



## QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEW

### REVIEW REPORT FOR WILLOW DENE SCHOOL

<b>Name of School:</b>	Willow Dene School
<b>Headteacher/Principal:</b>	Rachel Harrison
<b>Hub:</b>	London Special and AP Hub
<b>School phase:</b>	Special 2 - 19 Years
<b>MAT (if applicable):</b>	The Compass Partnership of Schools

<b>Overall Peer Evaluation Estimate at this QA Review:</b>	Leading
<b>Date of this Review:</b>	19/05/2025
<b>Overall Estimate at last QA Review</b>	Leading
<b>Date of last QA Review</b>	15/05/2024
<b>Grade at last Ofsted inspection:</b>	Outstanding
<b>Date of last Ofsted inspection:</b>	02/11/2022



## **1. Context and character of the school**

Willow Dene School is a large all-through special school in Greenwich. It developed from an amalgamation of a long-standing primary school and a secondary school which opened in 2016. In 2024 the school started a sixth form at Oakmere Road. Young people in Year 13 will be its first Year 14 cohort in September. Willow Dene has a setting for up to twelve part time two year olds.

This report will use the school's preferred titles for learners, children (2 - 15 years) and young people (16 -19 years) and children and young people (CYP) collectively.

All CYP have education, health and care plans (EHCPs) for their special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). These are for complex learning and/or physical or medical needs and/or complex autism. CYP come from a wide range of backgrounds. Over half are from disadvantaged families. Almost a quarter of the families have English as an additional language.

The sixth form runs four strands of social enterprise, Forever Friends (pet care), Willow's Delish, (catering), Compost Crew (horticulture) and Creations (creativity and arts). The headteacher is executive headteacher of special schools within the Compass Partnership comprising this school and thirteen primary schools in Greenwich and Essex.

### **2.1 Leadership at all levels - What went well**

- Willow Dene provides high levels of practical care and support for all its CYP. Its aim, to prepare CYP for adulthood and life beyond Willow Dene as 'valued and valuable' members of the wider world, underpins all it offers. As one leader said, 'We are an effective organisation which helps individuals to grow, flourish and make a difference to others'.
- Following the inspiring role model of the visionary headteacher, leadership is completely collegiate. Leaders are passionate and outward looking. The school provides significant support for schools in the Trust and beyond, particularly in relation to provision for SEND.
- Provision is based on experience, innovation, passion and research. Every half term, time is set aside for all staff to reflect on the school's effectiveness. This helps ensure that practice fulfils aims, is up to date and relevant for all. In conjunction with researchers at Oxford University, leaders have made a film, narrated by one young person, to share what the school does so well, support parents, other schools and the wider community.

- Leaders value and prioritise continuous professional learning and development (CPLD) of all staff. They employ teaching assistants (TAs) for an hour beyond the school day, provide school-made training videos and infographic overviews for their development. Leaders described the impact of this as 'revolutionary'. TAs know how and why they can contribute as educators, playing a significant role in the learning of CYP.
- Subject leaders are given time to develop their skills and roles and play a full part in the school's vision and provision. As one said, 'The school invests in passionate subject leaders who are knowledgeable, forward thinking and innovative, integral to continuous school development and improvement'.
- The school's ethos is one of trust and bravery. Leaders are encouraged to try new approaches to 'solve problems' and mitigate against challenges. They are exceedingly outward looking, collaborating with any organisations who can help their CYP.
- CYP are also encouraged to 'have a go'. Milo, the school's black labrador support dog, plays a key part in this. Despite some initial parental concerns about their children's potential reaction to a school dog, almost all CYP are now happy and calm with him. Some extend their physical movements of stretching and arm control as they reach out to pat and stroke him.
- Parents and families become part of the community as soon as they accept their child's place and many remain an active part after their offspring leave. One parent said, 'Being given a place for my son was like winning the lottery!' Families attend coffee mornings and special events and help tend the school grounds.
- All the Gatsby bench marks are met securely. Sixth formers work in one of the four social enterprises, three days each week, bringing them into contact with people outside the school and helping prepare them for life in modern Britain.

## 2.2 Leadership at all levels - Even better if...

... leaders reviewed and refined information in order to create a stand-alone package of CPLD.

## 3.1 Quality of provision and outcomes - What went well

- The curriculum is broad, ambitious and imaginative. The creative arts are integral to other subjects, motivating and engaging CYP. Children in one class acted out planting seeds, watering plants and reacting to bugs which helped deepen their understanding of a book which the teacher had read to them.

- Its spiral sequence enables CYP to revisit and build on previous learning throughout the school. This is well thought out and adapted to meet individual needs. In an art lesson, young people used coloured, scented paints to create sensory pieces of art.
- Opportunities for reading are embedded across the school using 'Little Wandle' to help those who are ready for phonics. CYP use symbols and text to help them interact and communicate with others. For example, young people in Willow Delish read prompts to ask customers 'What can I get you?'
- Clearly established routines in lessons help CYP focus and anticipate what is coming next. In a drama lesson children moved to music confidently, with a sense of natural freedom, following the TA as she walked very slowly or ran more quickly. Their obvious familiarity with this routine successfully helped children progress.
- Teaching staff use imaginative methods to engage CYP. In one class young people sat under a tent-like cloth onto which lights and stars were projected to listen to a story. This helped their enjoyment, engagement and progress.
- CYP have an array of highly specialist resources bespoke to their particular needs. These help them access learning and communicate with others. CYP use a range of assistive high-tech assistive and augmented communication devices (AACs) and some with complex physical needs use eye gaze to communicate and send emails.
- Work is personalised to meet CYP's bespoke needs and challenges so that they can engage and progress. Teaching staff are encouraging and patient, giving CYP time to process information and respond. One child was given additional time to complete his exploration of a bell before he independently returned this to its box.
- Teaching staff use their highly attuned understanding of the needs and preferences of CYP to extend learning. This was evident in Choir where the teacher took the microphone to different young people so that their individual voices could be magnified. This helped all the young people, including those who were initially timid and reluctant singers
- The culture for learning is ideal. Staff are skilled and well prepared. They have appropriately high aspirations and expectations, seeing the potential of all CYP who, in turn, frequently rise above these. Children who were initially scared of the swimming pool now splash and laugh as they interact gleefully with others.

- Educational visits out are central to the school's provision. All CYP in Year 5 and above are offered opportunities for residential trips each year. These help extend CYP's independence and confidence. CYP who are physically or medically vulnerable have sleepovers at the school. A few young people who are too anxious to join a residential, visit for a day.
- Relationships throughout the school are excellent. Staff and CYP are respectful and supportive, helping all to thrive. In one class story time a girl was supported to move to sit behind her friend and proceeded to interact with her. Her friend told her to 'shh' and pointed at the teacher, indicating that it was time to listen not to talk!
- CYP enjoy school and enter happily. Attendance is above the national average for special schools. There have not been any exclusions or part-time places for over twelve years.

### **3.2 Quality of provision and outcomes - Even better if...**

... provision, especially for enterprises, in sixth form was extended further, particularly as the number of young people there increases.

### **4.1 Quality of provision and outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with additional needs - What went well**

- Work to process administration for SEND is led by the headteacher and completed collaboratively. This ensures that staff who know CYP best are directly involved in annual reviews of EHCPs. The local authority holds the school in high esteem and knows that families are happy with, and supported by, its provision.
- The whole school community have high aspirations for all CYP, especially those who are disadvantaged. For example, termly 'Power Days' allow all CYP to participate in careers-based learning in a meaningful way. The most recent one was on digital art where CYP made a green screen, created mono prints and listened to a live band playing electronic music.
- School leaders and staff build close, supportive relationships with all families, including those who are most disadvantaged or have CYP with the most complex SEND. Family support advisors visit homes and run frequent coffee mornings. A group of over 20 parents initiated, arranged, attended and brought a range of food to a party to celebrate a family support advisor recently. This was a joyous multi-cultural occasion where a diverse group of parents laughed and danced together.

- Home-school links are important for all CYP including those with some of the most complex needs who start at the school in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). Children make noticeable progress here as they experience exceedingly focussed support from, and interactions with, skilled staff.
- Daily home school contact books, evidence for learning (EFL) messages and videos help build and maintain contact with parents of the most disadvantaged CYP. Parents can see videos of what their children have done at school. Some are amazed at what they have achieved in this conducive setting.
- Leaders staff a phone line over school holidays. This has been a very valuable point of contact for the most disadvantaged families who may not have other networks of support.
- A range of skilled therapists work in tandem with school staff. This provides essential holistic support and treatment for CYP with the most complex additional needs. Physiotherapists train teaching staff to continue exercises in class when they are not there.
- School staff attend hospital visits with families where needed. This ensures continued support for parents, ongoing explanations and reassurance which parents appreciate for their CYP with the most complex medical and physical needs.

#### **4.2 Quality of provision and outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with additional needs - Even better if...**

... the school's work to support families, including grandparents and siblings, was extended even further.

### **5. Area of Excellence**

**Creative Arts:** How taking part in creative arts affects children and young people with complex needs and/or autism and the wider community.

### **Accredited**

### **5.1 Why has this area been identified as a strength? What actions has the school taken to establish expertise in this area?**

The school's skilled, experienced leaders of cultural capital and the arts have been on a journey of passion for their subjects. This has included collaborating with each other to forge the creative arts as a core value and priority which threads through, and underpins, the school's whole curriculum. This has increased the accessibility, motivation and achievement of learning for these CYP. For example, learning mathematics through dance, drama through English, and geography through visual arts. The school has attained Artsmark at gold level and is currently working towards platinum.

Leaders have worked with all teaching staff at the school to raise their skills and awareness of the creative arts. They are now all on board with teaching through these subjects. CYP have also had opportunities to work with professionals at Sadlers Wells, The Tate and The National Maritime Museum which has boosted their identity, achievement and self-esteem. Parents who were able to attend were moved, proudly saying that they "never thought their child would have the opportunity - or be chosen - to take part in something like this.' The skill and confidence of the CYP has touched professionals in these organisations, changing their mindsets and raising their expectations. As a teacher and choreographer at Sadlers Wells said "They really are breaking down the barriers. It was honestly inspirational—I cried from start to finish."

Professionals in arts organisations have harnessed the experience and insights of these CYP to develop their provision including accessibility and an inclusive playground. The school has found the arts to be a highly effective means of furthering their aim of preparing CYP for life in the wider world as valued and valuable citizens who can contribute meaningfully to society.

The creative arts have become a key vehicle for the implementation of the school vision, 'Seeing possibilities, realising dreams' for CYP, families and staff. Leaders can share their vision, passion, approaches and systems with other schools that can implement the model with their CYP to the benefit of all.

## **5.2 What evidence is there of the impact on pupils' outcomes?**

CYP are engaged and motivated in a range of lessons taught through the creative arts. This has helped their learning as well as their personal and social development. The cultural capital of all CYP, including those who are most disadvantaged or who have the most complex SEND, has been increased.

CYP have tried new workshops and been thoroughly motivated by them, for example, disc jockeying (DJing). CYP have worked and performed with a range of professional artists. Much of this, for example the Shakespeare for Schools Festival, where young people performed Macbeth, has been alongside and on an equal platform to mainstream schools and dance colleges such as those at Sadlers Wells. CYP have increased opportunities to participate fully and meaningfully in public spaces. The effect of this has permeated to other schools in the Trust, impacting staff and CYP, including those who are disadvantaged. Thus CYP are extending and displaying their creativity in a valuable, collaborative way.

## **5.3 What is the name, job title and email address of the staff lead in this area?**

- Lisa Parascandolo, Cultural Capital Lead.  
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### **Following the QA Review**

The review report is primarily for the school's internal use to support the school's continuing improvement. However, we encourage you to share the main findings with your hub/hub manager so that they can support your hub's activity planning. Challenge Partners will also collate and analyse content reports from across the hub networks including using AI tools to create an aggregate picture of what is going on across the sector (sharing these with the partnership) each year. The QA Review reports remain confidential to Challenge Partners and the host school. This ensures that schools embrace the review as a development process, acting as a catalyst for their ongoing improvement. This is the primary purpose of the QA review. However, our aim is that the thematic analysis will demonstrate the additional value of a sector wide overview, illustrated with real-life examples.



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For further support following your QA Review, schools can access the School Support Directory; the Challenge Partners online tool that enables schools to connect with other schools in your hub and across the national network of schools. The School Support Directory can be accessed via the Challenge Partners website. (<https://www.challengepartners.org/>)

Finally, following the QA Review, schools may find it useful to refer to research such as the EEF toolkit to help inform their approach to tackling the EBIs identified in the report (<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/teaching-learning-toolkit>)