

Inspection of Willowbrook School

Summer Lane, Beacon Heath, Exeter, Devon EX4 8NN

Inspection dates: 28 and 29 June 2022

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Early years provision

Good

Previous inspection grade

Requires improvement

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils like Willowbrook and feel safe in the care of trusted adults. They learn all the subjects in the national curriculum. Leaders have improved some aspects of the school's curriculum. However, there are still too many weaknesses, including in early reading and mathematics. Leaders do not have sufficiently high expectations of all pupils. Subject curriculums are not consistently well matched to pupils' abilities and some staff lack the knowledge they need to undertake their roles effectively. This hampers pupils' learning.

Pupils understand the school's behaviour expectations and follow the 'Willowbrook Way' with pride. Staff enforce the school behaviour system consistently. Consequently, pupils feel that they are treated with fairness. At times, some pupils attend the school's 'learning hub'. This is designed to help pupils manage their behaviour and to enjoy a bespoke curriculum. Bullying is rare. Should any bullying occur, pupils trust adults to deal with it swiftly. Leaders are working with families and other professionals to improve pupils' attendance, particularly the high rates of repeated absence.

Staff provide a range of wider curriculum experiences to appeal to most pupils' interests, including art, music and sport. Pupils speak enthusiastically about playing and performing in concerts and assemblies.

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

There have been several changes to the school leadership since the previous inspection. Leaders have used help and advice from the local authority to make some curriculum improvements. Subjects, such as science, history and physical education (PE), have suitably ambitious curriculums. However, some weaknesses persist in a few curriculum subjects, including mathematics and early reading. Progress in these areas has been delayed by the impact of COVID-19, but also by leaders' overly optimistic self-evaluations.

Leaders have put in place a suitable phonics curriculum to teach early reading. However, the teaching of phonics is inconsistent. Children in the early years get off to a flying start in reading and using vocabulary. Knowledgeable staff read, sing and recite nursery rhymes to children. This is helping the youngest children to develop their communication and language well. This strong start slows in key stage 1. Some pupils, who remain at the early stages of reading, are supported by adults who have not received appropriate training. This results in pupils, in key stages 1 and 2, repeating mistakes and using unhelpful strategies to read words. Early readers in key stage 2 are developing a love of reading through inspiring class texts and the diverse range of books available in the well-stocked library.

The early writing curriculum is not sequenced well. It does not allow pupils enough time to consolidate current learning before moving on. Some pupils' writing is poor.

They make mistakes in their letter formation and spelling that are not acknowledged by adults. Consequently, these errors persist.

Leaders have not put in place a suitably ambitious mathematics curriculum. Some pupils who need to catch up cannot recall number facts well enough. This means they lack the mathematical understanding needed to tackle basic calculations. Other pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to apply their understanding to problems or explain their understanding. Leaders do not use assessment well enough to find out what some pupils know and understand. Consequently, gaps in pupils' learning are not being systematically addressed. Some stronger mathematicians find mathematics too easy. Too often, they repeat what they have learned before.

Leaders have prioritised support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Staff identify pupils who may have additional learning needs swiftly. Children in the early years receive additional attention from specialist staff. The learning hub provides helpful pastoral and educational support for some pupils. Occasionally though, when the classroom curriculum does not meet their needs, some pupils with SEND become distracted.

Many aspects of pupils' character are developed well. Leaders encourage pupils' sense of civic duty. Pupils' interests and talents are nurtured by the school. Pupils learn how to be physically healthy. They learn much of what makes a healthy relationship. Pupils understand most aspects of diversity and equality. They debate issues, including spiritual and moral dilemmas, in a mature, considered way.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders make suitable checks to ensure that adults are safe to work with children. They provide training for staff. Staff identify potential signs of abuse and understand that everybody is responsible for keeping pupils safe. Leaders speak knowledgeably about managing allegations. They ensure that pupils and families receive the help they need. Staff work in partnership with other professionals to provide appropriate support.

Pupils understand how to keep safe, including online.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders do not have an accurate picture of the quality of education. Some key weaknesses, including in the reading and mathematics curriculums, have not been identified. This means that some pupils are not learning well enough. Leaders need to check that the curriculum intent is implemented consistently so that pupils achieve success.

- Leaders and staff do not have consistently high expectations for all pupils. Too often, staff do not adapt the curriculum to match pupils' abilities. This results in some pupils becoming distracted or bored. Leaders need to check that all pupils are receiving a suitably ambitious curriculum.
- Leaders have introduced a scheme for teaching early reading. However, beyond the early years, some staff lack the subject knowledge and pedagogy required to teach reading effectively. This results in some pupils not reading as well as they could. Leaders must ensure that staff are equipped with secure subject knowledge and a sound pedagogy.
- Teachers do not identify and address pupils' misconceptions in spelling and letter formation consistently. Consequently, mistakes persist and sometimes become embedded in pupils' practice. This is detrimental to the overall quality of pupils' writing. Teachers need to support pupils to improve their writing swiftly when errors arise.

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	132778
Local authority	Devon
Inspection number	10227357
Type of school	Primary
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	440
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	John Draper
Headteacher	Molly Marlow
Website	www.willowbrook.devon.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	11 and 12 July 2018

Information about this school

- The school uses no alternative provision.
- The school nursery admits three-year-old children.
- Since the last inspection, there has been a governance review.

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 did deep dives in early reading, mathematics, PE and history. This included discussions with subject leaders, lesson visits, looking at examples of work, discussions with teachers, discussions with pupils and listening to pupils read to an adult. They also considered evidence gathered about the science curriculum.

- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, curriculum leaders, the leader for SEND, staff and governors, including the chair of the local governing board.
- The lead inspector spoke with the local authority school effectiveness adviser.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation provided by the school, including leaders' self-evaluation, risk assessments, improvement plans and documentation relating to behaviour.
- Inspectors examined safeguarding records, checked staff's safeguarding knowledge and spoke with pupils. Inspectors also met with the designated safeguarding lead.
- Inspectors considered the 75 responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, and free-text comments. They also took into consideration responses to the staff and pupil surveys.

Inspection team

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Her Majesty's Inspector

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