

Inspection of Willowdown Primary School

Kings Drive, Bridgwater TA6 4FU

Inspection dates: 4 and 5 May 2023

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Early years provision

Requires improvement

Previous inspection grade

Requires improvement

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils do not receive a good enough quality of education. However, leaders are taking appropriate action to improve this. They have recently introduced a new curriculum with increased expectations of what pupils can achieve. As a result, pupils are starting to learn with more success.

Pupils say that there are adults who will listen to their worries. However, they lack confidence in staff to deal with incidents of bullying and poor behaviour. Consequently, pupils worry about bullying. Parents share these concerns about these aspects of pupils' well-being.

Leaders' expectations for how pupils should behave are becoming clearer. They have shared these with staff and pupils in the 'Willowdown Way'. Pupils know the new rules, 'Ready, Respectful, Safe'. Although pupils' behaviour is improving, some pupils say that poor behaviour can still disrupt learning.

Pupils enjoy the friendships that they make in school. They appreciate the extra-curricular activities that leaders offer. These include football, chess and choir. Pupils benefit from mindfulness and yoga sessions with the school's well-being coach. They speak positively about special events, such as Shakespeare week and storytime evening.

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

There have been significant recent staffing changes. Many leaders are new to their roles. Staff from the multi-academy trust are working closely with senior leaders. They are clear that pupils must receive a better quality of education. However, it is too soon for the impact of recent improvements to be seen.

The new curriculum covers a broad range of subjects. It is designed to build pupils' knowledge in a considered way. This starts from the early years. Teachers have secure subject knowledge. They use this to design learning that helps pupils to learn in a logical way. Teachers regularly check how well pupils are learning.

Pupils remember some important knowledge. For example, pupils can confidently explain science vocabulary and discuss in detail the techniques they have learned in art. However, in many areas of the curriculum, pupils struggle to remember what they have been taught previously. Older pupils have significant gaps in their knowledge. They cannot remember enough of their learning. As a result, they are not well prepared for their next stage.

Leaders have made improvements to the outdoor spaces for children in the early years. Adults understand the importance of developing children's language and communication skills.

Leaders have established a consistent approach to the teaching of early reading. This begins from the start of pupils' time at school. Pupils enthusiastically use their knowledge to read books for themselves. Leaders check pupils' phonic knowledge. Skilled staff provide extra support for those that need it. Older pupils read and discuss books with interest. However, some pupils do not have the vocabulary that they need to discuss their reading in depth. This limits the building of their knowledge.

Teachers support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) to access the curriculum. In mathematics, for example, pupils with SEND receive extra explanation of important knowledge. Staff give pupils specific help with vocabulary and language. Pupils with SEND have targets that help them to learn the curriculum. However, parents are not involved in target setting for pupils early enough. Their thoughts and understanding of their children are not taken into account when designing learning for these pupils.

Leaders have made thoughtful changes to the behaviour system. They investigate and respond to concerns, including about bullying. Staff and pupils say that behaviour has improved. Nevertheless, pupils say there are often occasions when their learning is disrupted. Pupils do not always feel comfortable with the behaviour of other pupils at break and lunchtimes. The pastoral team works effectively with families to improve attendance. They build strong relationships and offer families and pupils effective individual support.

Leaders have attempted to engage with parents in a variety of ways. Some parents comment positively about the school. However, some other parents express strong concerns. They are worried in particular about behaviour, changes in staffing, communication and bullying.

Governors do not check with enough precision, the impact that school leaders' actions are having on pupils. They do not provide suitable challenge. Leaders from the new multi-academy trust have clear plans for how they will support and challenge the school to improve in the future.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders provide safeguarding training for staff. This helps staff to be vigilant for signs of abuse. Staff share any concerns with leaders as soon as they arise.

Leaders take effective actions that keep pupils safe. They keep detailed records. Leaders make regular checks on vulnerable families. They work effectively with outside agencies to get families the support they need.

Leaders know about the particular risks to children in the local area. They have adapted the curriculum in response. Leaders provide useful safeguarding information

to parents and families. They make the appropriate checks on staff and other adults who visit the school.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- It is too soon to see the impact on pupils' learning of the new curriculum. Many pupils have significant gaps in their knowledge. They find it hard to remember new learning. Leaders must ensure that the implementation of the curriculum is effective and supports pupils to know and remember more.
- Leaders have not established a consistently positive and respectful culture. Pupils say that their learning is disrupted by poor behaviour. Some pupils worry about bullying. Leaders need to make sure that all staff have clear and consistent expectations of pupils' behaviour.
- Leaders do not communicate effectively with some parents. Parents of pupils with SEND are not sufficiently involved with planning their targets. Many other parents are strongly dissatisfied with the school. Leaders need to ensure that communication between school and home is effective, so that parents can work with the school to support their child's education.
- Governors do not hold school leaders to account with sufficient rigour. They do not have an accurate enough understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Governors and trustees of the new multi-academy trust must hold leaders fully to account for the quality of education that pupils receive.

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

Unique reference number	140220
Local authority	Somerset
Inspection number	10268230
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	313
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Malcolm Broad
Headteacher	Natalie Sweet
Website	www.willowdownprimary.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	12 May 2021, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- A new headteacher took up post in September 2022.
- The school's previous trust merged with the Futura Learning Partnership on the 1 March 2023.
- The nursery has provision for two-year-old children.
- The school uses one unregistered alternative provider.
- There is a before- and after-school club managed by leaders.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors 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 the school and have taken this into account in their evaluation.

- Inspectors met with the headteacher, subject leaders, teachers, groups of pupils, members of the local governing board and representatives from the multi-academy trust.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in the following subjects: design and technology, early reading, mathematics and modern foreign languages. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors met with pupils and looked at samples of their work in other subject areas.
- The lead inspector listened to pupils in Years 1, 2 and 3 read to an adult.
- Inspectors reviewed the school's safeguarding documentation, including safeguarding checks carried out on staff working at the school. They reviewed how well the designated safeguarding leads act on concerns about pupils' welfare. Inspectors talked to pupils, staff and governors about how leaders keep everyone safe.
- Inspectors considered the responses to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View, including the free-text responses. They also considered the responses to the staff survey.

Inspection team

Jonathan Gower, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Andrew Evans	Ofsted Inspector
Tracy Hannon	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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