

Inspection of Willow Bank Primary School

Seacourt Road, Thamesmead, London SE2 9XB

Inspection dates: 25 and 26 April 2023

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
The quality of education	Requires improvement
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Good

What is it like to attend this school?

This is a nurturing school. From the early years, children are well cared for. Although the school's performance has declined since the last inspection, a new leadership team has worked hard to improve all areas of the school's work. Pupils typically enjoy school and are safe and happy here.

Leaders have prioritised making improvements to reading, writing and mathematics. In these areas, pupils learn the curriculum well. However, there is more to do to ensure that all pupils achieve equally well across the wider curriculum.

Leaders have worked to ensure that the school is a calm and orderly place. Pupils are focused on their work in class. They enjoy collecting house points for meeting leaders' high expectations for their behaviour. Beginning in the early years, children learn to get along with each other, to take turns and to share.

Pupils enjoy undertaking a range of responsibilities, including as reading ambassadors and attendance ambassadors. Playground leaders are proud to help the youngest children; for example, they help them to line up to collect their meals at lunchtimes.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The school has been through an unsettled period, with significant changes in leadership. This, coupled with disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, has delayed the development of some curriculum subjects. The new leadership team knows precisely what steps to take to improve pupils' learning across the curriculum. While many improvements have been made, for example to mathematics and writing, other changes are in their early stages. As a result, pupils do not achieve as well as they might across the curriculum.

Teachers in the early years accurately assess children's starting points. They use the information to extend children's knowledge and build on what children already know. However, the assessment of older pupils' knowledge is less effective. Checks on pupils' understanding are not routinely careful. As a result, pupils have gaps in their knowledge.

Leaders have dedicated time successfully to improving teachers' subject knowledge, especially in mathematics, reading and writing. In these subjects especially, teachers break information down and present it clearly. In the early years, teachers focus carefully on repeating the language that children need to hear again and again to learn new knowledge. In some other subjects, teachers do not deliver all the curriculum content as coherently as leaders intend. As a result, pupils do not develop equally detailed knowledge across the curriculum.

Leaders have ensured that early reading and phonics are taught effectively to all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). From the early years onwards, all pupils quickly gain the knowledge they need to read fluently and confidently. Leaders have ensured that staff are well trained to teach reading successfully. Leaders provide many opportunities for parents, carers and their children to read together. For example, during weekly reading mornings for the youngest children, parents can come into the classroom and read with their child.

Leaders make sure that they identify the needs of pupils with SEND swiftly. They provide thoughtful support to help pupils manage their emotions, when needed, such as 'Willow Walks' with the school dog, which help pupils to feel calm. Leaders ensure that pupils with SEND learn to read and get better at mathematics. This helps pupils with SEND to access the wider curriculum and to learn the same content as their peers. However, on occasion, the work set for pupils with SEND is not as closely tailored to their needs, which makes it difficult for them to complete the work set. As a result, they have some gaps in their knowledge.

Leaders have brought in changes to support pupils' positive behaviour. Pupils and teachers comment that these changes strongly encourage pupils to behave in ways that help them to be successful in the classroom. Leaders have significantly improved pupils' attendance rates this year.

From the early years upwards, pupils are taught about relationships, health and well-being. Pupils are taught in detail about different religions, beliefs and cultures. Leaders organise a wide variety of popular clubs and outings to deepen pupils' wider learning. Pupils spoke with confidence about the importance of upholding the school's values, such as through demonstrating resilience and having high aspirations.

The new headteacher and leadership team have made significant improvements since they took up post last year. Staff are well supported in terms of training and professional development. Leaders' communication is clear, and staff say that leaders take their workload into account. One staff member, representing the views of many, said that the changes leaders have made have been 'transformational'.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have put in place clear systems to ensure that pupils and staff report their concerns. There is a number of well-trained safeguarding leaders. Staff and pupils alike know who they are and how to report to them any concerns that may arise.

Leaders provide effective and regular safeguarding training to staff, with key points repeated in weekly briefings and memos. Staff understand their responsibilities and are vigilant. Leaders work decisively to secure the help pupils need in a timely manner.

Pupils are taught to stay safe, including online.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Sometimes, teachers do not ensure that all pupils with SEND complete work set. As a result, they have gaps in their knowledge and do not learn the curriculum as leaders intend. Leaders should ensure that teachers make adaptations so that all pupils with SEND can complete work that will help them to follow the intended curriculum.
- In some cases, teachers do not check pupils' understanding systematically to identify where there are gaps in their knowledge and misconceptions, or to check they have learned the curriculum as leaders intend. As a result, what pupils remember in some subjects is reduced, and they sometimes recall incorrect information. This makes it hard for them to make sense of what they have learned. Leaders should ensure that teachers cover all curriculum content as intended and that they check pupils' understanding systematically to address gaps in their knowledge and correct misconceptions.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	136932
Local authority	Bexley
Inspection number	10255379
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	282
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Louise Miriam Wolsey
Headteacher	Abigail Oldfield
Website	www.willowbankprimaryschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	5 December 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Woodland Academy Trust.
- The headteacher and deputy headteacher started in post in February 2022.
- There have been a number of changes to the leadership of the school since the last inspection.
- The school makes use of one alternative education provider, Horizons Academy Bexley.
- The school runs breakfast and after-school clubs.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics, art and history. For each deep dive, they discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, looked at pupils' work, spoke to teachers and spoke to some pupils about their learning.
- Inspectors also looked at curriculum information in other subjects.
- Inspectors considered the school's policies and procedures for safeguarding and supporting pupils' health and safety, as well as their welfare and well-being. This included looking at case studies and reviewing the school's record of pre-employment checks.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher and other senior leaders. Inspectors also met with leaders with responsibility for SEND, early years, behaviour and pupils' personal development.
- Inspectors met with members of the local governing body and a trust representative.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted's online surveys for parents, staff and pupils.

Inspection team

Rebecca Iles-Smith, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Christian Hicks	His Majesty's Inspector
David Lloyd	Ofsted Inspector

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