

# Inspection of Willow Tree Primary School

Bedford Close, Huyton, Liverpool, Merseyside L36 1XH

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Inspection dates: 27 and 28 June 2023

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>
The quality of education	<b>Good</b>
Behaviour and attitudes	<b>Good</b>
Personal development	<b>Good</b>
Leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Early years provision	<b>Good</b>
Previous inspection grade	Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

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

The school's motto, 'Small school, big heart', is evident in everything Willow Tree Primary does for its pupils. Pupils are polite and friendly to visitors. They are keen to share their insights into life at school.

Leaders and staff have an excellent understanding of the school community. They are ambitious for their pupils. All pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), are proud of their school. Pupils enjoy school, and they say that they feel safe. Parents and carers are unanimous in their praise of leaders and staff.

Staff promote the personal development of pupils well. They provide activity residentials, where pupils face new challenges, such as cooking, canoeing and climbing. There are regular visits to local museums, parks and the beach. Pupils take part in concerts and learn about democracy through work on the school council, and they are encouraged to speak out.

Pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. They are attentive and keen to learn. In assemblies, they listen well to visiting speakers, and they answer questions politely. Lunchtimes are calm, and pupils enjoy the choice of healthy meals provided.

Children in the Reception Year get off to a great start in reading. They enjoy the routine of their reading lessons and are making strong progress through the reading curriculum. Children discuss with confidence what they are learning in their expansive early years curriculum, such as why a walrus needs blubber.

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

Since the school joined the Vantage Academy Trust, leaders have worked systematically and successfully to improve the quality of education that pupils receive. The principal appreciates the support and challenge provided by the trust. The strategic leadership of the trust has focused on the right things. Consequently, the school is now thriving.

Leaders know that teaching reading effectively is the key to pupils' success across the curriculum. In 2022, leaders invested in a new reading scheme and training for staff. Children in the early years, and pupils in key stage 1, are now taught to read by staff with expert phonic knowledge. The reading leader keeps a regular check on pupils' learning. More pupils are meeting the Year 1 phonic screening check than previously.

Leaders are working well to ensure that the success in reading in the lower part of the school is replicated for pupils in key stage 2. They are achieving this by focusing on developing the reading fluency of older pupils. All pupils are benefiting from being read to by their teachers. Staff also encourage pupils to read for pleasure.

Leaders are improving the delivery of the mathematics curriculum. They have introduced new textbooks and training to support staff in ensuring that the curriculum is coherent. Staff are now confident in delivering the core of the mathematics curriculum well.

Specialist teachers are employed as coaches for music and physical education. They work well with staff to develop their subject knowledge in these areas. For example, in music, by engaging with the local music hub, all pupils are learning to read music notation, play an instrument and sing. There is the opportunity for them to perform for their parents in a concert, demonstrating what they have learned and remembered.

Children in the Reception Year enjoy a spacious, well-resourced classroom and outdoor area. Staff encourage children to engage with adults and each other well. Relationships are strong, and children are attentive. Adults are building children's confidence and spoken language effectively. For example, sharing books and singing are important parts of the children's daily routine. They are learning to form letters and hold a pencil comfortably. However, children are not given enough practice to write. This has a negative impact on pupils' handwriting further up the school.

Staff are developing their leadership skills well. Many of the subject leaders are new, and they are building strong links with other subject leaders from across the trust, and with the local secondary school. The history leader, for example, uses the locality well in designing the curriculum. Pupils in Year 5 can talk clearly about the history of their local area and how it has changed over time.

Staff are confident in using leaders' assessment systems to identify what pupils know and can remember. Teachers are quick to address pupils' misconceptions in learning. Overall, pupils achieve well.

Pupils with SEND are identified and supported effectively. Where possible, they learn in the classroom alongside their peers. However, increasingly, for some pupils, this is too difficult. On these occasions, well-trained staff ensure that these pupils are provided with a safe space in which to continue learning. Typically, pupils with SEND achieve well.

Pupils conduct themselves appropriately in lessons and around the school site. Learning is rarely disrupted. However, some pupils do not attend school regularly enough to benefit from the good quality of education on offer.

The personal, social, health and economic education curriculum is well designed. Pupils learn in depth about different religions and cultures. Pupils enjoy a wide range of enrichment activities that enhance the curriculum. They gain a secure understanding of how to be a good citizen in modern Britain.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have developed a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Regular staff training ensures that adults are alert to any changes in a pupil's behaviour or demeanour. All staff know what to do if they are concerned about a pupil's welfare or safety. Staff teach pupils about keeping themselves safe.

Record-keeping by staff is rigorous. Leaders monitor records closely. Importantly, as well as completing records, the staff at Willow Tree talk to each other about the pupils in their care and how they are doing. They know all the pupils and their families well and are quick to act and to offer support, including from external agencies, when required.

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

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

- Some younger pupils do not form their letters correctly. They are not given enough practice to learn to print their letters. Older pupils do not write as legibly as they should as they progress through the school. This hinders how well pupils write fluently and with speed. Leaders and staff should work together to agree on how to improve pupils' handwriting.
- The rates of attendance of some pupils are not as high as they should be. This prevents these pupils from experiencing all that the school offers. Leaders should continue to work with these pupils to ensure that they attend school more regularly.

## **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>	146848
<b>Local authority</b>	Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council
<b>Inspection number</b>	10268163
<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Academy converter
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4 to 11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	164
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Board of trustees
<b>Chair of trust</b>	Phil Mason
<b>Headteacher</b>	Emma Riley
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.willowtree.knowsley.sch.uk">www.willowtree.knowsley.sch.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected

## Information about this school

- Willow Tree Primary joined the Vantage Academy Trust in February 2019. When its predecessor school, Mosscroft Primary School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to require improvement.
- The school does not make any use of any alternative provision.

## 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 of the school 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.
- The inspectors held discussions with the principal, the assistant principals, the special educational needs coordinator, the reading and early years leader and with other subject leaders.

- Inspectors also spoke with members of the board of trustees, the chief executive officer, the director of school improvement for Vantage and the chair of the local advisory board.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in the following subjects: early reading/English, mathematics, history, physical education and music. They spoke with subject leaders and teachers, looked at pupils' work and held discussions with pupils. Inspectors visited lessons, listened to some pupils read, and talked with pupils about their work and life at school.
- Inspectors looked at the school's records of recruitment checks on staff. Inspectors also spoke to staff and leaders about the school's procedures and systems for safeguarding pupils. Inspectors discussed with staff and pupils how the school teaches pupils to keep themselves safe, including when on the internet.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons, assembly, around the school and outdoors during play and lunchtimes.
- Inspectors spoke to parents and considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. The inspectors also reviewed the responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for staff and the school's records of pupil and parent feedback.

## **Inspection team**

Gill Jones, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Mandy Dodd

Ofsted Inspector

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