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Kelly Head
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Head

Monitoring inspection of a school not in a category of concern of The Willows Primary School

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 9 January 2025, on behalf of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills. The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8(2) of the Education Act 2005 and took place because the school meets the monitoring threshold as set out in the [Monitoring Inspection Handbook](#).

The purpose of a monitoring inspection is not to grade the school's key and (where applicable) provision judgements, but to identify and report on the school's progress. It is to highlight to the school and parents any improvements that school leaders have made since the school's previous graded inspection.

During the inspection, I discussed with you and other senior leaders, the chief executive officer (CEO) of the trust, other staff and trustees the actions that have been taken to improve the school since the most recent graded inspection. We discussed the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. I also visited lessons, spent time on the playground, met with pupils and staff and looked at examples of pupils' work. I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

Leaders have made progress to improve the school, but some aspects of the school need further improvement.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that improvements in the teaching of reading, writing and mathematics result in more pupils reaching the expected standard at the end of key stage 2 and in the Year 1 phonics screening check
- complete the redesign of the curriculum so that pupils are taught a structured curriculum in all national curriculum subjects.

Main findings

Since the previous inspection, you are now permanently in role as the headteacher. The senior leadership team has had new members, including some who are currently covering maternity leave. The school is currently consulting on reducing pupil numbers to one-form-entry from the current two-form-entry because of falling numbers in the local area. The local governing body has been temporarily replaced with a Rapid Improvement Board made up of trustees with education expertise.

The school has raised the quality of support and adaptations within lessons, particularly for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Staff are making greater use of appropriate strategies to help pupils understand what they are using. Some pupils confidently use technology to help them write. However, the implementation of these adaptations is not yet consistent. Sometimes, the approaches used do not support the intended learning, including for pupils with SEND. Staff are becoming more confident to use assessment opportunities within lessons to adapt teaching as needed to maximise learning. Again, this is not consistent across the school. Some of the activities completed by pupils are not as effective as others in moving learning on. Pupils say teachers now make learning more interesting and practical. Work scrutiny showed that pupils are now engaging far more in written work. However, some pupils are still very reliant on adult reassurance before moving on to further tasks. You and your leadership team are developing staff expertise, many of whom are new to role, in increasing pupils' independence, but this is still at an early stage. At the previous inspection, the teaching of reading was described as a strength. This is still the case. The school has prioritised reading and there are many interesting books, with a wide variety of challenge, for pupils to read. However, the improved teaching has not yet resulted in stronger outcomes, for example in pupils achieving the expected standard in the phonics screening check or in the end of key stage 2 test. These were significantly below national averages in 2024.

You and other leaders have a strong understanding of what the school needs to do to improve further. Together, you have identified very clear steps that leaders are working on each term to improve core areas, currently in reading, writing, mathematics and attendance. The school works closely with the trust. The trust draws from expertise in the other schools to help staff to develop their practice. The school is in the process of redesigning the curriculum beyond mathematics and English. This is further on in some subjects, for example history, but not yet complete.

Comprehensive changes in how the school supports and challenges families around pupils' attendance have significantly raised attendance levels. The school knows there is still

more to do in terms of reducing persistent absenteeism, but the overall attendance figure is now only just below the national average. Behaviour across the school has improved substantially. Staff and pupils agree that this is the case. Classrooms are calm and focused places. Most pupils are in the right place most of the time and significant behaviour incidents have reduced. The school has improved playground behaviour by introducing adult-led games and activities at the morning 'movement breaks'. These teach turn-taking and coping strategies, for example how to react when your team does not win. Younger pupils also have opportunities to develop their socialisation and motor skills through construction and play.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the CEO of the Orwell Multi Academy Trust, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Suffolk. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Tessa Holledge
His Majesty's Inspector