

Inspection of The Willows Primary School

Greatbatch Avenue, Penkhull, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire ST4 7JY

Inspection dates: 10 and 11 June 2025

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Outstanding**

Leadership and management **Good**

Early years provision **Good**

Previous inspection grade Good

What is it like to attend this school?

The Willows Primary School is a warm and nurturing school where pupils thrive. The school's vision of 'Explore, dream and discover' is realised through the vast array of experiences that pupils have access to. Most pupils achieve successfully in a broad range of subjects.

Relationships are at the core of all the school's work. Pupils are happy. They feel safe and well cared for. Pupils are confident that adults take any concerns they have seriously.

Pupils behave well in lessons. The varied activities offered to pupils at social times support their behaviour and interactions with each other. They are kind to one another and play well together.

The school nurtures pupils' talents and interests through a diverse enrichment programme involving a wide range of sporting and creative activities. These include crocheting, trampolining, weightlifting and many sporting competitions. Pupils benefit from a rich and varied set of experiences that celebrate their local heritage and broaden their horizons. These experiences include different career-focused workshops, local artist visits and residential trips. During their time at the school, pupils develop into responsible and well-rounded citizens through the many pupil leadership opportunities that they undertake.

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

Pupils benefit from a curriculum that is broad and ambitious. The school has identified the important knowledge pupils need to learn. Pupils build knowledge in carefully ordered steps from the early years to Year 6. Teachers have secure subject knowledge. They apply the school's agreed teaching approaches with increasing consistency.

Teachers make checks on what pupils know and remember. Staff use this information well to adapt teaching. However, in some subjects, the school does not have a consistently effective approach to check how well pupils have learned over time. Consequently, some pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), do not achieve as well as they could in some subjects.

Children in the early years settle well into school life. They develop confidence and independence through a range of interesting and varied activities. Staff support children's vocabulary and language skills effectively. Children currently have limited opportunities to engage in activities that promote their physical development, so they are not continuing to develop as well as they could. In this area, staff do not always check how well children are achieving in order to plan their next steps in learning.

The school makes learning to read a priority. Staff deliver the phonics programme consistently well. They track pupils' progress over time and provide support for anyone falling behind. In most cases, this helps pupils to become fluent and competent readers as they move into key stage 2. Dedicated story time, inspiring well-resourced reading areas and the passion that staff have for reading help pupils to develop a love of reading.

Pupils with SEND benefit from strong relationships with staff, who identify pupils' needs quickly and accurately. Staff adapt the delivery of the curriculum well so that pupils with SEND can learn alongside their peers.

Staff create a positive, supportive and nurturing learning environment. They follow the school's recently revised behaviour policy consistently well. Staff help pupils to reflect on their feelings. This helps to improve behaviour, particularly during social times. The school has secure systems to promote high attendance. They work closely with families when pupils' attendance is a concern. As a result, most pupils attend well.

The provision for pupils' personal development is exceptionally well considered. It prepares pupils well with an understanding of life in and beyond the local area. Developing aspiration and introducing pupils to think about their next steps in life is a standout feature of this school. Through visiting different places of worship, pupils develop high levels of understanding and tolerance for different beliefs and cultures. Pupils secure a deep understanding of how to stay safe, including when online. Pupils learn how to be physically and mentally healthy. Effective and bespoke pastoral support is widely available for any pupils who need it.

The governing body assures itself of the school's effectiveness well. Members have the knowledge and expertise to ask pertinent questions to support the school's drive for continuous improvement. Staff receive regular and valued training and well-being initiatives. Staff appreciate the support they receive. They are proud to work at this school. Many parents and carers are highly complimentary of the school's work. They value the regular updates on their child's learning and opportunities to visit the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Sometimes the school does not consistently and accurately identify how well pupils develop knowledge over time. As a result, some pupils do not achieve as well as they could. The school needs to ensure that assessment is used effectively in all aspects of its work so that pupils, including those with SEND, develop secure knowledge across the curriculum.

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	123999
Local authority	Stoke-on-Trent
Inspection number	10378236
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	694
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	John Perry
Headteacher	Sarah Thursfield
Website	www.willowsprimary.com
Dates of previous inspection	3 and 4 March 2020, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Information about this school

- Since the last inspection, a new chair of the governing body has been appointed.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- The school has a specially resourced provision for pupils who are hearing impaired on site.

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. The inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- The inspectors met with the headteacher and senior leaders.
- The lead inspector met with members of the governing body. Minutes of governing body meetings were also scrutinised.
- The lead inspector talked to a representative from the local authority.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, history and art and design. 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 a sample of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also held discussion about the curriculum in some other subjects and looked at a sample of pupils' work.
- The lead inspector listened to some pupils read to a familiar adult.
- The inspectors looked at records of pupils' attendance and behaviour. They observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around school and talked to them about behaviour, bullying and welfare.
- 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.
- The inspectors spoke with several groups of pupils and observed their behaviour at breaktime and lunchtime.
- The inspectors met with groups of staff and pupils and also considered the opinions expressed through Ofsted's staff survey.
- The inspectors met with some parents at the start of the day. Inspectors also considered the views expressed through Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text responses.

Inspection team

Cathy Young, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Tim Bassett	Ofsted Inspector
Mark Gilbert	Ofsted Inspector
Vicki Jordan	His Majesty's Inspector

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