

Willowdown Primary School

Address: Kings Drive, TA6 4FU

Unique reference number (URN): 140220

Inspection report: 6 January 2026

| | |
|--------------------|-----------|
| Exceptional | |
| Strong standard | ● ● |
| Expected standard | ● ● ● ● ● |
| Needs attention | |
| Urgent improvement | |

✔ Safeguarding standards met

The safeguarding standards are met. This means that leaders and/or those responsible for governance and oversight fulfil their specific responsibilities and have established an open culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and concerns are actively identified, acted upon and managed. As a result, pupils are made safer and feel safe.

How we evaluate safeguarding

When we inspect schools for safeguarding, they can have the following outcomes:

- Met: The school has an open and positive culture of safeguarding. All legal requirements are met.
- Not met: The school has not created an open and positive culture of safeguarding. Not all legal requirements are met.

Strong standard ●

Inclusion

Strong standard ●

Leaders know all pupils as individuals, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), those known to social care and those who face additional barriers to learning or wellbeing. They use this detailed understanding to shape provision precisely. Leaders set a clear, well-embedded approach to identifying and supporting pupils' needs, and staff receive training to use it well. Daily practice shows a firm commitment to removing barriers. Leaders and staff consider adaptations for pupils with SEND carefully and, where appropriate, draw on specialist professional advice.

The inclusion team builds trusting relationships with families. The team understands the challenges families face, and parents and carers value the support the school provides. Leaders work with a wide range of early help agencies so pupils and families receive support matched to their circumstances. Leaders work continually with teachers to refine provision, including, for example, structured approaches that help identify the right solutions for each family.

Leaders check pupils' progress regularly and gather pupils' views directly. They act promptly on this information to secure improvements. This leads, for example, to improving attendance and phonics outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. Staff deliver targeted support based on pupils' gaps in number, reading, writing and spelling. Leaders use a range of nurture-based approaches effectively to strengthen pupils' wellbeing. Leaders place disadvantaged pupils at the centre of their work, ensuring pupil premium funding improves both academic outcomes and personal development. This whole-school approach, combined with bespoke support, ensures pupils with SEND and disadvantaged pupils receive consistently high-quality provision.

Leadership and governance

Strong standard ●

After a period of leadership and staffing instability, the school, the governing board and trust leaders have made significant and rapid improvements in many aspects of the school's work. Leaders have accurately identified key areas for improvement and implemented highly effective plans to drive improvement.

Leaders are ambitious for every pupil. They make appropriate adaptations to ensure pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, can succeed. Well-considered decisions that place pupils' needs at the centre have significantly improved pupils' wellbeing and behaviour. Robust support from the trust has led to notable improvements in the experiences and support for pupils who are disadvantaged.

The professional learning programme for staff is well established. Ongoing performance improvement work enables staff at all levels to refine their practice. This continually improves the quality of the curriculum and teaching and has raised achievement for pupils, especially those who face barriers to their learning. Staff value the ongoing development and support they receive. They value the consideration leaders have for their workload and wellbeing and are proud to work at the school.

Professional relationships between leaders and trustees allow for both support and challenge. Leaders at all levels are held to account. Trustees and school leaders share an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development so are well placed to continue to strengthen the school's work. Leaders have built positive relationships with parents and carers as well as external agencies to ensure the most vulnerable pupils get timely support.

Expected standard

Achievement

Expected standard 

Leaders' work to improve the curriculum and teaching has ensured that pupils are now learning and achieving well. The impact of this work is evident in the most recent published outcomes. In 2025, pupils attained results at the end of key stage 2 that were close to national averages in reading, mathematics, grammar, punctuation and spelling. Pupils' outcomes in writing were above the national average. Disadvantaged pupils also achieved well at the end of Year 6, with attainment close to average across all areas. Similarly, pupils attainment in the Year 4 multiplication check and phonics screening check is also similar to national figures. Leaders recognise the need to sustain these improvements.

Leaders ensure gaps in pupils' knowledge are addressed well so that pupils progress effectively across the curriculum. Although some pupils are still catching up, targeted teaching and careful curriculum planning are having a positive impact. Leaders remain alert to gaps in reading, writing and mathematics. The school's focused approach is helping remaining gaps to close quickly and is supporting pupils to make progress. This secures pupils' readiness for their next steps.

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

Leaders analyse attendance precisely. They take appropriate and supportive action to address concerns. These measures are improving attendance for all groups of pupils. Currently, the school's attendance information shows that overall pupil attendance is close to the national average. Persistent absence is also reducing, although this remains a challenge. Leaders are relentless in their drive to raise attendance. Their collaborative work with external agencies and their close engagement with families enable them to understand and remove barriers to attendance. This approach is having a clear and positive impact.

Leaders have established robust behaviour systems. Staff apply these consistently. Leaders check and analyse behaviour patterns. They implement bespoke plans to provide extra help for pupils where needed. Leaders have also embedded whole-school supportive strategies to improve behaviour. These include nurture lunchtimes and the reflection room. These actions are having a positive impact on individual pupils and behaviour generally across the school, which is now calm and purposeful.

Classrooms are hives of focused activity. Staff manage any rare disruptions quickly and effectively. Staff support pupils at social times by reminding them about routines and

expectations. The school ensures that, though rare, any reports of discrimination, harassment, abuse or violence are dealt with quickly and consistently. Staff know pupils well and provide a caring, supportive environment where pupils can be themselves and access a range of approaches that promote their wellbeing.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Leaders have an accurate understanding of the quality of teaching and learning across the school. They use this insight to make informed decisions that bring about improvement where it is needed. The curriculum is well sequenced and identifies the key knowledge pupils will learn. This builds progressively as pupils move through the school. Teachers provide regular opportunities for pupils to revisit important content. This supports pupils to secure their understanding across the curriculum. Pupils remember key knowledge confidently. For example, they spoke knowledgeably about opaque objects and how light travels. Leaders have recently embedded strategies to develop pupils' vocabulary and their speaking, listening and communication skills. The impact of this is beginning to show, for example in the way pupils build on each other's responses in lessons.

Leaders ensure teachers use assessment effectively. Staff identify gaps in pupils' understanding quickly and adapt teaching to address these. The school supports teachers well and helps them develop the expertise required to teach their subjects and year groups effectively. Leaders' decisions about how the curriculum is organised and delivered show a clear focus on addressing pupils' gaps in reading, writing and mathematics. They adapt the curriculum swiftly so gaps in pupils' knowledge are addressed promptly. This approach is proving effective, and gaps in pupils' learning caused by previous weaknesses in teaching are beginning to close.

Early years

Expected standard 

Children have a smooth start to school. Leaders create a well-organised, engaging environment that helps children feel secure. Staff are ambitious for children. They promote children's independence from the outset. For example, they encourage children to find their pegs and hang up their coats. Children become familiar with the wider school environment as they visit spaces such as the hall to develop confidence and a sense of belonging. Children are well cared for and benefit from a carefully planned curriculum that builds progressively from Nursery into the Reception Year. Parents and carers receive regular updates so that they are kept well informed about their child's learning. Staff ensure important information is shared at each stage so that they can work collaboratively with parents to support children's development and wellbeing.

Staff know children well. Interactions between staff and children are warm, purposeful and focused on developing language. Staff consistently model new words to widen children's vocabulary. Leaders have a clear vision for giving every child the best start. Staff routinely check children's progress to identify additional needs and barriers to learning early. Staff use this effectively to adapt teaching to meet children's needs. They provide tailored support to ensure all children access the curriculum. Reading is prioritised. Phonics teaching reflects the school's high expectations. Children develop a love of books, stories and rhymes. Children who fall behind receive precise interventions that help them catch up, ensuring

most are well prepared for Year 1. Leaders remain focused on reducing remaining gaps in children's knowledge.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

The school provides an effective personal development programme. Leaders have designed a curriculum that goes beyond academic learning and helps pupils understand themselves, others and the world around them. Leaders adapt the curriculum skilfully, when needed, so pupils learn about relevant issues affecting the school and local community. Pupils talk confidently about how to stay physically and mentally healthy, both online and offline. They have a secure understanding of fundamental British values, explaining clearly why rules and laws matter and why everyone should be treated fairly and with respect. Pupils learn about relationships and sex education in an age-appropriate way, including how their bodies will change as they grow. A well-established reflective approach supports pupils to manage their emotions and respond to challenges. This helps pupils develop a clear sense of right and wrong and understand how to sensibly resolve conflicts.

Pupils develop responsibility for their community through opportunities such as the Year 5 'mini-police project'. They enjoy taking on leadership roles, including as eco-councillors, who monitor classroom energy use and encourage their peers to reduce waste. The wide range of clubs on offer provides pupils with opportunities to explore their interests. Pupils speak enthusiastically about activities such as Spanish, art and choir.

Leaders work hard to ensure all pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, can access these wider opportunities. They use funding effectively to remove barriers, and track participation carefully to ensure disadvantaged pupils benefit fully from the offer. Leaders use a range of approaches, including nurture provision and dedicated outdoor learning time, to support pupils' wellbeing. These approaches contribute to a caring, inclusive environment in which pupils feel supported and able to thrive.

What it's like to be a pupil at this school

Pupils thrive in Willowdown Primary School's welcoming, learning-focused culture. Leaders set consistently high expectations for pupils and staff, reflecting the school's vision to 'flourish together with kindness, respect and aspiration'. Pupils enjoy their learning and feel happy in school, so most attend well. Leaders provide a wide range of opportunities that broaden pupils' experiences, including, for example, caring for the school's pet chickens at lunchtime. Pupils take part in a range of leadership activities that help them understand democracy, community and their responsibilities within the wider world. For example, pupils contribute to school life through the work of the eco-council.

Pupils feel safe. Leaders have created a warm, predictable environment in which pupils are well cared for. A culture of nurture and respect permeates the school. Relationships between adults and pupils are positive and respectful. As a result, pupils feel confident to speak to staff if they have any worries. Leaders have embedded clear routines and systems that support pupils to behave well, so behaviour around the school and in lessons is calm and focused. Pupils understand clearly what is expected of them. The school adopts a zero-tolerance approach to bullying. Leaders respond swiftly and effectively to any reports of unkind behaviour. When bullying does occur, leaders take appropriate action to support all pupils involved and prevent further incidents.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities flourish because of the individualised support they receive. Overall, pupils' achievement is broadly close to national expectations. Typically, they are ready for their next stage of education. Pupils benefit from a well-designed curriculum and a comprehensive programme of interventions. Pupils remember new learning well because leaders ensure that teaching addresses any gaps in knowledge promptly. Leaders' relentless focus on improving attendance means that overall attendance is now broadly similar to national averages. Attendance rates are rising for all groups of pupils.

Next steps

- Leaders should continue to analyse attendance data and implement effective actions to address low rates of attendance, in particular for those who are persistently absent, so that rates of attendance continue to improve.
 - Leaders need to embed and build on the rapid improvements made to achievement, the curriculum and teaching so that all pupils benefit from a consistently high-quality education over time.
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About this inspection

This school is part of Futura Learning Partnership Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Gary Schlick, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Malcolm Broad.

Inspectors carried out this full inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Following our renewed inspection framework, all inspections are now led by His Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

Inspectors spoke with the headteacher, the chief executive officer, representatives from the trust board and other school leaders and staff during the inspection.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school does not currently make use of any alternative provision.

Since the previous inspection, a new headteacher and governing body have been appointed. The headteacher was previously the school's deputy headteacher.

Headteacher: Katie Sharp

Lead inspector:

Sophie Hillson, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Malcolm Willis, Ofsted Inspector

Sarah Jane Tustain, Ofsted Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

The data was used by the inspector(s) during the inspection. More recent data may have been published since the inspection took place.

 This data is from 6 January 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

342

Close to average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils currently at this school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 272

School capacity

420

Above average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils who can attend the school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 300

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

26.55%

Close to average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years.

National average: 26.3%

Pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan

1.46%

Below average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan. This covers pupils with more support than is available through special educational needs support.

National average: 3.5%

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

12.57%

Close to average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with reported special educational support needs at the school.

National average: 15%

Location deprivation

Well below average

What does this mean?

Based on the English Indices of Deprivation (2019) and the school's location, we have calculated whether the school is located in a more or less deprived area.

Resourced Provision or SEND Unit (if applicable)

No resourced provision

What does this mean?

Whether school has Resourced Provision or SEND unit (if applicable).

All pupils' performance

Pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics

The percentage of pupils meeting the expected standards in a combined reading, writing and mathematics measure.

| Year | This school | National average | Compared with national average |
|-----------------------|-------------|------------------|--------------------------------|
| Latest 3 year average | 55% | 61% | Close to average |
| 2024/25 | 66% | 62% | Close to average |
| 2023/24 | 58% | 61% | Close to average |
| 2022/23 | 39% | 60% | Below |

Pupils reaching the expected standard in reading

The percentage of pupils meeting the expected standard in reading.

| Year | This school | National average | Compared with national average |
|------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Latest 3 year average | 66% | 74% | Below |
| 2024/25 | 69% | 75% | Close to average |
| 2023/24 | 74% | 74% | Close to average |
| 2022/23 | 54% | 73% | Below |

Pupils reaching the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing

The percentage of pupils meeting the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing.

| Year | This school | National average | Compared with national average |
|------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Latest 3 year average | 76% | 72% | Close to average |
| 2024/25 | 81% | 72% | Above |
| 2023/24 | 84% | 72% | Above |
| 2022/23 | 61% | 71% | Below |

Pupils reaching the expected standard in mathematics

The percentage of pupils meeting the expected standard in mathematics.

| Year | This school | National average | Compared with national average |
|------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Latest 3 year average | 66% | 73% | Below |
| 2024/25 | 78% | 74% | Close to average |
| 2023/24 | 61% | 73% | Below |
| 2022/23 | 57% | 73% | Below |

Disadvantaged pupils' performance

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after.

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics.

| Year | This school | National average | Compared with national average |
|------------------------------|-------------|------------------|--------------------------------|
| Latest 3 year average | 41% | 46% | Close to average |
| 2024/25 | 55% | 47% | Close to average |
| 2023/24 | 30% | 46% | Below |
| 2022/23 | 38% | 44% | Close to average |

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in reading

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in reading.

| Year | This school | National average | Compared with national average |
|------------------------------|-------------|------------------|--------------------------------|
| Latest 3 year average | 59% | 62% | Close to average |
| 2024/25 | 64% | 63% | Close to average |
| 2023/24 | 50% | 62% | Below |
| 2022/23 | 63% | 60% | Close to average |

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing.

| Year | This school | National average | Compared with national average |
|-----------------------|-------------|------------------|--------------------------------|
| Latest 3 year average | 69% | 59% | Above |
| 2024/25 | 73% | 59% | Above |
| 2023/24 | 70% | 58% | Close to average |
| 2022/23 | 63% | 58% | Close to average |

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in mathematics

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in mathematics.

| Year | This school | National average | Compared with national average |
|-----------------------|-------------|------------------|--------------------------------|
| Latest 3 year average | 55% | 60% | Close to average |
| 2024/25 | 73% | 61% | Close to average |
| 2023/24 | 30% | 59% | Below |
| 2022/23 | 63% | 59% | Close to average |

Disadvantaged pupils' performance gap

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after. The school disadvantage gap is the difference between the performance of the school's disadvantaged pupils compared to the performance of all non-disadvantaged pupils nationally.

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics, including the disadvantaged gap.

| Year | This school | National non-disadvantaged score | School disadvantage gap |
|------------------------------|--------------------|---|--------------------------------|
| Latest 3 year average | 41% | 68% | -26 pp |
| 2024/25 | 55% | 69% | -15 pp |
| 2023/24 | 30% | 67% | -37 pp |
| 2022/23 | 38% | 66% | -29 pp |

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in reading

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in reading and the disadvantaged gap.

| Year | This school | National non-disadvantaged score | School disadvantage gap |
|------------------------------|--------------------|---|--------------------------------|
| Latest 3 year average | 59% | 80% | -21 pp |
| 2024/25 | 64% | 81% | -17 pp |
| 2023/24 | 50% | 80% | -30 pp |
| 2022/23 | 63% | 78% | -16 pp |

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing and the disadvantaged gap.

| Year | This school | National non-disadvantaged score | School disadvantage gap |
|------------------------------|--------------------|---|--------------------------------|
| Latest 3 year average | 69% | 78% | -9 pp |
| 2024/25 | 73% | 78% | -6 pp |
| 2023/24 | 70% | 78% | -8 pp |

| Year | This school | National non-disadvantaged score | School disadvantage gap |
|---------|-------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 2022/23 | 63% | 77% | -15 pp |

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in mathematics

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in mathematics and the disadvantaged gap.

| Year | This school | National non-disadvantaged score | School disadvantage gap |
|-----------------------|-------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Latest 3 year average | 55% | 80% | -25 pp |
| 2024/25 | 73% | 81% | -8 pp |
| 2023/24 | 30% | 79% | -49 pp |
| 2022/23 | 63% | 79% | -17 pp |

Absence

Overall absence

The percentage of all possible mornings and afternoons missed due to absence from school (for whatever reason, whether authorised or unauthorised) across all pupils.

| Year | This school | National average | Compared with national average |
|-------------------|-------------|------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2024/25 (2 terms) | 7.3% | 5.2% | Above |
| 2023/24 | 9.0% | 5.5% | Above |
| 2022/23 | 7.3% | 5.9% | Above |

Persistent absence

The percentage of pupils missing 10% or more of their possible mornings and afternoons.

| Year | This school | National average | Compared with national average |
|-------------------|-------------|------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2024/25 (2 terms) | 23.6% | 13.3% | Above |
| 2023/24 | 25.6% | 14.6% | Above |
| 2022/23 | 20.5% | 16.2% | Above |

Our grades explained

Exceptional

Practice is exceptional: of the highest standard nationally. Other schools can learn from it.

Strong standard

The school reaches a strong standard. Leaders are working above the standard expected of them.

Expected standard

The school is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standard set out in statutory and non-statutory legislation and the professional standards expected of them.

Needs attention

The expected standards are not met but leaders are likely able to make the necessary improvements.

Urgent improvement

The school needs to make urgent improvements to provide the expected standard of education and/or care.

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