

Inspection of The Willows Primary School

Pyle Hill, Newbury, Berkshire RG14 7SJ

Inspection dates: 7 and 8 December 2021

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Requires improvement

What is it like to attend this school?

Leaders are united in their passion and ambition to provide the very best education for all pupils. Aply led by the headteacher, leaders have got this school back on course and brought about rapid improvement. Pupils are at the heart of their decision-making. Pupils are doing well. They are proud of the school and their achievements.

Pupils behave well and settle quickly to their work in class. Staff encourage pupils to 'shine' and to work hard. Pupils rise to their teachers' high expectations. They know that it is important to persevere when things get tricky, and that challenge is a good thing because this helps you to learn.

Pupils enjoy coming to school and have much to say about all the things they like about The Willows. More than anything, they value the friendships they forge with their classmates and that staff are kind and help them to learn. Pupils feel safe and told inspectors that bullying does not happen here. They are confident that staff quickly sort out any issues.

Parents speak highly of the school and the staff. As one parent commented, 'All staff are friendly, professional and clearly think the world of the children in their care'.

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

Leaders have planned an interesting curriculum. Their plans set out clearly what pupils will learn as they 'journey' through each subject. Leaders have carefully linked some content across different subjects. This is helping pupils to make meaningful connections and remember important knowledge. Pupils' learning in geography and science also helps them to connect with topical issues about planet Earth. Across different subjects, pupils are achieving well.

The new curriculum in some subjects, such as art and design, has only recently been implemented. Therefore, curriculum and assessment practices are not yet fully embedded in these subjects. Leaders are still adapting the early years curriculum to reflect recent statutory changes. This includes their approach to assessment. Currently, plans do not yet set out precisely enough what leaders would like children to know in all areas of learning.

Reading is centre stage at this school. A strong focus on communication and language in the Nursery gets children ready for learning phonics later. Phonics is coherently planned and taught well. This helps younger pupils get off to a good start with learning to read. Staff check how pupils are doing and adapt lessons accordingly. However, there are a few inconsistencies in the school's support for pupils who are not keeping up. Not all staff are clear about what pupils should know by the end of each term.

Books are everywhere at The Willows. Learning from texts is the central cog in the school's effective reading and writing curriculum. Throughout the school, teachers engage pupils daily with high-quality texts. Pupils learn to love reading and the new worlds that these open up. Their encounters with texts enrich their vocabulary and develop their understanding.

The well-planned mathematics curriculum is helping pupils to build their knowledge securely. Leaders have adapted the curriculum to give added weight to some aspects of mathematics, such as securing number facts and fluency. Staff in the early years make sure that children get a good grounding in mathematics. This lays a sound foundation for learning in Year 1.

Teachers bring learning to life and skilfully explain new content and vocabulary. They take time to revisit important knowledge and reconnect pupils with previous topics. This helps pupils to remember what their teachers have taught them. Staff are adept at noticing and addressing anything that pupils have not quite understood or remembered.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are supported well. Leaders ensure that any needs are identified as soon as possible so that the right support can be quickly put in place. In class, pupils with SEND learn happily alongside their peers.

Strong relationships and a culture of respect have transformed behaviour. The school's effective behaviour policy is implemented consistently. Pupils behave sensibly and work with positive attitudes. The school provides well for pupils' all-round development. They are taught to be kind and to value everyone, whatever their background or beliefs. The school council enables pupils to consider issues such as how they can make their school better and 'greener'.

Staff are fully on board. They too are proud of their work to improve the school. Staff appreciate the training and support they receive and feel that leaders consider their workload. Governors are knowledgeable and have good systems in place to maintain strategic oversight of the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

This is a school where pupils' well-being and safety are everyone's top priority. Leaders have established a strong culture of safeguarding. Their approach to all aspects of safeguarding is highly systematic. Leaders and staff know pupils and their families well. They are tuned in to any signs of concern. Leaders act swiftly to provide support. When needed, they involve external agencies. They understand the risks that pupils may face outside of school and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Strong pastoral support and early help for families often prevent concerns from escalating.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- There are a few inconsistencies in the support the school provides for pupils who have lost ground in phonics because of the disruptions to education during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some staff are not clear about what phonemes pupils need to know term by term. This risks pupils not catching up quickly enough. Leaders should iron out these few inconsistencies and strengthen their work to help pupils catch up quickly.
- The school's new curriculum in some foundation subjects has recently been implemented. Assessment processes are still being refined to help staff know what pupils have learned and remembered. Leaders should continue to embed the new curriculum and their assessment processes for these subjects. Additionally, leaders need to make sure that foundation subject leaders evaluate the impact of the new curriculum.
- Leaders are currently adapting the early years curriculum and assessment processes to reflect the new statutory framework. Plans do not yet set out explicitly the component knowledge children need to acquire in all areas of learning. Leaders need to implement their plans to strengthen the early years curriculum and assessment processes, ensuring that plans set out how they intend children's knowledge to build cumulatively during the early years.

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.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

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	135213
Local authority	West Berkshire
Inspection number	10203127
Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	386
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Huw Griffiths
Headteacher	Jo MacArthur
Website	www.thewillowsprimary.org
Date of previous inspection	6 and 7 March 2018, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school has nursery provision for two- and three-year-old children. The two-year-old provision, Saplings, is accommodated in a separate building.
- The number of pupils on roll is lower than when the school was last inspected. There is now one class in Reception and two classes in each of the other school years.
- The school operates a breakfast and after-school club.
- The school does not currently use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this 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 school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in reading, mathematics, art and design, science and physical education. They met with subject leaders, pupils and staff, visited lessons and sampled pupils' work. Inspectors also heard pupils read.
- Inspectors visited the school's early years provision, including the nursery provision for two- and three-year-old children.
- Inspectors sampled curriculum planning and pupils' work in English, history and geography.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher and the leader with responsibility for SEND.
- To inspect safeguarding, inspectors reviewed a wide range of safeguarding documents and records, including the school's record of recruitment checks. The lead inspector met with the designated leader (headteacher) and deputy designated leader (deputy headteacher). Inspectors also spoke with pupils and staff.
- Inspectors took account of parents' responses to Ofsted's survey, Parent View, and parents' written comments. An inspector also talked with some parents on the morning of the second day of the inspection.
- Inspectors gathered pupils' views through meetings with them and at other times of the day, for example during visits to lessons and at lunchtime. Inspectors also considered the responses to Ofsted's pupil survey.
- Inspectors met with staff to gather their views about the school and took account of staff's responses to Ofsted's confidential staff survey.

Inspection team

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