

# Inspection of Willow Tree Primary School

Willow Tree Avenue, Leach Lane, Sutton Leach, St Helens, Merseyside WA9 4LZ

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Inspection dates: 5 and 6 July 2022

## **Overall effectiveness**

## **Requires improvement**

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The quality of education

**Requires improvement**

Behaviour and attitudes

**Good**

Personal development

**Good**

Leadership and management

**Requires improvement**

Early years provision

**Requires improvement**

Previous inspection grade

Good

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Pupils, including children in early years, enjoy coming to school. They benefit from strong and supportive relationships with staff. This helps them to feel safe while they are at school. Pupils said that they know that adults in school will listen to them. They feel confident in talking about their feelings and feel that staff really care about them.

Leaders are aspirational for pupils, including those pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). However, there are some aspects of the curriculum that are not designed effectively or delivered well enough by teachers. This means that children and pupils do not achieve as well as they should in a range of subjects, including in reading.

Pupils said that staff sort out any bullying problems quickly and effectively. Pupils behave well, both in lessons and around the school. They are well mannered and respectful towards each other and with staff. Pupils and parents and carers are confident that leaders' new behaviour policy has had a marked impact on pupils' conduct. For example, pupils are clear that positive behaviour at school will be rewarded and celebrated.

Pupils enjoy the range of after-school activities that they can attend, such as fencing, rounders and gardening club. They enjoy the variety of trips on offer, including residential trips and visits to pantomimes.

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

Leaders have acted to ensure that subject curriculums are suitably challenging for pupils, including children in early years. Increasingly, leaders ensure that teachers deliver topics in a logical order. However, some of leaders' curriculum changes are at an early stage of development.

In some subjects, leaders are not clear enough about the knowledge that they want teachers to deliver or what they want pupils, including children in early years, to learn. This hinders teachers from designing learning that helps children and pupils to build up their knowledge over time. It also means that teachers are unsure what to assess to check that pupils have remembered their learning. Consequently, some children and pupils are not well prepared for the next step in their education.

Leaders have not ensured that staff deliver some aspects of the subject curriculums effectively. Teachers have not received sufficient support to develop their expertise in teaching the more ambitious curriculums. As a result, some pupils do not acquire the knowledge that they need for future learning.

Pupils' achievement in reading is starting to improve. This is because some staff are putting their recent training to good use. However, this is not the case elsewhere. For example, on occasion, staff select reading books for pupils that are not matched

accurately to the sounds that children and pupils know. This hinders pupils and children from becoming fluent and confident readers soon enough. Leaders have not checked closely enough that all staff are following the school's chosen phonics programme as well as they should.

Leaders have adopted a well-structured programme to introduce pupils to a broad range of fiction and non-fiction texts. Pupils and children enjoy the books that their teachers read to them. They spoke enthusiastically about the links between the books that they read in class and other curriculum subjects.

Children in the combined Nursery and Reception class enjoy their learning and settle quickly into routines. Teachers use the new behaviour policy consistently well so that children's and pupils' learning in classrooms is rarely disrupted. Leaders have put in place a range of effective strategies to encourage pupils to attend school regularly and to arrive on time.

Leaders have designed a broad range of additional experiences to help pupils to learn about the wider world. For instance, pupils in Year 5 travelled to London to experience democracy in action at the Houses of Parliament. Children in early years have visited seaside destinations to learn about famous landmarks. Pupils benefit from opportunities to take on additional responsibilities, such as being playground buddies, digital leaders and school councillors.

Pupils with SEND are identified by staff at the earliest possible opportunity. They access the same curriculum as their peers. Leaders have undertaken considerable work to ensure that staff know how to adapt their approaches to curriculum delivery to meet the needs of these pupils. That said, inconsistencies in how the curriculum is delivered prevent some pupils with SEND from achieving as well as they should.

Leaders and governors prioritise the well-being of staff. Staff appreciate leaders' considerate approach. For example, some teachers said that they feel highly valued by leaders. Other staff explained how senior leaders had acted to reduce their workload.

Members of the governing body are suitably experienced and have a secure knowledge of those aspects of the school that require further development. They provide an appropriate level of challenge to leaders.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff know pupils well and they receive suitable and regular safeguarding training. Leaders have identified the risks that pupils may face at school and in the local area. Recent trauma awareness training for all staff helps them to prioritise pupils' emotional health. For instance, staff notice and act appropriately when pupils need additional support to regulate their behaviour.

Leaders have been tenacious in how they follow up external support to help those pupils who may be vulnerable. Pupils learn how to stay safe and healthy. For example, they talked about combining food groups to create healthy plates and keeping themselves fit by taking part in regular exercise.

## What does the school need to do to improve?

### (Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some subjects, leaders are not clear enough about the key knowledge they want pupils, including children in early years, to learn. This hinders teachers when designing and assessing pupils' learning. It means that pupils and children do not acquire some of the knowledge that they need for subsequent learning. Leaders should ensure that the curriculums are sufficiently clear about what should be taught and when this should happen, so that pupils can build securely on earlier learning.
- Leaders have not ensured that the curriculum in some subjects is being delivered effectively. This means that some children and pupils do not acquire the knowledge that they need for future learning. Leaders should ensure that they support staff to deliver curriculums consistently well.
- Leaders have not ensured that all staff are putting their early reading training into practice. This means that the delivery of the phonics programme is variable. This stops some children and pupils becoming confident readers. Leaders should ensure that staff follow the agreed early reading curriculum so that pupils learn to read with fluency and accuracy.

## 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.

If you are the school and 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	104772
<b>Local authority</b>	St Helens
<b>Inspection number</b>	10226319
<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3 to 11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	253
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair of governing body</b>	Jackie Lowe
<b>Headteacher</b>	Jane Sweeney (Acting Headteacher)
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.willowtree.st-helens.sch.uk">www.willowtree.st-helens.sch.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	21 March 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- Since the previous inspection, there have been several changes in the leadership of the school. The current acting headteacher took up post in April 2022.
- School leaders do not make use of alternative provision.

## Information about this inspection

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

- This was the first routine inspection the school had 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.
- During this inspection, inspectors met with the acting headteacher and the deputy headteacher. Inspectors also met with a wide range of staff members.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in early reading, mathematics, history and physical education. Inspectors spoke to leaders about the curriculum and met with teachers from the lessons visited. Inspectors reviewed pupils' work and spoke to pupils.

- Inspectors also discussed the curriculum and spoke with leaders of other subjects.
- Inspectors observed children in early years and pupils in key stages 1 and 2 reading to trusted adults.
- Inspectors spoke with parents to gather their views about the school.
- The inspectors considered responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text responses.
- Inspectors spoke with staff to gather their views about their workload and well-being.
- There were no responses to the Ofsted staff and pupil surveys.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour during playtimes and lessons.
- Inspectors met with some members of the governing body, including the chair of governors. The lead inspector held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority.

### **Inspection team**

Sarah Barraclough, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Brendan Hassett	Ofsted Inspector
David Deane	Ofsted Inspector

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