

Inspection of a good school: Willow Dene School

Swingate Lane, Plumstead SE18 2JD

Inspection dates:

5–6 December 2019

Outcome

Willow Dene School continues to be a good school.

There is enough evidence of improved performance to suggest that the school could be judged outstanding if we were to carry out a section 5 inspection now.

What is it like to attend this school?

Staff care greatly about the pupils at this school. They go the extra mile to ensure that pupils get the most from their education. This means that pupils want to carry on learning. They concentrate in lessons and are eager for more.

Pupils' behaviour is excellent. The atmosphere in school is friendly and purposeful. Pupils feel safe, and several told me that there is no bullying. Pupils are confident that teachers will sort out any concerns that they may have.

Parents and carers are really pleased with the school. They know their children are happy and are getting on well. Staff are trained to provide whatever care pupils need. Even for the most poorly pupils, parents are able to let their children go to school, secure in the knowledge that they will be well cared for. During the inspection, one parent echoed the feelings of others, saying, 'This school provides the utmost care and stability for my child.'

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

All staff are determined to give every child who comes through the school's doors the best possible start in life.

Leaders have successfully created a culture where staff feel valued and supported. Leaders ensure that all staff receive highly effective training. This includes working with mainstream colleagues across the trust to share expertise. As a result, staff are experts at delivering learning in engaging, interesting ways that pupils fully understand.

Every pupil follows their own personalised curriculum. Pupils' targets in their education, health and care plan are cleverly broken down into achievable, yet aspirational, smaller steps. These sit alongside appropriate elements of a full range of curriculum subjects, such as modern foreign languages. In most areas of the school, including in the early years, pupils' learning is carefully and individually sequenced. This ensures that they

reach the ambitious targets teachers set, including for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. However, in a few subjects, leaders have not made sure that teachers have the required subject-specific knowledge. Not all teachers understand what they need to do to precisely implement the school's plans for how subjects should be taught.

Pupils enjoy taking part in a wide range of activities that broaden their learning, for example spending time in local woodland areas. Secondary-aged pupils are able to choose some of their own courses, including photography and sculpture. Parents are included in this decision-making. Older pupils are expected to make a positive contribution to the community by taking part in fundraising, charity work or volunteering.

Parents told me that they are happy with how well their children are achieving. Parents put this down to staff being really committed to each child's personal development. They appreciate how approachable the staff are and feel well informed about the next steps of their child's learning.

Pupils become familiar with subject-specific vocabulary that adults provide during lessons. However, some pupils do not develop their speaking skills further because they are not given the vocabulary they need to communicate informally outside the classroom.

Children in the early years, including the two-year-olds, thrive in the excellent care of the adults who work with them. Classrooms are lively, interesting places. This helps children and staff communicate well together. On the rare occasion that pupils are distracted from their learning, staff are able to quickly refocus the pupils to get them back on track. Teachers are imaginative in their planning. For example, they help children to count using musical instruments and songs. Staff work closely with parents to ensure that there is consistency between home and school.

Teachers help pupils to enjoy reading and pupils develop their reading skills well. This starts as soon as children join the school in the early years. Teachers give pupils a wide range of fascinating books, including Shakespeare's 'The Tempest'. Workshops help parents to contribute to pupils' love of books and their understanding of words.

Staff want to give pupils every chance to do well and continue their education when they leave the school. They help pupils to move into appropriate placements when they leave the school, such as enrolling in college courses. As a result, pupils are confident to take their next steps.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding. Leaders make sure that all safeguarding checks are carried out efficiently and in a timely manner. Staff are trained well and kept up to date with the latest information about how to keep pupils safe. Staff demonstrate good awareness of safeguarding around the school. All staff are vigilant about keeping pupils safe, including when pupils are online. Staff know what to do if they have a concern about a pupil.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school's curriculum is well planned. Learning is sequenced and meets pupils' complex needs. However, some subject plans are not fully understood by all staff. Leaders need to develop all teachers' knowledge and understanding of the full curriculum.
- Currently, there are some missed opportunities for pupils to develop speaking skills, both in and out of lessons. Leaders should ensure that all pupils have opportunities for more spontaneous communication that would allow them to further develop their speaking skills.

Background

When we have judged a special school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good school or non-exempt outstanding school. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find some evidence that the school could now be better than good or that standards may be declining, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will convert the section 8 inspection to a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the predecessor school, also called Willow Dene School, to be good on 23 October 2012.

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 Ofsted Parent View information 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.

If you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

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	143595
Local authority	Greenwich
Inspection number	10124651
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	2 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	248
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Mrs Mary Whitehead
Headteacher	Miss Rachel Harrison
Website	www.willowdene.greenwich.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school caters for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, specifically severe and profound learning difficulties, and autism spectrum disorder.
- Willow Dene School converted to become an academy on 1 July 2017. When its predecessor school, Willow Dene School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good overall.
- In 2015, the school opened specialist two-year-old provision. It also extended the age range to include pupils up to 16 years of age.
- The primary and secondary departments are based on two different sites.

Information about this inspection

- We met with the chief executive of the trust, the headteacher, the deputy headteachers, curriculum leaders, the chair of the board of trustees and two members of the local governing body.
- I met with the designated safeguarding lead and a deputy designated safeguarding lead to discuss safeguarding arrangements. A range of documentation was scrutinised, including the pre-recruitment checks that leaders make on staff.

- We looked at a range of documentation related to the school's work, as well as pupils' files. We also looked at the school's website.
- I met with a small number of parents to gather their views.
- We considered the 44 responses to Ofsted's Parent View survey, and the 132 responses to the staff survey.
- We talked to staff both formally and informally during the inspection.
- We did deep dives in these subjects: reading, language and communication, mathematics and art. As part of these deep dives, we met with a range of staff, pupils and leaders. We made visits to lessons, looked at pupils' work and listened to pupils read. We also considered pupils' learning in other subjects.

Inspection team

Francis Gonzalez, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Carolyn Dickinson

Her Majesty's Inspector

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