

# Willow Dene School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	133399
<b>Local Authority</b>	Greenwich
<b>Inspection number</b>	301988
<b>Inspection dates</b>	16–17 May 2007
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Greg Sorrell

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

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<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	154
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Richard O'Connor
<b>Headteacher</b>	Ms Pip Hardaker
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	17 March 2003
<b>School address</b>	Swingate Lane London SE18 2JD
<b>Telephone number</b>	020 8854 9841
<b>Fax number</b>	020 8854 9846

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<b>Age group</b>	3–11
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

Willow Dene is a large community special school for pupils with a wide range of learning disabilities. Approximately 40% of pupils have profound learning difficulties, 40% have autistic spectrum disorder and 20% have complex and severe learning difficulties. The school's intake is becoming increasingly complex and there are a small number of part-time placements. All pupils have statements of special educational need and many have additional medical needs. Many ethnic groups are represented; approximately half are White British and one quarter are Black African. Seventeen languages are spoken and five pupils are 'looked after'. There are twice as many boys as girls. The school also provides outreach functions, one of which is located on site but managed by the local authority. It has a Healthy Schools Award.

## Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

Willow Dene is a good school with some outstanding features. The children in the Nursery and Reception classes and the pupils in the main school make good progress regardless of their special educational need or ethnic group and are well prepared for their next stage of education. Although academic standards are low, reflecting the learning difficulties experienced by the pupils, achievement is good. This is due to the good quality of teaching and learning. The pupils' personal development and well-being are excellent.

Staff are skilled in promoting effective communication by using a wide range of methods. Relationships between staff and with pupils are extremely strong and supportive. The good curriculum recognises the increasingly complex needs of the pupils and is suitably balanced to develop the pupils' academic abilities and independent living skills.

The pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are good. Regular attendance and enthusiastic entry to school confirm their enjoyment of learning. One parent wrote, 'Our son misses school so much during the holidays, but when it's time to return he giggles and sheds tears of joy.' Parents overwhelmingly support the work of the school and they endorse the view that their children are safe and happy to be at school. Other comments included, 'We have nothing but admiration for the teachers and management ... we know our children are very well cared for ... achievement is much more than we expected.'

The overall quality of care, guidance and support provided is good. The attention given to the pupils' needs is excellent when all required therapies are available. Teachers' use of assessment in lessons is good, although the recently adopted system, which should provide even better quality information about progress and target setting when fully established, is not yet fully embedded. Respect for the pupils' wishes and the preservation of dignity in their personal care are extremely strong features of daily life at school. School procedures ensure that their well-being is appropriately safeguarded.

Leadership and management of the school and outreach services are good. The headteacher gives an excellent lead to staff and with her team has ensured good improvement since the last inspection. The governing body gives good support in preparing for the school's relocation. The headteacher and senior staff have an accurate view of the school's effectiveness through the school's self review and recognise the need to increase the involvement of all staff and governors. The school's partnership with others for the benefit of its pupils is excellent.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Complete the adoption of new assessment procedures to enable all staff to gain an even more accurate view of learners' progress.
- Extend the role of governors and all staff in school review.

## Achievement and standards

### Grade: 2

The pupils' achievements are good as a result of good quality teaching, and good leadership and management, including additional specialist input from available therapists. In the Nursery and Reception classes, the children achieve well in relation to their capabilities in the relevant areas of learning. In Years 1 to 6, the pupils achieve well in all subjects and against the challenging targets set for them in their individual education plans; there is no evidence of

differences in achievement between boys and girls or any ethnic groups. Individual education plans also include targets for pupils' development of communication and independence skills as well as wider academic performance. Personal development is a particular strength for all due to the individual attention provided by all staff.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 1**

Pupils learn well about different ethnic groups as they enjoy music and dance from other countries and cultures, for example as provided by visiting bands playing steel band music and scores from Bollywood. The behaviour of pupils is good and they make an excellent contribution to their own community and beyond. For example, they help each other at lunch-time and raise funds for others at home and abroad. At the end of each day classes have 'candle time' when they are encouraged to reflect on the events of the day. They celebrate the good things and, when necessary, receive counselling to help them through difficulties such as bereavement. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Attendance is good and absence is almost invariably for medical treatment. Pupils certainly enjoy school, and this is evident in their eagerness to take part in activities, including swimming and hydrotherapy. This positive disposition lasts all day. The pupils respond well to the provision of healthy foods and show an awareness of safety around the school. Pupils endeavour to practise what they have learned and take care around peers who have mobility aids or additional equipment.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

The good teaching evident throughout the school has many strengths. One of these is the ability of staff to communicate effectively with the pupils. This is ensured by clear speech and careful listening as well as the use of alternative methods to meet different needs. For example, staff are skilled in the use of the Picture Exchange Communication System, signing and symbols, as well as understanding pupils' facial expressions and gestures. There is a clear focus on the understanding of vocabulary that is appropriate to the activity. For example, a focus on the word 'blue' on a Thursday as pupils are handed a blue cloth as they greet each other at the beginning of the day. This expertise is essential in encouraging all pupils to exercise choice, for example, when using the interactive whiteboard or deciding what to eat. Staff take good account of the pupils' wishes, their preferred learning styles, and individual targets. This information is readily available and enables staff to provide good, relevant lessons.

Some teaching observed was outstanding as a result of high expectations supported by a range of tasks differentiated according to ability. The pupils' learning is enhanced by regular and prompt feedback. Occasionally opportunities are missed for pupils to assess their own success in lessons, although the end of each day provides a good time for reflection on the day's events.

Staff deployment is good. The well-trained teaching assistants make a significant contribution to the quality of teaching and many are well equipped to lead some aspects of learning alongside teachers. Relationships between teachers and teaching assistants are very strong. There are many examples of good practice that include shared planning, team teaching and shared assessment. Therapists, medical staff and visiting teachers and volunteers also make valuable contributions to the quality of provision.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 2**

The curriculum is effective in meeting the wide range of need within the school. Since the last inspection appropriate emphasis has been given developing the curriculum in light of national guidance for all ages. The particular strengths are reflected in the respective expertise of school management in severe and profound and multiple learning difficulties. The school continues an appropriate focus upon communication, literacy and numeracy alongside the pupils' personal, social and physical development. Pupils with additional complex learning needs access the curriculum through sensory experiences. The recent training and development of sensory integration programmes and experiences for pupils is effective for many pupils.

Where possible opportunities to integrate with peers from other schools are provided and occasionally other pupils visit the school to play sport. Staff work hard to overcome accommodation difficulties in order to provide greater equality of experience for pupils. Some good enrichment activities for older pupils are offered and good use is made of the local community to enhance the curriculum.

Many pupils receive good therapies that further increase their ability to access the curriculum. The combined experience of lessons and therapy prepares them well for their next stage of education. This is equally true for children in the Nursery and Reception classes. School staff do their best to reduce the adverse impact of the lack of occupational therapy required by some pupils due to the unavailability of therapists.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 2**

The care, support and guidance that pupils receive are good. Parents are very positive about this. Pupils, despite their wide range of learning difficulties and disabilities receive carefully focused and well planned support, enabling them to make good progress. Pupils' needs, including looked after children, are reviewed regularly by all relevant agencies to devise tailored individual education plans. Those at an early stage of language development receive well planned teaching which enables them to make good progress, albeit in very small steps.

There are appropriate procedures for safeguarding pupils, and staff are trained appropriately in risk assessments. Teachers assess widely using the 'P' level assessments. The recently introduced assessment system is beginning to yield data to help staff have a more accurate starting point from which to measure progress but is not yet fully developed.

In recognition of the many pupils who have a range of medical needs, the school has set up several clinics on the school site. Such initiatives have been welcomed by parents and have reduced the amount of absence for off-site appointments. These clinics, also offer advice and guidance to families and have a very positive impact of the pupils' overall well-being. Liaison with parents and other agencies is highly effective.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

The headteacher provides excellent leadership and management and is very well supported by her senior leadership team who have been responsible for the good improvement since the last

inspection. Significant changes in the management team lie ahead, including the need to find a new headteacher; consequently, the school's capacity for further improvement is satisfactory.

The headteacher and her senior team have good monitoring procedures to ensure they know the quality of provision. These include performance management, including lesson observations, and the excellent evaluations of pupils' 'red files' which contain specific information about individuals.

Gathering evidence for self-evaluation is primarily undertaken by the headteacher and senior leadership team who acknowledges the need to involve other managers and governors more fully. The introduction of the new assessment system is effectively managed and some subject leaders are in the early stages of conducting systematic self-evaluation. The school has very good systems for professional development, including a structured induction programme. Work to achieve 'Investors in People' status is nearing completion although as yet, there is no formal evaluation of the many teaching assistants.

Governors receive good quality information from the headteacher and they provide good support for the school. They continue to be very involved in the planning for the school's new premises and are well briefed by the headteacher. Some repairs to the fabric of the existing building have not been made due to the funding requirements of the new building. Financial matters are well managed and appropriately audited.

The outreach services managed by Willow Dene fully meet the needs of pupils who are referred to them from other schools. Feedback from staff and their pupils indicate overwhelming satisfaction for these well managed services.

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## Annex A

## Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	<b>School Overall</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

### Achievement and standards

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

### The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>	2
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	2
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	2

<sup>1</sup> Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

## Annex A

**Leadership and management**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

## Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

4 June 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Willow Dene School, London, SE18 2JD

Thank you for helping me and my colleague last week and for giving us such a warm welcome. I am pleased to say that you go to a good school. Some things are outstanding, especially your personal development and well-being. Ms Hardacre leads the staff very well and they all work very hard for you. The teachers and teaching assistants make sure that your lessons help you to learn in lots of different ways. They provide you with choices and help you to communicate and use number where you all make good progress as well as becoming more confident and able to look after yourselves. You get on well with the staff and do your very best to see that everyone can get on and learn in class. We were impressed by the way you take care when moving near your friends who had walking frames.

We could see that you were happy when you arrived at school and were tired when it was home time. You have lots of lessons, including swimming to keep you strong, fit and healthy. I know that Boccia is also a favourite. When we were in your school we could see how much you enjoyed whatever you were learning!

Ms Hardacre is well supported by her senior team and governors when planning for your new school building. To improve the school even more, I'm asking her do a couple of things. One is to develop further the way teachers assess your progress and the other it to see that all staff and governors are more closely involved in checking how good the school is now.

I wish you lots of luck in the future and thank you once again for allowing us to see just how well you are doing.

Greg Sorrell Lead inspector