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| <b>Name of School:</b>        | Willow Dene School        |
| <b>Executive Headteacher:</b> | Rachel Harrison           |
| <b>Hub:</b>                   | London Special and AP Hub |
| <b>School type:</b>           | Special - 2-19 year olds  |
| <b>MAT (if applicable):</b>   | Compass EKO Trust         |

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| <b>Date of this visit:</b>              | 20/05/2026  |
| <b>Grade at last Ofsted inspection:</b> | Outstanding |
| <b>Date of last Ofsted inspection:</b>  | 02/11/2022  |

## **1. Information about the visit**

In place of a Quality Assurance Review (QAR), Willow Dene School was visited by a Lead Reviewer who spent two days reviewing the following areas with school leaders:

- The school's Self Evaluation Form (SEF) and School Development Plan (SDP), with emphasis on continuous professional learning and development and the creative arts
- Sixth form developments

## **2. Information about the school**

Willow Dene School (WDS) is an all-through special school in Greenwich which opened in 2016. There are 317 children and young people (CYP)<sup>1</sup> on roll, including 32 in Key Stage 5. The school has a setting for up to twelve part time two-year-olds. In 2024 the school started a sixth form at Oakmere Road.

All CYPs have education, health and care plans (EHCP) 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.

Compass and EKO multi-academy trusts (MAT) joined from 1 April, 2026. Willow Dene was part of the former Compass MAT and the headteacher is currently Director of Special schools across schools in the former Compass MAT.

### **3.1 The school's SEF and SDP – What went well**

- Willow Dene School (WDS) is a reflective learning community for both CYP and adults. Leaders and staff have established a collaborative, inclusive culture in which the views of all stakeholders meaningfully inform evaluation and development planning.
- As the school has expanded, the headteacher has strategically refined leadership structures to ensure clear oversight of new initiatives, including the early years setting, sixth-form provision, and the establishment of the free school, which is due to move to a separate site later this academic year. Leaders articulate their interdependent roles and collaborative practice with clarity and passion.
- The SEF is clear, well-evidenced and collectively owned. Staff, parents, therapists and CYP contribute through surveys, regular meetings and varied communication channels. Therapists (speech and language, occupational therapists and

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<sup>1</sup> This report uses the school's preferred titles for learners, children (2 - 15 years) and young people (16 -19 years) and children and young people (CYP) collectively.

physiotherapists) describe themselves as fully integrated into the school and 'part of the staff group'.

- The SEF aligns with the Trust's framework and national evaluation criteria. Its evaluative statements clearly capture the school's strengths and provide strong evidence to support judgements in each area. Leadership and governance are threaded through relevant sections, and leaders have recently developed a discrete leadership section that will be incorporated into the Trust's template as required.
- Self-evaluation is iterative and responsive. Termly evaluation cycles allow leaders to refine priorities rapidly, ensuring the SDP is reviewed formatively and practice is adjusted swiftly to meet emerging needs.
- The termly-revised SDP ensures CYP needs are met well. It sets out clear actions (What), rationale (Why), success measures (What) and methods of evaluating impact. Current term foci include reparative communication, vocabulary development with the pedagogy core team, early intervention planning and the launch of a behaviour pathway referral system.
- Seven priority areas underpin the SDP, each linked to one or more SEF areas. These include applying Funds of Knowledge theory and strengthening creative arts provision. Where links are explicit, the rationale and intended impact on provision are transparent. Early Years evaluations, for example, are clearly connected to early reading, phonics and writing priorities.
- Each core priority is driven by a working party, ensuring staff at all levels contribute to evaluation, develop leadership skills, and engage in meaningful professional development and appraisal.
- Priority-focused teams set clear action goals, such as securing meaningful lifelong learning pathways for Year 14 leavers.
- Where appropriate, priorities include system-leadership objectives that extend impact beyond Willow Dene. Through its three-tier training model, for example, the school's assessment system has been shared with more than 20 schools nationally.

### **Continuous Professional Learning and Development (CPLD)**

- Leaders have carefully shaped the CPLD to embed learner-centred pedagogy, one of the seven core SDP priorities. Designed to ensure pedagogy becomes something staff actively use and reflect on in daily practice rather than a theoretical concept, CPLD reinforces the Trust's BEST (Behaviour, Environment, Safeguarding and Teaching) impact measures.
- Leaders driving this priority articulate clearly the reasons for the initiative: refining the curriculum, securing a shared vision across two sites, responding to changing CYP needs, building a culture of professional trust and strengthening improvement through reflective practice.
- The CPLD offer is balanced to challenge and support all staff. It is flexible enough to respond to emerging needs and tailored to differing levels of experience. Modelled by the senior leadership team, it has established professional learning as a shared endeavour, characterised by collaboration and a sense of enjoyment.
- Recognising the changing needs of CYP, leaders place equal value on the role of teaching assistants (TA) and senior TAs (STA) in leading learning. As a result, CPLD initiatives over the last two years have ensured all staff participate in

training and share a common professional language and strategies to support pupils confidently.

- The CPLD vision and expectations are realised clearly in practice. Weekly meetings, focused class-team time, high-quality learning materials, regular discussion points and robust evaluation have ensured full participation. Support staff and teachers describe significant gains in confidence, collaborative practice and the quality of provision for CYP.
- Weekly pedagogy PowerPoints, written by CPLD leaders, are used by teachers and support staff to explore language and practice. Working in groups led by either a teacher or support staff member, staff engage in reflection that translates directly into classroom action. TAs and STAs report that CPLD has enabled them to use terms such as curriculum, pedagogy and assessment with confidence and to refine their scaffolding of learning. In observed lessons, TAs demonstrated skill and sensitivity in balancing their input to promote independence and used varied resources to ensure those with differing needs could participate fully in a number-game activity.
- To enhance weekly discussion, leaders have produced a range of video clips showing highly successful practice, including examples of meaningful and responsive interactions between staff and children. In early years, TAs demonstrated these high-quality relationships while leading sensory learning, including in a darken setting to support visually impaired children.
- Strengthening system leadership and collaborative professional practice, CPLD PowerPoints, materials and video clips are now available to all staff across the Compass EKO Trust.

### **The Creative Arts**

- The Creative Arts priority is underpinned by a strong objective, 'to enhance the impact of creative arts opportunities and embed best practice through a holistic curriculum that can be shared more widely'. Rigorous planning, assessment, progress data and systematic feedback from pupils, parents and staff demonstrate the significant impact of creative arts on EYP at the school.
- Led by a dynamic subject lead, clear and coherent summaries based on the Sounds of Intent Framework, along with detailed subject strands, set out explicitly how art, drama, music and dance support EYPs.
- A consistent three-part lesson structure across the arts establishes clear expectations for both EYPs and staff. Sessions follow a prepare-and-explore, learn-and-create and share-and-celebrate sequence, ensuring all have time to engage, have opportunities for deep learning and structured moments for reflection and recognition.
- Robust evidence demonstrates the progress CYP make through the creative arts. Outcomes for early development are drawn from the Learning Journeys Framework (Stepping Out) and, with a focus on Communication and Language and Literacy, the Concept Progression Framework for the Fundamentals. Both frameworks identify the seven levels of development used to track EYP progress.
- Developments in the creative arts at WDS have attracted interest from external professionals. The school has contributed to research leading to published articles, including work on musical leadership and music therapy for students in special schools.

### 3.2 The school's SEF and SDP – Even better if...

- ... leaders made the links between the SEF and SDP explicit in all areas.
- ... leaders reviewed the strengths identified in the SEF to ensure they more comprehensively matched the criteria for evaluation which have been adopted.
- ... leaders considered further how to incorporate key evidence that supported the strengths identified within the SEF.
- ... leaders built on the school's reflective practice, including its CLPD initiatives, to establish itself as a centre for research and development.

### 4.1 Sixth Form developments - What went well

- Leaders have made substantial progress in developing the sixth form since 2022. Numbers on roll have increased, with 32 young people now in Key Stage 5. The curriculum has been refined, and in partnership with the local authority, the school is planning future provision for young adults aged 19 to 25.
- Leaders have successfully implemented important changes to sixth-form provision. Careful planning ensured that young people transitioning to the new site were fully involved and prepared, enabling a smooth move without disruption. Collaborative work with the local authority has secured straight-through admissions so that Willow Dene pupils no longer need to reapply for sixth-form entry.
- The curriculum is carefully sequenced to ensure progression and clear alignment with preparation-for-adulthood outcomes central to adult EHCPs. It has been refined to make learning even more relevant and supportive in preparing young people for adulthood, building on personalised, accredited Key Stage 4 pathways.
- Centred around enterprise, the school has established a school-based business model comprising five ventures that draw on CYP strengths and interests - a Café; Forever Friends (pet care); Willow's Delish (catering); Compost Crew (horticulture); Creations (creativity and arts); and, Nail It (making items for local users)
- Provision is carefully balanced: three days a week are dedicated to business ventures and two days to the school's preparation-for-adulthood curriculum.
- A holistic approach ensures young people develop the skills needed to access opportunities that lead to healthy, fulfilling adult lives. Each young person enjoys learning on and off site, fulfilling their allocated roles in their business team.
- In lessons, young people in the sixth-form were highly engaged in preparing for an upcoming performance. Whether working on performance skills, or in backstage or set-design groups, they participated fully and collaboratively in stimulating activities supported by teachers and experienced support staff.

- Leaders have championed and thoroughly planned for the 14 young people currently in Year 14. Transition places have already been secured for six young people, and staff have accompanied them to their next settings to support the move. Leaders have also established the Launch 19 project for a further four young people. Plans are in place to ensure there are no NEET outcomes in September.
- After being proactive in seeking providers that are keen to understand and support WDS's young people, all Year 14 young people have completed work experience this year for the first time.
- The EHCPs of all Year 14 young people have been rewritten, ensuring they and their families can access continuing provision and support after leaving school.

#### **4.2 Sixth Form developments - Even better if...**

... No EBIs were identified for this area