

Willowfield School

Address: 209 Blackhorse Road, Walthamstow, London, E17 6ND

Unique reference number (URN): 103100

Inspection report: 20 January 2026

Exceptional	
Strong standard	
Expected standard	
Needs attention	
Urgent improvement	

Safeguarding standards met

The safeguarding standards are met. This means that leaders and/or those responsible for governance and oversight fulfil their specific responsibilities and have established an open culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and concerns are actively identified, acted upon and managed. As a result, pupils are made safer and feel safe.

How we evaluate safeguarding

When we inspect schools for safeguarding, they can have the following outcomes:

- **Met:** The school has an open and positive culture of safeguarding. All legal requirements are met.
- **Not met:** The school has not created an open and positive culture of safeguarding. Not all legal requirements are met.

Expected standard

Achievement

Expected standard 

Across the school and in most subjects, pupils make steady progress from their starting points. GCSE results are consistently at least in line with national averages, and disadvantaged pupils often achieve better than similar pupils nationally. In 2025, the proportion of pupils achieving a grade 5 or above in both English and mathematics was significantly higher than the national figure. This reflects the school's strong focus on helping all pupils secure the literacy and numeracy skills they need to succeed in the wider curriculum. As a result, pupils finish Year 11 well prepared for post-16 education, training or employment.

In most subjects, pupils talk confidently about what they have learned. They show a secure understanding of key ideas and produce work of high quality. In a small number of subjects, some pupils struggle to explain their learning clearly, and the quality of their work does not always match the robust standard seen elsewhere.

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

Over time, pupils' overall attendance has stayed close to national averages. The attendance of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and disadvantaged pupils is consistently higher than that of similar groups nationally. However, in 2025, the rate of pupils who were persistently absent rose noticeably to significantly above average. Since September, senior leaders have strengthened their oversight of attendance and punctuality and introduced new decisive strategies to improve both. These actions are already having a positive effect, with clear reductions in persistent absence and lateness this academic year.

The school's approach to promoting positive behaviour works well because staff apply routines and expectations consistently. As a result, the school feels calm, friendly and purposeful. Pupils usually work with focus in lessons because they want to do well and learning is rarely disrupted. Bullying, harassment or any form of discrimination, whether online or in person, is not tolerated. When concerns arise, staff respond quickly, professionally and with appropriate care.

Leaders regularly review behaviour information to spot any patterns that may need attention. This enables them to identify pupils who may benefit from additional support to help them manage their behaviour more effectively. These processes ensure that pupils feel safe, included and able to learn successfully.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Leaders have a firm understanding of the quality of the curriculum and teaching. They continue to drive improvement with a clear and coherent approach. The curriculum is broad and ambitious. It meets national curriculum requirements and includes some vocational options. The school recently added GCSEs in sociology and business studies to its offer.

Most subjects are well sequenced, identifying the knowledge pupils need to master over time. Teaching is typically effective because staff have strong subject expertise. Teachers mainly have high expectations for what pupils can achieve and plan learning that consistently deepens pupils' knowledge and skills. In a small number of subjects, some teaching is less secure, which means pupils do not always learn as well as they could.

In recent years, leaders have strengthened teachers' understanding of how to adapt the curriculum for different pupils' needs. Teachers now plan carefully for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, disadvantaged pupils and those with other barriers to learning and/or wellbeing. As a result, these pupils learn at least as well as their peers.

Leaders ensure that pupils who need additional help in literacy or numeracy receive timely and effective support. They put in place well-established approaches that help pupils to quickly secure the early reading and mathematics knowledge they need to access the wider curriculum.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Leaders have created an inclusive culture across the school. They identify and assess pupils' individual needs accurately, including for disadvantaged pupils, pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those known or previously known to children's social care. Staff use this information well to plan learning and provide appropriate support. For example, teachers follow guidance from leaders and external professionals so that pupils can access learning successfully.

Leaders reduce barriers to learning and wellbeing through carefully considered support and effective adaptations. They monitor pupils' progress closely, reviewing academic performance and the impact of interventions regularly. Leaders also take account of pupils' views about the support that they receive.

Staff receive suitable training on a staged approach to support for pupils, which strengthens their understanding of how best to help pupils consistently well. Leaders work effectively with families, professionals and external agencies to shape pupils' support and aspirations. The school also collaborates well with the local authority to meet the needs of children known to social care.

Leaders use additional funding thoughtfully. They evaluate its impact for pupils through outcomes, attendance, behaviour and participation in wider opportunities. This oversight ensures that disadvantaged pupils and those facing additional challenges benefit from provision that helps them to succeed.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Leaders and governors review the school's work regularly. They understand the needs of the school and local community well. They know clearly what the school does well and what still needs to improve. Their improvement priorities are well chosen, and they take effective action that drives real change. Their commitment to acting in pupils' best interests is evident in their decision to further develop provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Leaders work collaboratively with other schools in the area to share practice. The school is also the local authority's lead school for music. Staff share their specialist expertise and offer training and guidance to help strengthen teaching and curriculum development in music in other schools.

Governors bring a broad range of expertise and use this to support and challenge the school effectively. They check the school's performance carefully and seek feedback from parents and carers, staff and pupils. They also make sure they meet their statutory responsibilities, including checking how well additional funding improves the academic and social outcomes of disadvantaged pupils.

Leaders ensure that all staff benefit from high-quality, evidence-based professional learning. This training strengthens teaching and the pastoral support offered to pupils. Teachers who are early in their careers receive effective mentoring and guidance that helps them establish secure classroom practice and develop confidence.

Leaders value their staff and listen to their views. They consult staff on proposed changes and take their ideas seriously. Leaders also keep workload under review and have introduced measures that reduce unnecessary burdens. Staff report that leaders act considerately and support their wellbeing.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

The school's personal development programme is well structured, comprehensive and meets statutory requirements. The curriculum is thoughtfully planned to build pupils' knowledge over time. Leaders monitor the programme closely and adapt content in response to their checks, feedback and local issues. As a result, pupils engage confidently with themes such as equality, protected characteristics and ethical dilemmas, using the safe space provided to explore differing views respectfully.

Pupils have opportunities to reflect on their beliefs and experiences through 'thought for the week' assemblies and tutor-time discussions. They debate and vote on current issues. Pupils develop social skills and teamwork through activities such as the drama club, running club and the philosophy and debate clubs. Cultural appreciation is fostered, for example, through visits to museums and inter-faith events hosted at the school. These opportunities help pupils understand fundamental British values, appreciate diversity and take an active role in the school community.

The personal development programme supports disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) effectively. Leaders ensure that these pupils can access the full range of clubs, enrichment and educational visits, including cultural capital weeks in key stage 3. However, the uptake of these beneficial optional clubs is not as high as it could be, especially for pupils with SEND and those who are disadvantaged.

The school teaches relationships, sex and health education appropriately, giving pupils clear guidance on managing risk and maintaining wellbeing. Pupils also learn explicitly about forming healthy relationships and recognising when relationships may be unsafe, including online. Careers education is well organised and impartial. Pupils receive individual guidance from a qualified adviser. Pupils with SEND and vulnerable pupils are prioritised for this

guidance. They learn about study routes and employment pathways and benefit from growing links with local employers. This helps pupils to make informed choices about their next steps.

What it's like to be a pupil at this school

As pupils enter the school gate, caring staff greet them warmly. Pupils move quickly into class to the sound of music and begin their first learning task without delay. This positive, purposeful start sets the tone for the day. Pupils settle promptly and approach their learning with focus as they move between their classes.

Pupils get on very well with one another. They celebrate diversity and describe the school as a 'melting pot' where everyone feels they belong. Well-staffed safeguarding, pastoral and inclusion teams play a key role in supporting pupils' safety and wider wellbeing. Pupils form trusting relationships with staff, which gives them the confidence to raise any concerns.

Pupils enjoy learning across the broad range of subjects on offer, as well as the many subject-related enrichment visits. They typically achieve well in national examinations, sometimes well above their peers, because teachers provide effective teaching. Teachers and support staff make helpful adaptations that meet the needs of all pupils. Secure systems ensure that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, disadvantaged pupils and those facing other barriers to learning and/or wellbeing receive the support they need to thrive. As a result, pupils leave school well prepared for their next steps.

Pupils attend school regularly. Staff deal quickly and effectively with any bullying or misbehaviour.

All pupils have many opportunities to participate in school life. For example, pupils from all year groups can take part in the annual musical production. Pupils also contribute actively to the wider community. For example, Year 9 pupils support Year 7 early readers, and pupil leaders organise a wide range of fundraising activities for charities. Pupils share their views confidently, including in interviews for prospective teachers and in providing feedback to staff and governors. They also support other schools to prepare for externally validated awards.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that all teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve, so that across the subjects and year groups pupils can articulate their learning confidently and produce work of a consistently high standard.

About this inspection

The chair of the board of governors in this school is Stuart Smith.

Inspectors carried out this full inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Following our renewed inspection framework, all inspections are now led by His Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

Inspectors spoke with the headteacher, senior leaders, groups of staff and groups of pupils, as well as the chair and other governors during the inspection.

The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

The school makes use of one registered alternative provision.

Headteacher: Ms Rebecca Linden

Lead inspector:

David Radomsky, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Luisa Vittoria Bonelli, Ofsted Inspector

Gareth Cross, Ofsted Inspector

Rebecca Drysdale, Ofsted Inspector

Lisa Strong, His Majesty's Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

The data was used by the inspector(s) during the inspection. More recent data may have been published since the inspection took place.

 This data is from 20 January 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

1,004

Close to average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils currently at this school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 1,067

School capacity

1,050

Close to average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils who can attend the school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 1,153

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

33.76%

Close to average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years.

National average: 28.9%

Pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan

4.48%

Above average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan. This covers pupils with more support than is available through special educational needs support.

National average: 3.09%

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

19.82%

Well above average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with reported special educational support needs at the school.

National average: 13.4%

Location deprivation

Well above average

What does this mean?

Based on the English Indices of Deprivation (2019) and the school's location, we have calculated whether the school is located in a more or less deprived area.

Resourced Provision or SEND Unit (if applicable)

No resourced provision

What does this mean?

Whether school has Resourced Provision or SEND unit (if applicable).

Type of specialist provision (if applicable)

Not Applicable

What does this mean?

The type of Special Educational Needs provision provided at the school (if applicable).

All pupils' performance

English and maths GCSE

Percentage of pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (provisional)	54.3%	45.2%	Above
2023/24 (final)	53.0%	45.9%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	51.5%	45.3%	Close to average

A measure of pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (provisional)	46.0	45.9	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	48.1	45.9	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	46.7	46.3	Close to average

Progress 8

How much progress pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	-0.02	-0.03	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	-0.24	-0.03	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils' performance

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after.

Disadvantaged pupils' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (provisional)	42.6%	25.6%	Above
2023/24 (final)	47.3%	25.8%	Above
2022/23 (final)	40.0%	25.2%	Above

Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (provisional)	40.4	34.9	Above
2023/24 (final)	41.1	34.6	Above
2022/23 (final)	41.3	35.0	Above

Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	-0.37	-0.57	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	-0.62	-0.57	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils' performance gap

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after. The school disadvantage gap is the difference between the performance of the school's disadvantaged pupils compared to the performance of all non-disadvantaged pupils nationally.

Disadvantaged pupils' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (provisional)	42.6%	52.8%	-10.2 pp
2023/24 (final)	47.3%	53.1%	-5.9 pp
2022/23 (final)	40.0%	52.4%	-12.4 pp

Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (provisional)	40.4	50.3	-9.9
2023/24 (final)	41.1	50.0	-8.9
2022/23 (final)	41.3	50.3	-9.0

Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2023/24 (final)	-0.37	0.16	-0.54
2022/23 (final)	-0.62	0.17	-0.79

Destinations after 16

Destinations after 16

Percentage of pupils staying in education or employment for at least 2 terms after the end of secondary school (key stage 4).

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023 leavers (provisional)	93%	91%	Average
2022 leavers (revised)	91%	93%	Average
2021 leavers (revised)	93%	94%	Average

Absence

Overall absence

The percentage of all possible mornings and afternoons missed due to absence from school (for whatever reason, whether authorised or unauthorised) across all pupils.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (2 term)	8.5%	8.1%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	7.9%	8.9%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	7.8%	9.0%	Close to average

Persistent absence

The percentage of pupils missing 10% or more of their possible mornings and afternoons.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (2 term)	26.6%	21.9%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	22.2%	25.6%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	25.8%	26.5%	Close to average

Our grades explained

Exceptional

Practice is exceptional: of the highest standard nationally. Other schools can learn from it.

Strong standard

The school reaches a strong standard. Leaders are working above the standard expected of them.

Expected standard

The school is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standard set out in statutory and non-statutory legislation and the professional standards expected of them.

Needs attention

The expected standards are not met but leaders are likely able to make the necessary improvements.

Urgent improvement

The school needs to make urgent improvements to provide the expected standard of education and/or care.

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231

Textphone: 0161 618 8524

E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

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