

The Willows Primary School

Address: Pyle Hill, The Willows Primary School, Pyle Hill, Newbury, Berkshire, RG14 7SJ

Unique reference number (URN): 135213

Inspection report: 10 February 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.

Strong standard ●

Achievement

Strong standard ●

Leaders ensure that pupils have secure knowledge and skills in English and mathematics as the foundations for being successful learners now and in the future. Across the wider curriculum, pupils develop and can apply detailed knowledge and skills, regardless of their individual or additional needs. They distinguish between what they are starting to learn and what they already know and understand. Pupils, including those who speak English as an additional language, are confident in their use of important vocabulary. Their work across different subjects is consistently well presented and of a high quality. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities learn well. They benefit from carefully considered adaptations to support them to learn the same curriculum as their classmates.

Overall, pupils achieve well in national tests by the end of Year 6. The gap between disadvantaged pupils and others is narrowing. Occasionally, this is not the case where a number of pupils have multiple needs.

Curriculum and teaching

Strong standard ●

Leaders oversee an ambitious curriculum that builds pupils' knowledge and skills meticulously from the start of Nursery through to the end of Year 6. Tasks are designed with the intended learning firmly in mind and to get pupils thinking. Robust systems are in place to review and refine the curriculum as needed. Leaders' annual evaluations of each subject analyse how effectively it is taught and the impact on pupils' learning. Any curriculum changes needed are identified and addressed, such as work to improve pupils' grasp of timelines in history. This in turn feeds into staff training to enhance how effectively the curriculum is delivered.

There is a sharp focus on getting the basics right. Leaders have ensured that early reading is taught effectively to enable pupils to become fluent and confident readers. Extra help for pupils who need it supports their success in catching up with their peers. Teachers systematically develop and deepen pupils' understanding in mathematics. Across subjects, new vocabulary is taught explicitly to help pupils make sense of learning. Leaders make sure that teachers are skilled at explaining learning, checking pupils' understanding and addressing misconceptions swiftly. Training and support to make suitable adaptations mean that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities learn the same curriculum as their classmates.

Early years

Strong standard ●

Leaders ensure that provision for the youngest children is of a consistently high quality, preparing children extremely well for their move to Year 1. Warm relationships and well-established routines encourage children to feel safe, emotionally secure and happy. Staff get to know children and their families well before they start at the school. They take great care to forge positive relationships with parents and carers and work together to support children's learning and development both at home and at school.

The early years curriculum is well thought through. It plots the journey from Nursery through to the end of the Reception Year, taking account of the very different needs of 2-year-olds and those children who are nearly ready for school. The impact of the curriculum and teaching is regularly reviewed and the provision is adapted accordingly. Every room is language-rich. Staff engage children in 'back and forth' conversations throughout the day to develop their speaking and listening skills, and extend their vocabulary and understanding. Early reading skills are prioritised. In Nursery, children enjoy listening to stories with adults. Carefully planned activities help to tune children into hearing and recognising sounds. Children in the Reception Year are taught phonics and practise saying and writing their sounds every day.

Inclusion

Strong standard ●

Being inclusive is what this school is all about. Leaders know their community extremely well and are acutely aware of the many challenges that some pupils often face in their lives. Leaders make sure that any needs are identified swiftly when pupils join the school. Staff are alert to the impact of changes in circumstances. Reviews of pupils' progress are insightful in unpicking barriers to learning and wellbeing, determining what is working and what needs adjusting. Strategies to support pupils who need extra help are carefully considered and skilfully delivered. Leaders are responsive to changing context and needs. For example, they draw on external expertise to develop provision following a rise in the number of pupils who speak English as an additional language.

The pupil premium grant funding is used wisely and kept under careful review. Leaders prioritise its use to make sure that pupils consistently experience high-quality teaching and that interventions are well matched to pupils' learning and/or social needs. Well-trained staff are alert to signs that a pupil may be struggling to keep up. They are proficient at adapting teaching in the first instance. Where pupils are identified with special educational needs and/or disabilities, leaders involve parents and carers in decisions about support, including the very occasional and appropriate use of alternative provision.

Leadership and governance

Strong standard ●

Leaders have an in-depth understanding of the school's context, which informs everything that they do. Their mantra, that 'children are seen, heard and held in mind all of the time', shines through. Leaders are rightly proud of the school's many strengths, in particular the positive impact that they have on breaking down barriers to learning for those pupils who are facing challenges in their lives. Equally, leaders are not complacent. They are relentless in their analysis of the school's work and its impact on pupils. They have accurately identified what could be even better.

Curriculum leaders are instrumental in the quest for further improvement. Opportunities for professional learning ensure that their knowledge and expertise are up to date. Annual reviews draw on a wealth of information to determine how well each subject is taught and the depth of pupils' learning. Staff training is aligned with any changes or further improvements needed. Staff agree that this is a child-centred school where every decision taken has pupils at its heart. Care is taken to continually update staff's knowledge and avoid

unnecessary demands on them. This means that they have the skills and time to support pupils and teach effectively.

Governors provide robust support and challenge to leaders. They ensure that their statutory duties, such as safeguarding, are met. Governors also ensure that they are well informed, with a thorough first-hand understanding of the school's work. For example, governors are currently focused on the provision for, and experiences of, disadvantaged pupils. They are intent on holding leaders to account for maintaining and building on the school's successes for these pupils.

Personal development and wellbeing

Strong standard 

Leaders have carefully crafted the personal development programme to be relevant to pupils' lives now and in the future. They are determined that pupils will develop the knowledge, attributes and skills to be well-rounded individuals and successful in life. The school values shape pupils' character as they strive to live up to leaders' high expectations of them. Through lessons and assemblies, they learn about different faiths, beliefs and equalities. They consider moral issues and current affairs. Opportunities to apply for leadership roles bring the concept of democracy to life for pupils. They take their responsibilities, whether as librarians, house captains or members of the sports crew or eco-council, very seriously. Pupils recognise that what they learn at school makes them 'better people'. They appreciate the importance of treating others with respect. By the time they leave Year 6, pupils have a mature understanding of their place in the wider world.

Pupils learn to look after themselves and learn what it means to have a healthy lifestyle in all respects, including their mental health. This starts in the early years, where children start to understand their feelings and manage their emotions. Pupils are taught the importance of being alert to online risks. Leaders are vigilant in keeping an eye on pupils' wellbeing. Additional support for pupils' emotional needs, for example with regard to anxiety, is well matched to needs. Relationships and health education is age-appropriate. Staff are well trained to teach the programme. Parents and carers are kept informed of the content of this teaching. Pupils learn how to keep friendships positive and the importance of respecting personal boundaries. Clubs are fully funded for all pupils to remove any barriers to participation. Leaders are creative in finding alternative options for physical activities for pupils who are reluctant to join in with sports.

Expected standard

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

Leaders are diligent in their work to ensure that pupils are not absent without good reason. They know pupils and their families well, understanding precisely the barriers to regular attendance that some pupils face. Leaders keep a particularly close check on these pupils, supporting and challenging parents and carers in equal measure to support pupils to attend school regularly. As a result, overall attendance has been close to the national average in recent years. Leaders' persistence and work in this area are improving a recent significant fall in the attendance of disadvantaged pupils.

Pupils behave very well at work and play. Leaders have embedded a culture of high expectations, shaped by the school values. Pupils learn to take responsibility for themselves and their actions. Staff's care for pupils' wellbeing gives them a sense of security and belonging. They are extremely respectful of one another and of staff. Pupils are very focused in class and keen to learn. They understand that being successful takes time and resilience. Leaders keep a watchful eye on any unacceptable behaviour, including bullying, nipping it in the bud if it does occur. Support for pupils who need extra help to manage their feelings and reactions is effective. Staff are well trained to prevent minor issues from escalating.

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

Pupils are eager to come into school in the morning, anticipating the day ahead and looking forward to seeing their friends. Warm greetings from staff at the classroom doors and purposeful early morning activities set the tone for the day. Pupils are inspired by explicit references to the school values throughout the day to 'have a go, not give up and always try to be the best version of themselves'. As a result, classrooms are industrious and social times are enjoyable and harmonious. It is unusual for pupils to fall out. Bullying is a very rare occurrence.

Highly positive relationships with staff help pupils to feel secure and part of the school community. Pupils have a well-developed understanding of the importance of respect and kindness for each other from a young age. They feel safe and well cared for, confidently putting their trust in staff to look after them and deal effectively with any worries they might have. Pupils' confidence and self-esteem are nurtured by the school's wider development offer. Older pupils feel well prepared for the move to secondary school. They have a keen awareness of how to look after themselves and appreciate being taught important life skills, such as how to manage their money. Pupils are keen to make a positive difference to school life, for example as school councillors.

Pupils have extremely positive attitudes to their learning. This starts in the Nursery Year, where children's curiosity is sparked by the activities on offer. The carefully designed curriculum builds pupils' learning and broadens their experience from this point on. Pupils of all ages benefit from leaders' determination that teaching is of a consistently high quality. The school is highly inclusive. Leaders successfully break down barriers for pupils facing challenges in their lives, ensuring that they can benefit from all the school has to offer. Pupils attend regularly and achieve very well.

Next steps

- Leaders should continue to be resolute in tackling barriers to high attendance to further increase rates of attendance for pupils, particularly for disadvantaged pupils.

- Leaders, including those responsible for governance, should maintain their focus on disadvantaged pupils to ensure that improvements for these pupils are sustained and built on.
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About this inspection

The chair of the board of governors in this school is Kate Parietti.

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 and the deputy headteacher, subject leaders and groups of staff and pupils during the inspection. The lead inspector also spoke with representatives of the governing body, including the chair.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school makes use of one alternative provision, which is unregistered.

The school also, under the same registration, runs nursery provision for 2-year-olds.

Headteacher: Jo MacArthur

Lead inspector:

Alison Bradley, Ofsted Inspector

Team inspectors:

Lea Hannam, Ofsted Inspector

Trudi Sammons, Ofsted 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 10 February 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

383

Above 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: 272

School capacity

450

Above 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: 300

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

27.22%

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: 26.3%

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

2.61%

Close to 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: 3.5%

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

16.19%

Close to average

What does this mean?

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

National average: 15%

Location deprivation

Below 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).

All pupils' performance

Pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics

The percentage of pupils meeting the expected standards in a combined reading, writing and mathematics measure.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	64%	61%	Close to average
2024/25 (revised)	66%	62%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	63%	61%	Close to average

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2022/23 (final)	63%	60%	Close to average

Pupils reaching the expected standard in reading

The percentage of pupils meeting the expected standard in reading.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	73%	74%	Close to average
2024/25 (revised)	81%	75%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	64%	74%	Below
2022/23 (final)	73%	73%	Close to average

Pupils reaching the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing

The percentage of pupils meeting the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	73%	72%	Close to average
2024/25 (revised)	69%	72%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	76%	72%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	73%	71%	Close to average

Pupils reaching the expected standard in mathematics

The percentage of pupils meeting the expected standard in mathematics.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	82%	73%	Above
2024/25 (revised)	85%	74%	Above
2023/24 (final)	78%	73%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	83%	73%	Above

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 reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	38%	46%	Close to average
2024/25 (revised)	56%	47%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	11%	46%	Below
2022/23 (final)	46%	44%	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in reading

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in reading.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	55%	62%	Close to average
2024/25 (revised)	81%	63%	Above

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	17%	62%	Below
2022/23 (final)	67%	60%	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	53%	59%	Close to average
2024/25 (revised)	56%	59%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	44%	58%	Below
2022/23 (final)	58%	58%	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in mathematics

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in mathematics.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	59%	60%	Close to average
2024/25 (revised)	69%	61%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	39%	59%	Below
2022/23 (final)	67%	59%	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 reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics, including the disadvantaged gap.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
Latest 3 year average	38%	68%	-30 pp
2024/25 (revised)	56%	69%	-13 pp
2023/24 (final)	11%	67%	-56 pp
2022/23 (final)	46%	66%	-21 pp

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in reading

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in reading and the disadvantaged gap.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
Latest 3 year average	55%	80%	-24 pp
2024/25 (revised)	81%	81%	0 pp
2023/24 (final)	17%	80%	-63 pp
2022/23 (final)	67%	78%	-12 pp

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing and the disadvantaged gap.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
Latest 3 year average	53%	78%	-24 pp
2024/25 (revised)	56%	78%	-22 pp
2023/24 (final)	44%	78%	-33 pp
2022/23 (final)	58%	77%	-19 pp

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in mathematics

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in mathematics and the disadvantaged gap.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
Latest 3 year average	59%	80%	-21 pp
2024/25 (revised)	69%	81%	-12 pp
2023/24 (final)	39%	79%	-41 pp
2022/23 (final)	67%	79%	-13 pp

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)	5.8%	5.2%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	6.0%	5.5%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	6.1%	5.9%	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)	15.7%	13.3%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	17.2%	14.6%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	18.1%	16.2%	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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