

# Willow Grove Primary School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	132155
<b>Local authority</b>	Wigan
<b>Inspection number</b>	360381
<b>Inspection dates</b>	12–13 January 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Brian Padgett HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	5–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	48
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Phillip Stansbie
<b>Headteacher</b>	Valda Pearson
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	27 November 2007
<b>School address</b>	Willow Grove Ashton-in-Makerfield Wigan WN4 8XF
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors. Five lessons were observed involving five of the teachers. Meetings were held with parents and carers, members of the school council, governors, staff, and representatives of external agencies and of the local authority. The inspector observed the school's work and looked at its documentation, including records of pupils' progress and school policies. He analysed the results of returned questionnaires, including 19 from parents.

The inspector reviewed many aspects of the school's work. He looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The achievement of different groups of pupils and whether all groups achieve equally well.
- The success with which pupils overcome and/or manage their behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.
- The effectiveness of middle leaders in promoting improvement.
- How well the school works with its other partners to support pupils' learning and development.

## Information about the school

The school provides for pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties from Years 1 to 6. Pupils are allocated to the school by a local authority panel. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs. Eight pupils are in public care. About two thirds of the pupils have additional special educational needs and/or disabilities, including autistic spectrum condition, specific learning difficulties, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, hearing impairment, speech and language difficulties and complex needs. Over half of the pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals. Nearly all pupils are boys, and all are of White British background. The majority of the pupils are currently in Years 5 and 6, although pupils may join or leave the school earlier in their primary school years. They may also leave to rejoin mainstream primary schools.

The school has several awards including Eco School, Healthy School and Dyslexia Friendly School.

**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

Willow Grove is an outstanding school. It takes in pupils who have had a very poor start to school and, for many, a deeply traumatic start to life. The school turns them round, building trust in adults where there was none and self-belief when the youngsters thought they were failures. It is a school where pupils inspire remarkable dedication in staff. It is a good place to be, for pupils and for their parents and carers. Attendance is high. The school is held in the highest esteem by the many agencies which support its work.

Pupils are allocated a place in the school at different points in their primary education. They have not coped with school and their schools have not coped with them. Some of the pupils who are subsequently identified with additional special educational needs and/or disabilities arrive with their special needs undiagnosed. The self-esteem of many pupils is so low on admission to the school that they are unwilling to try any form of work where they have previously failed. The school is extremely successful in recovering pupils from this seemingly hopeless position. They work first on assessing pupils' needs and on creating the conditions of trust where pupils feel secure enough to attempt to learn. By the time pupils leave for their different destinations, they have made outstanding progress in their personal development. Their progress in learning places them among the most improving pupils in the country when compared to pupils with similar starting points.

Such outstanding progress is the result of provision of exceptional quality. The care, support and guidance for pupils are of the highest quality. Exceptional features include the provision of play therapy for pupils who have not experienced normal emotional and social development. Teachers are extremely skilled in building positive, trusting relationships with pupils who find it very difficult to manage their behaviour or take risks with new challenges. They have excellent support from teaching assistants who know the pupils so well and provide outstanding emotional support for them. This enables teachers to forge ahead with learning. Teachers and teaching assistants share high expectations of pupils and show exceptional adaptability in responding to pupils' often rapidly changing needs, moving seamlessly from challenging pupils to supporting them as the need arises. The curriculum is extremely well tailored to providing opportunities for pupils to catch up on basic skills, particularly reading, and to provide opportunities for social and emotional development. Many rich opportunities enable pupils to enjoy physical education and

sports, to play musical instruments, and to learn in the community, where they are often complimented on their good behaviour.

The school was last inspected in 2007. It was judged outstanding. Those responsible for leadership and management of the school have maintained the school's high performance and developed it further, so its capacity for further improvement remains excellent. Leadership is extremely strong at all levels. There is rigorous self-evaluation. The inspection did not identify any issues of which the school was not already aware. One of these points was to extend the marking of pupils' work to help them understand better what they need to learn next. In 2007, leadership at middle management levels was developing; it is now firmly established. The school is well governed. Governors hold the professionals to account and bring many skills to their work on the governing body. The influence of the headteacher is central to the school's success. She provides excellent oversight and has earned the respect and gratitude of staff and parents alike. Under her leadership, the school is innovative and forward looking. It is resourced to meet the challenges it faces well and provides excellent value for money.

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

- Improve marking and the involvement of pupils by recording the next steps in learning in their books.

### **Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**

<b>1</b>
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Pupils arrive at the school with levels of attainment that are generally extremely low. Despite some pupils having the potential to attain well, they may be up to three or four years behind pupils of their age with significant gaps in their knowledge and understanding. On arrival, many of the pupils have not taken part in lessons for some time. A high proportion of the pupils, about three quarters, have underlying special educational needs and/or disabilities additional to their behavioural, social and emotional needs that have gone undiagnosed. Pupils leave the school with levels of attainment that vary considerably, depending partly on their starting points and also on the length of time they are at the school. Pupils who arrive earlier make the greater gains. Some pupils against all of the odds attain the national expectations in English and mathematics.

Pupils make remarkable progress in dealing with their behavioural, emotional and social issues. Pupils who could never be considered to take part in school performances in their previous schools, for example, go on to take leading parts at Willow Grove. The overcoming of these problems is a core business for the school, in which it is extremely effective. Gradually, pupils overcome their resistance to learning and begin to enjoy lessons, developing good attitudes to school work. Pupils' attendance is high. It is above the average for primary schools and well above that for special schools of this type. Pupils in public care have the highest attendance of all groups, the reverse of the national picture. Academic progress matches or exceeds national expectations and the value added by the school in 2009, in relation to the pupils' starting points, was within the top 5% in England.

Pupils in the school have behavioural problems from time to time. They would be the first to admit this as they are generally open and direct about their issues. The extent to which they behave well, show consideration for others, and apply themselves to their work varies. However, for all pupils, the progress they have made to reach these levels of development is outstanding, and parents and carers are quick to acknowledge this. Pupils play a significant role in decisions made within the school, such as through the school council. They have good ideas and contribute responsibly and very effectively to the school’s development. Overall, behaviour is good and the school is calm and orderly.

The majority of pupils move on to the local authority’s secondary provision for students with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. About 10% of pupils go on to other specialist schools which provide for their specialist needs. About a quarter of pupils rejoin a primary school or join a mainstream secondary school when they leave.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>1</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	*
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
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	1
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>2</b>

**How effective is the provision?**

The care, guidance and support for pupils were outstanding at the last inspection and they remain so. This is a major factor in the rehabilitation of pupils as they are extremely anxious on admission because of their previous experiences in mainstream schools. Settling-in may take many months. This period requires high levels of patience and a consistent approach to managing pupils from teachers and teaching assistants. In time, pupils begin to trust adults and feel safe enough to talk about their behaviour and confident enough to try new things. During this period, the school assesses what pupils can do and understand. It works with external agencies to discover whether there are underlying special educational needs and/or disabilities that may be the root cause of pupils’ inability to cope in mainstream schools. An early start is made in supporting pupils to acquire the basic skills, where most pupils

<sup>1</sup>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.

have fallen far behind. Parents and carers are engaged early, with the partnership workers taking a lead role in meetings with professionals from external agencies. High levels of care are evident when pupils prepare to move on to secondary education or are re-integrated into primary schools, when staff accompany pupils for many weeks, making sure the transitions are successful.

Teachers are very skilled in working with pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Their ability to form trusting and close relationships while maintaining their professionalism is exceptional. They are extremely flexible and successfully adapt their lessons and planning very quickly in response to the rapidly-changing needs of pupils. They are highly dependent on the work of teaching assistants who play a vital role in their emotional support for pupils. Teachers have high expectations of pupils' learning and eventually, pupils respond to these by developing self-belief and growing in the maturity with which they evaluate their progress. The school has recognised it has more to do to involve pupils fully in evaluating their progress and deciding what comes next. A good start has been made and this is work in progress. Such is the demand within classes on staff's emotional reserves the school provides clinical supervision from trained therapists in order to help staff maintain their professionalism and objectivity. This is far-sighted provision, much valued by staff.

The school has developed, and continues to improve a highly-effective curriculum that is adapted very well to pupils' needs. It emphasises the acquisition of basic skills, behaviour management, and personal and social development. Since the last inspection the school has developed a creative curriculum through themes that interest pupils and motivate them to learn, and, in particular, to write. Lessons are enriched by opportunities to take part in exercise and sport, learn a foreign language and to play a musical instrument. A good range of after-school clubs and visits out of school and in the local community enrich pupils' experiences. Unusually, the school employs the services of a play therapist. She plays a vital role in training staff and organising individual and group sessions with pupils. These sessions are highly-valued by staff as a means of gaining better understanding of the pupils' emotional and social development. School drama performances by the pupils are hugely enjoyed by staff and parents and carers, and provide memorable experiences for all, poignant in their demonstration of the gains in pupils' confidence and self-belief.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>1</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>1</b>

## **How effective are leadership and management?**

Leadership and management at the school are highly successful. The school has a positive and welcoming ethos promoted by all staff. The headteacher has built up an exceptionally cohesive team, like-minded in their commitment to the pupils to whom they are much attached. Senior staff provide very good support for the headteacher

and oversee key areas of the school’s work. Middle leaders have developed their role since the last inspection and play a significant part in leading on school improvement. This development has enabled the senior team to take a step back and evaluate the school in a more objective way. Staff feel valued by the leadership, as evidenced by the very low staff turn-over.

Partnership work is exceptional: the school liaises with nearly 20 different agencies on behalf of its pupils and works with many schools. The agencies contacted in the course of the inspection commented on their high regard for the school and the way in which their contributions were valued and facilitated by school leaders. The partnership with parents and carers is an extremely positive element of the school’s work, recognising fully that support for the family is an essential part of the process of working with children with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.

Safeguarding and child protection procedures are excellent. Routines are in place for the many extra challenges faced by a school of this nature; for example, in the secure provision of medicines and the extra first aid training required of staff. Providing equality of opportunity for its pupils is a central driver for the leadership team. Each pupil is treated as an individual and pupils’ progress in all respects is monitored and tracked most carefully. Staff are rigorous in their interventions to prevent and explain discrimination to pupils. Community cohesion is promoted well, despite the dispersed nature of pupils’ home locations throughout Wigan and beyond. The links with the local community are developing particularly strongly and the school enjoys a good reputation within it.

The school is very well managed. It has efficient and effective reception, administrative and maintenance teams that ensure the school is well-organised, clean and runs smoothly. Governors are effectively organised in committees. They are well-informed about the work of the school and proud of its achievements. Individual governors contribute useful skills to the running of the school and are effective in their challenge to school leaders. The school undertakes regular and rigorous self-evaluation exercises that lead to clear improvement plans.

*These are the grades for the leadership and management*

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

## Views of parents and carers

All parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire were happy with the school and what it does for their children. All believe their children enjoy school and they are 100% supportive of the headteacher. Parents and carers become emotional about what the school has done for their children, and sometimes for them. This is because they see their children's transformation from apparent failure to growing confidence, self-belief and the progress they make in their learning.

Very few questionnaires recorded any concerns from parents and carers. However, of these, the response about communication from the school to parents and carers suggested a slight concern for a few. The school works extremely hard to involve parents and carers but is hindered by the dispersed nature of the school's parent/carer community across the whole of Wigan. The school will look at how communication and involvement can be further improved.

## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Willow Grove Primary 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 inspector received 19 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 48 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	9	47	10	53	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	15	79	4	21	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	12	63	6	32	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	12	63	6	32	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	12	63	7	37	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	11	58	6	32	2	11	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	12	63	7	37	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)	10	53	6	32	1	5	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	14	74	3	16	1	5	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	14	74	5	26	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	11	58	6	32	1	5	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	13	68	6	32	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	13	68	6	32	0	0	0	0

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 all 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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

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 is for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk))

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

## 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"> <li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li> <li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li> <li>■ The quality of teaching.</li> <li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.</li> <li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li> </ul>
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.**



14 January 2011

Dear Pupils

### **Inspection of Willow Grove Primary School, Wigan, WN4 8XF**

You may remember I visited your school recently to carry out its Ofsted inspection. When I talked to members of the school council I promised them I would write to the pupils to tell them the results of the inspection. This is the letter I promised.

I am very pleased to tell you I have given your school the top grade of 'outstanding'. This is the second time in a row that it has achieved the highest grade a school can achieve. I know all the people who work in the school, or who are connected with it, are very proud of you. I am pleased to be able to add Ofsted's official recognition of the school's excellence and of your achievements.

All of you had a very difficult start to school life. Many of you must have thought you would never be able to learn and some that it might be your fault. But at Willow Grove, Mrs Pearson and her staff give you the confidence to see you can be good learners and help you to make massive improvements in managing your behaviour. I saw the highest levels of care for children. I saw very skilled teachers, teaching assistants and support staff. They know you inside out and are 100% determined you will achieve the best you are capable of. Your parents and carers are unanimous in their praise for the school. They have seen the dramatic improvement in your attitudes and behaviour. That has made life better for them and they know the school is ready, through Mrs Latham's Parent Partnership Service, to support them at home, so they are not on their own.

Your school feels like a good place to be. There is much celebration of your successes. Lessons are interesting. You get on very well with your teachers. 'Respect' is a word I heard many times. There is lots for you to look forward to in school, after school and out of school. You are very busy. I am a little disappointed the inspection was not at a time when I could see your end-of-year or Christmas performances – they are legendary!

Our best schools never stop trying to get better. At Willow Grove, for example, the Everyone Playing in Class (EPIC) is breaking new ground in helping you sort out the difficulties you face. I could not find anything to add to make the school better that

Mrs Pearson has not already thought of. We both thought teachers could involve you a little bit more when they are deciding what you need to learn next.

Do continue to enjoy your time at Willow Grove. It is a very special place. Largely, this is because this is the place you overcome your difficulties and learn well. Wherever your next destination, I wish you continued success.

Yours sincerely

Brian Padgett  
Her Majesty's Inspector

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