benefit from fun and unique learning experiences. They can vividly recount learning due to immersive experiences such as going into a room and being transported to an ancient Egyptian pyramid, through 360° views, smells and sounds. They value these opportunities. This was supported by a pupil who said, 'I love learning.'

You were also asked to provide more opportunities for parents to understand and support their children's learning. You have worked hard to think of ways to involve parents in their children's learning, including through holding regular workshops and meetings. In addition, the school's science fair encouraged parents to support pupils. Winning pupils and their families visited the Eon Humber Gateway wind farm in the North Sea. However, some parents still say that they would like more opportunities to come into school, especially to celebrate their children's learning.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff and governors receive regular training, so that their knowledge of good practice in safeguarding is kept up to date. They have a clear understanding of what to do if they are worried about a pupil's well-being, and leaders ensure that any concerns are swiftly followed up. Leaders also ensure that appropriate checks are made on staff, governors, volunteers and regular visitors to the school to make sure that they are suitable people to work with children.

Pupils say that they feel safe in school and there is always an adult to talk to should they have any worries or concerns. They have a good understanding of what bullying is, including the different types of bullying, but are confident that bullying is extremely rare in their school. Pupils who have joined the school from other countries or areas of the United Kingdom say they were quickly made to feel welcome and 'instantly had lots of friends'. Pupils also understand how to keep themselves safe in different situations, such as when using the internet.

Pupils' physical health is well supported through imaginative lunchtime games and a welcoming physical environment that pupils want to play in. Pupils were observed enjoying their opportunities for skipping, hula-hooping, playing ball games and using the active-gym.

## **Inspection findings**

- At the start of my visit, we agreed several key lines of enquiry for the inspection. Firstly, I looked at how effectively leaders were addressing the teaching of phonics at key stage 1. This was identified because although phonics outcomes have improved since 2015 they remain below national averages. In 2018, these results dropped again to be significantly below national averages. However, evidence gathered shows that leaders have quickly addressed this and, as a result, current teaching of phonics is strong. Training has been put in place for all adults and consequently all adults contribute to pupils making strong progress in phonics.
- Pupils who did not pass the phonics screening in Year 1 catch up quickly. They are supported through effective phonics teaching to develop skills which means they are now successfully accessing texts at an age appropriate level. Careful monitoring ensures that the effective teaching of phonics remains a high priority. Targeted interventions are used to address any areas of weakness.
- I also looked at the impact leaders have had on developing reading at key stage 2. This was because, over time, attainment in reading has been lower than that of writing and mathematics. Since leaders have identified reading as an area for improvement, the teaching of reading has rapidly improved across the school. All pupils are exposed to challenging class texts and, as a result, pupils are understanding and therefore using more adventurous vocabulary in discussions and in their writing.
- Books are used at the heart of the curriculum, which means pupils study their class novel over an extended period and in more detail. This consequently deepens their learning and, as a result, pupils' love of reading is beginning to develop. Pupils read with confidence and frequently. They can discuss different authors and genres they enjoy reading.
- Leaders are aware that there is still work to do to embed the improvements in reading, through developing access to more exciting and inspirational reading texts that promote pupils' independent reading.
- Finally, I looked at how leaders were improving outcomes in the early years. This was also identified as an area for improvement in your previous inspection report. However, since then, outcomes have improved significantly. The proportion of children achieving a good level of development is in line with other children nationally.
- Early years provision is becoming a strength of the school. The teachers know the children well and, as a result, they adapt learning to meet their needs and interests. An example of this is how the early years staff changed their learning mid-lesson to follow the children's interests in caterpillars and ladybirds. As a result, adults facilitated learning based on the children's interests.
- Children in the early years show independence and resilience. They remain

focused on learning for extended periods of time both independently and through effective adult intervention.

- The early years environment is well thought out, with activities that challenge children. Activities are well planned to ensure that children can take ownership of their learning. They can access equipment independently when they feel it is appropriate.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- continue to improve outcomes in reading by ensuring that pupils have access to books that are motivating and challenging
- continue to develop frequent opportunities for parents to be involved in their children's learning.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the associate advisory board and the chief executive officer of Delta Academies Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for North East Lincolnshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Eve Morris  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and other senior and middle leaders. I met with representatives of Delta Academies Trust and members of the school's associate advisory board. I evaluated documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, the school development plan, information about pupils' attainment and progress, minutes of local governing body meetings, behaviour and attendance records and information about safeguarding. I spoke with parents and pupils. I considered the two free-text responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I also looked at the 10 responses to the staff questionnaire and 12 responses from pupils to their questionnaire. I visited every classroom with you to observe teaching and learning and to scrutinise pupils' work in their books.