

The Willink School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	110048
Local authority	West Berkshire
Inspection number	378042
Inspection dates	30–31 May 2012
Lead inspector	Patricia Metham HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1030
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	170
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Julie Spratley
Headteacher	Mr Peter Fry
Date of previous school inspection	14–15 January 2009
School address	School Lane Burghfield Common Reading RG7 3XJ
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Introduction

Inspection team

Patricia Metham

Her Majesty's Inspector

Allan Barfoot

Additional Inspector

Michael Elson

Additional Inspector

Patricia Maclachlan

Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors visited 32 lessons, observed 31 different teachers, and held meetings with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body, staff and students. Inspectors took account of responses to the on-line Parent View survey in planning the inspection. They evaluated students' achievement over three years and reviewed schemes of work, policies, the school's self-evaluation and development plan and minutes of governing body meetings. They considered 122 responses to the questionnaire sent to parents and carers, 144 responses to the students' questionnaire and 72 responses from staff.

Information about the school

The Willink is a comprehensive school of average size, with more girls than boys. It meets the government's current floor standards, which set out the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress. The school has been a language college since 1999. Vocational and sixth form options are extended through links with Reading College and with a neighbouring school. The school's awards include Artsmark Gold, International Schools and the Healthy Schools Gold Standard. The Willink Leisure Centre is a joint school-community resource.

Approximately 8% of students are from minority ethnic groups, the largest group being of any other White background. About two in every hundred are known to have English as an additional language, a proportion well below the national average. The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs who are supported at school action plus or have a statement of special educational needs, is well below average. Students' special educational needs are predominantly moderate or specific learning difficulties and, for a few, hearing impairment. A larger than average proportion joins the school partway through secondary education. The proportion known to be eligible for free school meals is below average, about one in every twenty students. The school has a breakfast club and a homework club.

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	3
Achievement of pupils	3
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- The school provides a satisfactory education and is improving steadily, with clear-sighted and engaging leadership. It is not yet good overall because students' achievement, whilst improving, is uneven and teaching is not consistently good or better. The school's self-evaluation is detailed and accurate and recent strategies are strengthening teaching and learning. Safeguarding procedures are thorough. Capacity for further improvement is strong. Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.
- The sixth form is satisfactory. Attainment and progress are uneven but improving. Sixth formers are well motivated and responsible. Year 12 leavers take up college courses, apprenticeships or employment and most students leaving after Year 13 progress to university.
- While students do well in several subjects, overall attainment is broadly average. Progress is satisfactory, being strongest in mathematics and science. Able students are not always fully challenged because expectations are not consistently high. On occasion, students are unclear about what is to be learnt and how to succeed. They are not routinely given time to respond to guidance given in marked work. Disabled students and those with special educational needs have progressed more slowly than others in the school but this gap is closing.
- Rigorous and systematic monitoring of teaching and good management of staff performance set priorities for well-managed professional training and support. The proportion of good teaching is increasing. Lesson plans are carefully constructed but not always adapted to meet students' immediate needs and to encourage independent and creative learning.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is rooted in the curriculum, linked to equality of respect and opportunity and promoted through a network of care and guidance. Students feel safe and cared for. They are interested, courteous and cooperative and behave well.
- The curriculum is broad, balanced and flexible. It combines a substantial academic core with vocational opportunities, some provided off site. The languages specialism makes a major contribution.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Build on recent improvements in students' attainment and progress by ensuring that:
 - students across the ability range, particularly the most able, are fully challenged in lessons, with their steps to success clearly and regularly identified
 - time is routinely given for students to reflect on and respond to the guidance given and corrections made in the marking of their work
 - opportunities for students to develop as independent, active and creative learners are an integral and substantial part of their school experience.
- Refine and embed best practice in lesson planning and teaching to establish consistency across departments by ensuring that all teachers:
 - use regularly updated information about students' attainment and progress when planning lessons, so that all needs and learning styles are catered for
 - in lessons, evaluate and respond to differences in students' understanding of the topics covered and their ability to complete activities successfully
 - adjust the pace and the timing of activities to match students' concentration spans and rates of working.

Main report

Achievement of students

Students join the school with widely differing prior attainment. The school's ability to challenge able students is demonstrated by exceptionally high attainment in the three sciences at GCSE, but this has not in recent years been matched by students' progress and attainment across the curriculum. There is robust evidence that students are now making much stronger progress in previously weaker subjects, principally English. Overall attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is broadly average. The proportion gaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C or equivalent, including English and mathematics, has been above average for at least three years

Progress across Key Stages 3 and 4 is uneven but broadly satisfactory. Where expectations are high and teaching is challenging and engaging, students make good or better progress. This was seen in a Year 10 music lesson in which students, working in small groups, showed creativity and skill as they translated what they had learnt about Indonesian Gamelan traditions into a short composition for percussion instruments. Each performance was assessed by other groups, which also tested the assessors' learning. In lessons where progress was no better than satisfactory, neither the planning nor the teaching took effective account of students' differing abilities and presented only patchy levels of challenge. Scrutiny of students' written work in core subjects showed most making at least satisfactory progress. Students are able to identify specific areas in which they have improved over the year, for example in developing breadth of vocabulary and variety of sentence structure. Provision for disabled students and those with special educational needs has

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improved since the last inspection and is steadily closing the achievement gap between these and others at the school. Regular and detailed tracking of progress ensures that individual needs are quickly identified and appropriate in-class support and additional tuition organised. These interventions and the developing role of Heads of Learning in combining academic mentoring and pastoral support are also closing the achievement gap between those known to be eligible for free school meals and other students.

Students are responsive and keen to do well. They approach group work with enthusiasm and an evident sense of purpose, showing a readiness to learn from each other. They make good use of opportunities to evaluate each other's work when they are given clear guidance on what to look for.

Sixth form numbers have been increasing, indicating students' rising aspirations and growing confidence in the opportunities provided. Poor results for the large number entered for general studies in 2011 accounted for a dip in overall attainment and the school has adjusted its curriculum to avoid a repetition. Thorough and rigorous assessment of students' current progress shows a more positive picture, which was supported by inspection evidence. Particular strengths are evident in mathematics, sciences and art and design. Almost all students succeed in achieving qualifications that gain them entry to higher education, further training, including apprenticeships, or employment.

Parents and carers who responded to the inspection questionnaire expressed confidence that their children were making good progress. This reflects students' positive attitudes and personal sense of achievement rather than their overall progress when compared with students nationally.

Quality of teaching

In their responses, most parents and carers expressed the view that their children are well taught. Students themselves feel that they are helped to do as well as they can by most, but not quite all, of their teachers. A small sample of sixth formers, while confident that their decision to stay on at the school had been justified, commented on the uneven quality of teaching. Inspectors found that, while a substantial proportion of teaching is good, much is still satisfactory. No inadequate teaching was observed.

Typical strengths in teaching across Key Stages 3 and 4 and the sixth form include: well-structured planning; secure subject knowledge; a positive rapport with students; use of open questions to test students' understanding; encouragement of group work and peer- and self-assessment; confident use of varied resources; attention to literacy across subjects; and, in the most effective lessons, the matching of tasks to individual abilities and learning styles. This was demonstrated in a Year 10 French lesson in which the teacher successfully combined use of the target language, cheerfully firm behaviour management and activities that successfully guided students from one step to the next. Students are clear about teaching approaches

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that most help their learning, as these observations by Key Stage 4 students illustrate. 'Interactive lessons – we get involved, it helps us to learn.' 'You learn a lot by teaching others.' 'We do group work, which helps.'

A range of teaching strategies supports disabled students and those with special educational needs. Amongst the most effective of these are: one-to-one tuition; in-class support by specially trained learning assistants; small-group teaching; and booster sessions, particularly valuable for those whose off-site courses take them out of school regularly. Lesson plans identify students with special needs and outline targeted approaches. Where appropriate, teachers provide prompt sheets and a framework to help students organise their ideas confidently.

In less effective lessons, teachers do not always use the most up-to-date assessment information to plan work that matches students' ability levels and learning styles. Occasionally teachers stick too firmly to their original plan when students' responses indicate the need for a different approach. Similarly, some teachers do not effectively adjust the pace and timing of activities to match students' rates of working, taking into account their concentration spans. Opportunities for students to develop skills as independent, active and creative learners are not always exploited fully. Although work is regularly marked, students are not routinely given enough time to respond to written guidance.

Behaviour and safety of students

Overall, students' behaviour is good. Students respond willingly to instruction and are keen to meet expectations. In response to the questionnaire, parents, carers and students commented on occasionally disruptive behaviour in lessons. Inspection evidence shows that, when the pace is slow and tasks lack clarity or interest, a few students lose concentration and become distracted and distracting. Typically, this low-level disruption is good-humoured and stops when the learning becomes more actively engaging. Almost all the behaviour observed in lessons and around the school was courteous and sensible.

Attendance is above average. The rate of fixed-term exclusions is falling following a brief increase when a new behaviour code was introduced. Students are emphatic that they feel safe. They have a good awareness of the different forms of bullying, including cyber bullying and prejudice-based harassment, and say that instances are rare and are always dealt with promptly and well. The Learning Support Centre is rightly seen as a valuable resource, offering care and guidance for vulnerable students or those at risk of exclusion and expert support for those struggling with any aspect of school life, including their learning.

Leadership and management

Governors and senior leaders communicate an ambitious vision, shared at all levels: to educate effective global citizens, most speaking more than one language and all with an international perspective that will enhance their future prospects. This

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shapes the school's ethos, raises its profile and drives curriculum development. Staff, students, parents and carers support modern languages being part of the core curriculum and welcome links between modern languages and other subjects. Teachers' professional development benefits from the school's participation in language-based research by universities and in the training of new teachers.

To teach consistently well and to drive improvement in students' attainment and progress are key targets set for teachers' performance management. Senior leaders monitor teaching and learning rigorously, following up action points and arranging support and mentoring where appropriate. Careful pairing of teachers in cross-subject 'coaching duos' is encouraging the sharing of good practice and a collaborative approach to planning. Subject leaders play an increasingly active part in monitoring teaching and in reviewing marking and assessment. Through mentoring and access to nationally accredited courses, the school is increasing middle leaders' and managers' capacity to drive improvement. The proportion of good or better teaching is increasing, which is strengthening attainment and progress.

The curriculum is good, with breadth and flexibility, and contributes significantly to the school's improvement. The decision to maintain a traditional, academic programme reflects current national priorities; placing modern languages within the core ensures that many students cover English Baccalaureate requirements. Complementing this is a well-managed programme of vocational courses in partnership with Reading College, another school and local employers. The school's provision is impressively inclusive. It promotes equality of opportunity and esteem for students of differing abilities and ambitions, for example through effective strategies to close the achievement gap between disabled students and those with special educational needs and their contemporaries. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strongly promoted through the mainstream and extended curriculum and through opportunities to develop leadership and teamwork skills in school, locally and overseas.

Care is taken to build positive relationships with students' families. Close liaison with the nearby Air Force base supports students from services families. School-home communication is regular and comprehensive, including frequent postcards celebrating students' personal successes. Attendance at students' progress review meetings is good. Challenges presented by individual students are approached collaboratively, with considerable success. Students' safety and well-being are carefully protected, with safe recruitment procedures and regularly updated child protection training for staff and health and safety reviews. The headteacher justifiably identified a strong sense of community as one of the school's defining qualities.

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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



1 June 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of The Willink School, Reading RG7 3XJ

Thank you for the friendliness and openness with which you showed us your work and answered our questions when we visited your school recently. Yours is a satisfactory and steadily improving school, with particular strengths in its leadership, in the curriculum and in the contribution you make through your behaviour and attitudes to learning. While you do very well in some subjects, your attainment and progress across subjects are uneven. Although currently satisfactory, there is firm evidence that achievement and the quality of teaching are both improving.

Care is taken to ensure that your individual needs and ambitions are understood and catered for. As one of you said, 'It's not just for one type of person.' The school's focus on developing your knowledge of other languages and cultures has a positive impact on the curriculum and prepares you well for the future. Those in the sixth form progress successfully to further education, training and employment. You support each other well, taking on responsibilities within the school and in the wider community. We were pleased to know that you and your families feel that you are safe at school and that any difficulties will be quickly and effectively dealt with.

We also agree with you that there are aspects of your school that need to be more consistently effective, so we have asked your headteacher to ensure that:

- all teaching is as good as the best, has high expectations for you all, and encourages you to be independent and creative
- you are always clear about what you are to learn and the steps you must take to succeed
- you are given time to respond to the guidance given when your work is marked
- teachers assess your progress regularly in lessons and adapt lesson plans to match your immediate needs, so that you are fully challenged and supported.

You can help by having ambitious goals and working hard to achieve them.

Yours sincerely

Patricia Metham
Her Majesty's Inspector

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