

Willow Dene School

Swingate Lane, Greenwich, London, SE18 2JD

Inspection dates 23–24 October 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The dynamic leadership of the executive headteacher has ensured rapid improvement since he joined the school. Very good links with partner schools in the federation have done much to support the drive for improvement.
- All groups of pupils make good progress and achieve well. They achieve particularly well in developing their communication skills and make excellent progress in their physical development.
- Teachers expect much of the pupils. They check pupils' progress carefully and provide learning tasks that suit pupils' needs well.
- The behaviour of pupils is excellent as a result of the high-quality care and support they receive and the consistent use by staff of the behaviour management policy.
- Pupils feel extremely safe and secure. They enjoy school and have excellent attitudes to learning and support each other very well.
- Teachers' performance is managed rigorously so that they strive for improvement in the quality of their teaching.
- The governors challenge the school well and ensure that the extra government funding the school receives is used very effectively to improve what the pupils achieve.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- At the end of lessons, a few staff are not always fully effective in helping pupils understand how well they have achieved.
- The school has not fully implemented plans to develop the skills of staff in charge of curriculum areas. As a result, they are not all confident in making good use of the school's information about pupils' progress and checking that pupils are doing as well as they can.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 19 lessons, amounting to nearly 11 hours of classroom observations. About half of these observations were carried out jointly with senior leaders. Inspectors carried out a number of short visits to other lessons.
- Inspectors joined pupils at lunchtimes, talked to them in class and heard a small group of pupils read individually.
- Meetings were held with the Chair of the Governing Body and school staff, including senior as well as curriculum leaders. A discussion was also held with a representative from the local authority.
- The inspectors took account of responses to Parent View when planning the inspection. During the inspection the school's own analysis of questionnaires from parents and carers was used to provide a clearer picture of their views. Inspectors took account of 21 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a wide range of the school's documentation. This included the school's self-evaluation and its development plan, arrangements for safeguarding and promoting equality, and details of the curriculum.

Inspection team

Peter Gabony, Lead inspector

Additional inspector

Kay Charlton

Additional inspector

Janet Tomkins

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Willow Dene is an above average-sized primary special school for pupils with autistic spectrum disorder, severe learning difficulties and profound and multiple learning difficulties. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs.
- Pupils come from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds. The largest groups are those of Black African and White British heritage. About one third come from homes where English is not the main language.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium, which is funding provided by the government for pupils who are eligible for free school meals, in local authority care or from service families, is high.
- The current executive headteacher joined the school in May 2011. He is also executive headteacher of two local primary schools which form a soft federation with Willow Dene. The head of school was appointed in January 2012.
- The senior leadership team of Willow Dene consists of the executive headteacher, the head of school, the deputy headteachers, assistant headteachers, principal administrative officer and principal premises officer.
- The staff who take responsibility for curriculum areas are known in the school as middle leaders.
- The school is an accredited centre of excellence for a national programme for the development of mobility.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that at the end of every lesson, teachers are fully effective in helping pupils to appreciate how well they have achieved.
- Implement plans to develop the skills of staff in charge of curriculum areas so that they are confident in making good use of the school's information about pupils' progress and can check that pupils are doing as well as they can.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils, including those in the Early Years Foundation Stage, make good progress from their starting points and achieve well. The low, and often very low, starting points of all pupils mean that though their understanding, knowledge and skills are developed well, attainment for the majority remains low because of their difficulties.
- The school tracks progress rigorously and accurately and there is no difference overall between the progress of any groups of pupils. This includes pupils of minority ethnic heritage and those for whom the pupil premium provides additional support. Challenging targets are set for all pupils.
- By the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, children have learned the routines of the school day and have found out about themselves, their likes and dislikes as well as having an awareness of their bodies. Children enjoy listening to stories and a small minority recognise words in the text.
- Throughout the school, pupils learn how to use pictures, signs and oral approaches to communicate, depending on their needs. By age seven, a few learn to recognise words and sounds and can read simple text. They learn to recognise numbers and develop basic number concepts.
- By age 11, some pupils are reading fluently, with expression and for enjoyment. They apply basic numerical skills well in everyday situations.
- Across the school, pupils make particularly good progress in developing their skills in communication and they learn to express their views effectively, because of the focus given to this aspect in all activities.
- They make excellent progress in physical development based on the school's implementation of a specialist programme.
- Pupils on the autistic spectrum make good progress in developing social skills and interacting with each other. In one lesson a group of pupils demonstrated this clearly when they played a board game, each taking turns and commenting on what the others were doing.
- Whatever their needs, pupils are all well prepared for secondary school by the time they leave.
- Parents and carers report that their children make good progress. In particular, they value the way the school involves them fully in agreeing targets and teaching approaches for their children.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teachers have high expectations of their pupils. Their planning is detailed and based upon the tracking of achievement and a careful assessment of the individual needs of each pupil, including how they learn best.
- As part of the drive to improve pupils' achievement, classrooms and resources have been developed effectively to meet the differing needs of pupils.
- Teachers, working closely with therapists and other professionals, ensure that the development of communication and physical skills is threaded throughout the curriculum and is highly effective.
- Pupils enjoy their learning and work hard to succeed because they are given a wide range of interesting activities and sensory experiences. This was seen to good effect when a group of pupils with needs on the autistic spectrum were enthralled by a science lesson in which the teacher used a full skeleton to capture their interest.
- Teaching makes a strong contribution to the social, moral, spiritual and cultural development of the pupils. From the early stages, they learn to be aware of others, and develop a growing understanding of other people's lives and cultures.

- Teachers ensure that all pupils have access to reading and plan well for the development of literacy, using a wide variety of resources and approaches, which leads to pupils developing their enjoyment of books and reading as they progress through the school.
- Support assistants work effectively as part of class teams and help pupils to enjoy and be motivated by their learning.
- In every area of the school, there are examples of outstanding practice. In a class of older pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties the teacher used the review at the end of the lesson extremely effectively to ensure that all pupils understood how well they had achieved. This was evident in their smiling faces and the pride they showed in their work.
- Teaching of this quality is not consistent across the school. Occasionally, at the end of lessons, teachers do not provide effective guidance to pupils in a form that helps each one understand how well they have achieved.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Records show that all pupils make rapid progress in learning to manage their own behaviour. Consequently, behaviour is outstanding with excellent improvements over time.
- Pupils of all ages very quickly develop extremely positive attitudes to learning from when they first start. In part, this is because their participation in lessons is recognised and celebrated very effectively.
- The close collaborative work with speech and language therapists and other professionals ensures that pupils are taught to communicate in a way that best suits their needs. This includes signing, the use of symbols and the use of objects of reference. This has a noticeable impact on pupils' attitudes and on their ability to manage their own behaviour.
- Staff receive high-quality training in behaviour management and use the behaviour management policy extremely effectively ensuring that pupils feel safe and secure. Since the appointment of the executive headteacher there have been no exclusions and parents and carers affirm significant improvements in pupils' behaviour across the school.
- The family link worker funded by the pupil premium helps to make marked improvements in pupils' learning, attendance and their behaviour at both home and in school.
- Pupils indicate that there is no bullying and know what to do should any incidents occur.
- Pupils are very keen to come to school and attendance is above average.

The leadership and management are good

- The executive headteacher and head of school inspire staff with their vision of 'Seeing possibilities and realising dreams'. The senior leadership team works cohesively and effectively to implement ambitious targets for school improvement. Consequently, the school is very well placed to improve further.
- There is an upward trend of improvement in the quality of teaching as a result of robust performance management and support for teachers. Staff are committed to change and work hard to develop their practice.
- The school uses salary progression effectively to support good teaching performance. However, the full impact of the changes to the performance management arrangements introduced by the executive headteacher has yet to be realised.
- Class teams are supported by senior leaders to share responsibility for the professional development of all staff so that all strive continuously to develop their skills and knowledge in working with pupils with complex learning difficulties.
- The school's involvement in the federation has had a significant impact on the development of leadership skills at all levels. Governors monitor the school closely and have promoted improvement through the development of the federation.
- The school's self-evaluation is robust and thorough and involves all stakeholders. It is based

upon a rigorous analysis of all aspects of the school's performance.

- The executive headteacher has ensured that the curriculum has been developed so that it now fully reflects the wide range of needs within the school.
- The school works very effectively with parents and carers to improve the lives of pupils both at school and at home. An excellent example of this was the work undertaken to ensure that one boy's dream of being a page boy at a wedding was fulfilled by helping him to walk independently down the aisle.
- Parents and carers of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage highly value the carefully planned transition from home to school.
- The school successfully promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination and there are no racist incidents.
- The school has recently restructured the responsibilities of some of its teachers, known as middle leaders, to reflect the changes in the curriculum. The school has not yet fully implemented its plans to develop the role of these staff in charge of curriculum areas, so that they take responsibility for checking that pupils make as much progress as they can compared with the national picture.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance is much improved with a wide range of skills. The governing body challenges the school well and uses resources effectively. It ensures that policies and procedures, including those relating to safeguarding, are of the highest quality and have a positive impact on the life of the school. It also ensures that the pupil premium is used very effectively to underpin the home-school links so that pupils' learning, attendance and behaviour improve even further.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	133399
Local authority	Greenwich
Inspection number	402572

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	147
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Anne-Marie Organ
Executive headteacher	John Camp
Date of previous school inspection	13–14 July 2010
Telephone number	020 88549841
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