

Inspection of The Willows Primary School

Downing Close, Ipswich, Suffolk IP2 9ER

Inspection dates: 13 and 14 February 2024

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Early years provision

Good

Previous inspection grade

Requires improvement

The headteacher of this school is Kelly Head. This school is part of Orwell Multi Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Alastair Heath-Robinson, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Mayleen Atima.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils follow the new school rules of 'Ready, Respectful, Safe'. They like the range of rewards on offer, which motivate them to try their best. Year 6 pupils are particularly proud of their effort charts. However, pupils do not achieve as well as they could.

Pupils have positive relationships with staff, who know them and their families well. Pupils like the new start to the school day, where they enjoy a range of mindfulness activities to help them settle into the day ahead.

Pupils speak enthusiastically about their school. In lessons, pupils work well together. They focus on their learning, listen carefully to their teachers and try hard. When outside, most pupils play together well. Some pupils are not always respectful of others. Pupils trust adults to deal with any problems quickly and well, which helps pupils feel happy and safe.

Pupils learn how to keep safe. This includes learning through visits from the police and charities. Pupils enjoy a variety of trips out of school. They are excited about the upcoming residential trip, which has been reintroduced. Pupils appreciate the clubs available. They can take on leadership roles, such as school council members and prefects. Pupils influence changes made in school and fundraise for local charities.

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

Pupils learn a broad curriculum. The curriculum has undergone many recent changes. It is now organised to build pupils' knowledge and understanding over time. Staff use stories and non-fiction texts to enhance the curriculum and deepen pupils' understanding.

In subjects where teachers check on pupils' understanding carefully, they plan activities that build effectively on what pupils have learned before. Teachers ensure that lessons in these subjects are well resourced and engaging. They teach key words to support pupils' understanding of subject vocabulary. Pupils make strong progress in these subjects. However, these strengths in teaching are not evident in other subjects, including mathematics. In these subjects, teachers do not help pupils to build on previous learning well. Consequently, many pupils do not achieve as well as they could.

The early years curriculum is well matched to children's abilities. Staff consider what children already know and can do. Unlike for older pupils, adults use checks on children's understanding consistently well to plan activities that build on previous learning. Children listen attentively to staff and follow established routines. Adults model correct use of language for children. This enables children to learn to take turns in conversation and listen to others. Children are prepared well for learning in Year 1.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) do not achieve as well as they should. Teachers do not take enough account of pupils' differing needs. Teachers do not always adjust activities sufficiently so that pupils with SEND can work independently. When learning is too hard or too easy, pupils struggle to concentrate.

Reading is a priority. Staff are well trained to teach the phonics and reading curriculum. Staff use their checks on pupils' reading to ensure teaching matches what pupils can do. The school successfully encourages pupils to read often. Teachers ensure books are well matched to pupils' reading knowledge. This gives pupils the confidence to read more widely.

The school has prioritised the teaching of tolerance and respect to address the inappropriate language used by some pupils. It uses a range of strategies to support pupils and families who have difficulties engaging in school. However, some pupils are still absent too often and miss out on learning. Pupils are positive about approaches to improve behaviour and attendance, including the therapy dogs, calming room and reward assemblies.

The school supports pupils' wider development well. Pupils of all ages experience a range of enriching opportunities. Assemblies, lessons and extra-curricular opportunities support pupils' wider learning, including about life in modern Britain. Pupils can take on leadership opportunities, such as being school councillors and prefects. Pupils are positive about the range of clubs on offer, where they can follow and develop their interests. Pupils can learn a musical instrument through individual tuition, for example.

Prior to September 2023 improvement had been slow. New trust and school leadership are making a difference. They have made some rapid improvements. However, some changes are recent and have not had enough time to make a positive difference. Staff are supportive of the changes being made. The school and trust seek support from external experts to help improve the quality of education. Staff value this training. The school makes efforts to reduce staff workload. For example, staff value the opportunities to share ideas about what works well when planning lessons together.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some subjects, the curriculum is not implemented effectively to meet pupils' needs. Teachers do not always make necessary adjustments to help pupils, particularly pupils with SEND, learn the curriculum effectively. Consequently, pupils do not achieve as well as they should. The school should ensure that

teachers adapt activities and the curriculum in all subjects to meet pupils' needs to support pupils to achieve well.

- In some subjects, teachers do not use assessment effectively to check that pupils understand and remember what they have learned previously. Teachers do not use assessment information to plan activities and sequences of lessons that build effectively on pupils' prior knowledge. Pupils do not achieve as well as they should in these subjects. The school needs to ensure that teachers use assessment effectively to inform planning and teaching in all subjects.
- There is a core group of pupils who are not yet meeting the school's new expectations of behaviour. These pupils are not always respectful to others and behave inappropriately. The school should continue to develop its work and strategies to support pupils to meet expectations of behaviour.
- Some pupils are absent from school frequently. These pupils miss out on learning and do not achieve as well as they should. The school should ensure all pupils and their families understand the importance of regular attendance and provide support to help overcome remaining barriers to pupils attending regularly.

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	144216
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	10295096
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	363
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Mayleen Atima
CEO of the trust	Alastair Heath-Robinson
Headteacher	Kelly Head
Website	www.thewillows.omat.org.uk
Dates of previous inspection	29 and 30 January 2020, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Orwell Multi Academy Trust.
- Since the previous inspection, the school and trust leadership have undergone significant change and many leaders are new to their positions.
- The current headteacher is on secondment from another academy in the trust. She joined the school in September 2023.
- The school uses two alternative providers, one registered and one unregistered.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement 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 chair of Orwell Multi Academy Trust, the chief executive officer and three members of the trust’s rapid improvement board.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, senior leaders, staff and pupils.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, art and design, and design technology. 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 school’s approach to assessment and feedback to pupils. Inspectors scrutinised pupils’ work to further explore adaptations for pupils.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the 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.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted’s pupil and staff surveys. They considered responses to Ofsted Parent View, including free-text comments.

Inspection team

Sarah Fowler, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Simon Harbrow	Ofsted Inspector
Craige Brown	Ofsted Inspector

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