

Inspection of Willow Lane Community Primary School

Willow Lane, Lancaster, Lancashire LA1 5PR

Inspection dates:	23 and 24 April 2025
The quality of education	Requires improvement
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy attending this school. They have warm relationships with staff and with each other. Pupils typically behave well and are respectful towards others. Those who struggle to manage their emotions receive the support they need from skilled staff. The school ensures that pupils learn in a calm and happy environment, where everyone is welcome.

The school is ambitious for pupils' achievement, academically and personally. It is taking effective action to improve weaknesses in pupils' learning. These steps include redesigning the curriculum and ensuring that children get off to a positive start with their learning in the early years. However, there is variability in how well pupils build on their learning across key stage 1 and key stage 2. Some pupils have significant gaps in their knowledge that have not been addressed. This hinders these pupils from achieving as well as they should.

Pupils have opportunities to broaden their experiences and to develop their talents. They enjoy attending a range of clubs, including chess and Latin. Pupils also represent the school at external events and go on many trips, including to London. The school encourages pupils to be active. For example, pupils learn a range of different sports and take part in sporting competitions.

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

There have been significant changes to the leadership and staffing at the school in recent years. The school has remained committed to its vision and to continuous improvement. It has taken positive steps to strengthen many aspects of its work, including the design of the curriculum and increasing pupils' rates of attendance.

The knowledge that pupils should learn is identified clearly and is designed well to build over time. Staff's secure subject knowledge supports them to deliver the curriculum consistently. However, while pupils can recall prior learning, their depth and breadth of knowledge across the curriculum is variable. In addition, there is not enough focus on building pupils' knowledge of grammar, punctuation and spelling. Errors in these aspects of pupils' written communication are not addressed effectively. Pupils do not achieve as well as they could in writing, which also impacts their learning in other subjects.

The school makes checks on how well pupils are learning the curriculum. However, there is inconsistency in how effectively staff use these checks to inform teaching. For example, the activities that pupils complete are not consistently well matched to their next steps of learning. Furthermore, gaps in pupils' understanding are not consistently identified or addressed. This hinders pupils from successfully and securely building on their learning.

Reading is prioritised from the start of the Reception Year. Staff deliver the school's phonics programme consistently well and pupils read books that match the sounds they know. This helps pupils to develop their confidence and fluency in reading. The school provides additional support to pupils who find reading difficult. However, the inconsistencies in the school's checks on learning mean that gaps in pupils' phonics

knowledge are not identified and addressed as rapidly as they could be in lessons. This hinders some pupils from catching up in their reading as quickly as they could.

Children in the early years benefit from an engaging curriculum that supports them to develop their skills and knowledge well. The school places a strong focus on developing children's language skills. Staff introduce new vocabulary and plan activities to promote rich two-way conversations. This supports children to become confident communicators.

The school identifies and understands the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). It liaises effectively with parents and carers and external agencies to identify key targets for these pupils. Staff use a range of strategies and resources in lessons effectively to ensure that pupils' personal, sensory and learning needs are met.

The school has high expectations of pupils' behaviour that staff model consistently. Pupils have positive attitudes to learning. The school identifies and addresses barriers to pupils' attendance effectively. Its actions to reduce persistent absence have been successful.

The school provides pupils with first-hand experiences that support their broader development. For example, pupils learn to swim and to play musical instruments. Pupils develop a secure understanding of how to keep mentally and physically healthy. They learn how to grow vegetables that they then use as ingredients in recipes. Pupils play an active part in the wider community, including raising money for charities. Pupils are well prepared for life beyond school.

Governors provide effective support and challenge to the school. They are aware of the school's areas for development. They hold the school to account for its work to improve in these areas. The school considers staff's workload and well-being when making changes to the curriculum.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school's teaching of writing is not as effective as it could be. This means that some pupils do not develop the foundational skills they need in writing and do not achieve as well as they could across the curriculum. The school should ensure that there is an increased emphasis on teaching pupils the key knowledge and skills that they need in writing, so that they can successfully tackle the requirements of each stage of their education.
- The school's checks on learning do not consistently identify and address gaps in pupils' knowledge. Consequently, pupils have many gaps in their learning that are not closed,

which hinders them from achieving as well as they could across a range of subjects. The school should refine its approaches to assessment, so that gaps in pupils' knowledge can be rapidly closed across all subjects.

- Learning activities are not consistently well matched to pupils' next steps in learning. Consequently, pupils' learning does not build securely over time. The school should ensure that activities enable pupils to build on their next steps in learning and to deepen their understanding, so that they develop a secure body of knowledge.

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](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	119134
Local authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	10377962
Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	201
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Nick Harrison
Headteacher	Lucy Naylor
Website	www.willow.lancs.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	10 and 11 March 2020, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school has been part of the Willow Tree Federation since January 2023. The federation is comprised of two schools. The headteacher of this school leads both schools within the federation.
- The current headteacher and deputy headteacher have joined the school since the last inspection. The headteacher was appointed in September 2021.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- The school provides before- and after-school care for pupils.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024 will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, other leaders, governors, and staff at the school. The lead inspector spoke with a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and history. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also discussed the curriculum in some other subjects.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- The lead inspector listened to some pupils read to a familiar adult.
- Inspectors observed pupils at breaktime, lunchtime and when moving around the school.
- Inspectors spoke to parents and considered the responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. Inspectors spoke to pupils and to staff to gather their views. Inspectors also considered the responses to Ofsted's online survey for staff.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documents, including those related to the governance of the school.

Inspection team

Liz Dayton, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Cleo Cunningham

Ofsted Inspector

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