

# Inspection of Willow Dene School

Swingate Lane, Plumstead SE18 2JD

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Inspection dates: 2 and 3 November 2022

## **Overall effectiveness**

**Outstanding**

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The quality of education

**Outstanding**

Behaviour and attitudes

**Outstanding**

Personal development

**Outstanding**

Leadership and management

**Outstanding**

Early years provision

**Outstanding**

Previous inspection grade

**Good**

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

Pupils thrive and excel at this exceptional school. Leaders and staff have very high expectations for all pupils. They work hard to make sure that learning is fun and that lessons capture the interests of the pupils.

Behaviour at the school is exemplary. It is a calm and orderly environment for everyone. Sometimes, pupils need extra help to manage their feelings. Staff help them to become calm again so that they can get back on with their lessons as soon as possible.

Pupils who attend the school need extra help. This is because of their special educational needs and/or disabilities. Staff are very well trained. They understand the complex needs of pupils and how to help them. Pupils like coming to school. They are happy to see their friends and teachers each day. Leaders deal with any friendship issues or unkindness quickly. Bullying is never tolerated.

Resources at the school are excellent. The learning environments are well designed and maintained. This includes the attractive and inspiring outside areas. The safety, personal development and well-being of pupils are a priority. Parents and carers feel welcome at the school.

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

Leaders know their pupils well. They have ensured that the curriculum is ambitious and specialised. The expertise of therapists is woven through the school day.

Leaders sequence learning very well. The curriculum ensures that pupils build up knowledge and skills over time. Adults use their deep knowledge of pupils' needs to design engaging and inspiring lessons. Leaders check that the curriculum is being implemented well and that pupils are achieving.

Leaders have put independence and communication at the heart of the curriculum. Staff make sure that pupils have opportunities to make meaningful choices in lessons and throughout the day. This helps pupils to prepare for their next steps.

The curriculum supports all pupils to develop literacy skills. Some pupils can engage with phonics and text. Other pupils enjoy and experience a wide range of stories and poems through sensory approaches. Leaders focus on reading. Teachers use high-quality texts as starting points for learning. Pupils demonstrate their enjoyment through high levels of participation and interest.

Pupils show how much they like coming to school in the happy way that they arrive in the morning. Relationships between adults and pupils are a strength of the school. Sometimes, pupils need help to manage their emotions. Staff intervene quickly and sensitively, so that pupils can continue with their learning.

Parents are very happy with the work that leaders and staff do to help their child enjoy school and achieve well. Parents also value the help that staff provide to support them at home, for example with practical help to manage their child's behaviour.

Staff feel valued by leaders. They say that they 'never have a Monday morning feeling'. The positive school culture is a credit to leaders and governors. They have worked hard to make sure that staff are well trained and supported.

The personal development of pupils is of the highest quality. The curriculum includes a rich programme of visits, visitors and extra activities, such as a forest school, an allotment, school chickens and a well-resourced swimming pool. This supports pupils' wider development well.

Careers education is meticulously planned and sequenced. Pupils learn about the world of work and how to prepare for their future life as adults.

As in the rest of the school, the curriculum in the early years is well constructed by leaders. Teachers design lessons skilfully using their detailed understanding of each child's starting point. Children develop their communication skills and learn new vocabulary. There are excellent resources in the early years that interest and motivate children. As a result, they deepen their curiosity and learn to focus for longer periods of time. Leaders and staff are observant to the needs of the very young children in the early years. All staff pay particular attention to children's emotional development.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have embedded a rigorous approach to safeguarding. Staff are very well trained and they use this understanding, along with their detailed knowledge of pupils' needs, to check for any changes in well-being and safety.

Staff recognise any signs of concern at an early stage and report these quickly. Leaders deal with concerns promptly and effectively, involving external agencies when necessary.

The curriculum teaches pupils how to keep themselves safe. They learn about friendships and relationships at a level that is appropriate to their individual needs.

Leaders complete the appropriate pre-employment checks when recruiting new staff.

## 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.

## 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>	143595
<b>Local authority</b>	Greenwich
<b>Inspection number</b>	10241286
<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Academy special converter
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	2 to 16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	273
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Board of trustees
<b>Chair of trust</b>	Mary Whitehead
<b>Headteacher</b>	Rachel Harrison
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.willowdene.compassps.uk">www.willowdene.compassps.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	5 December 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- The school caters primarily for pupils with cognition and learning needs. A large proportion of pupils, about two thirds, also have communication and interaction difficulties. A significant number of pupils have additional physical and/or sensory difficulties.
- The school has provision for two-year-olds.
- The school has a second, smaller site about one mile away from the main school.
- The school uses no alternative provision.

## Information about this inspection

The inspector(s) carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school 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.

- Inspectors met with the headteacher, deputy headteachers and assistant headteachers. They also met with the chair of governors, other governors, a trustee and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: Early reading, mathematics, science and humanities. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Other subjects were also considered as part of this inspection.
- Through discussions with leaders, governors, pupils and staff, inspectors considered how pupils are kept safe. Inspectors also looked safeguarding records and records of pre-employment checks on staff.
- Inspectors met with pupils and they observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and at break and lunchtimes.
- Inspectors spoke with a range of staff about safeguarding, behaviour and their workload. Inspectors also took account of the responses from pupils, staff and parents to Ofsted's surveys.

### **Inspection team**

Gary Pocock, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Janet Hallett	Ofsted Inspector
Diane Rochford	Ofsted Inspector

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