

Willows Primary Academy

Address: Willows Primary School, Off Weston Road, Anglesey Road, Lichfield, Staffordshire, WS13 7NU

Unique reference number (URN): 151286

Inspection report: 3 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 ●

Inclusion

Strong standard ●

Leaders place inclusion at the centre of the school's work. They identify pupils' needs early and accurately, ensuring that support is in place from the outset. A well-structured process guides staff in responding to pupils' needs. Regular, high-quality training enables staff to adapt learning effectively. Teachers check progress frequently and act quickly when gaps appear. As a result, pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) learn confidently alongside their peers and make notable progress from their starting points.

Leaders maintain a clear and detailed overview of SEND provision. They monitor the impact of support closely and adjust it promptly as pupils' needs change. Those with the highest levels of need benefit from personalised support that helps them feel secure and engage successfully in their learning. Additional funding is used thoughtfully, ensuring that disadvantaged pupils and those with other vulnerabilities receive help that is precisely matched to their circumstances.

Close partnerships with families and external agencies ensure shared goals and consistent approaches and further enhance pupils' support. Staff make purposeful adaptations to remove barriers to learning and uphold high expectations for every pupil.

Inclusion is deeply embedded across the school's culture. Pupils with SEND and those who are disadvantaged achieve well and develop a genuine sense of belonging.

Leadership and governance

Strong standard ●

Leaders demonstrate a detailed and accurate understanding of the school. They have a clear view of its strengths and identify sharply the priorities for further development. Changes and improvements are being driven at pace. Pupils are placed at the centre of their work, including disadvantaged pupils, those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and pupils who face wider challenges to their learning or wellbeing. Leaders ensure that all pupils can access the curriculum and take part in wider opportunities.

Professional learning is carefully planned, evidence-informed and aligned with the school's priorities. Training for all staff is regular, develops practice over time and establishes consistent approaches across the school. Early career teachers and trainees benefit from structured mentoring, constructive feedback and protected time, which helps them grow in confidence and expertise. Leaders rigorously check how well training is working and revisit areas that require further practice.

The trust provides valuable support. Leaders and staff benefit from opportunities to share effective practice and learn from colleagues' expertise. This provides a high level of consistency across the school.

Governance, at all levels, is impactful. Local governors and trustees know the school well, understand its priorities and fulfil their statutory duties. They review information closely and ask precise questions that keep leaders focused on improvement. Their work is integral to

decision-making and ensures that choices benefit all pupils, including those facing barriers to learning.

Leaders take staff wellbeing and workload seriously. They listen to feedback, simplify systems and make thoughtful decisions that help staff feel valued and supported. Staff are highly appreciative of this support.

Personal development and wellbeing

Strong standard 

Personal development is a strength of the school. Leaders provide a clear and well-sequenced personal development programme that helps pupils understand themselves, others and the wider world. The pastoral care team is highly effective and supportive. Staff identify pupils' needs quickly and act without delay. They work closely and consistently with families and external professionals to ensure that pupils get the right wellbeing help at the right time. Pupils learn to reflect on their beliefs and experiences and think about how their actions affect others. They discuss right and wrong and explore real-life issues in a safe and respectful way. Teachers encourage pupils to ask questions, listen carefully and consider different viewpoints. This builds empathy and helps pupils understand fairness and respect. Pupils work together often, which supports their social skills well and helps them manage disagreements calmly.

Pupils learn about a wide range of cultures and traditions. This broadens their understanding of life in modern Britain. Leaders make sure disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities can participate fully in these experiences. Leaders adapt activities and remove barriers so every pupil can take part. Leaders enrich the curriculum through '50 Things at Willows', which gives pupils experiences that build confidence and independence. Relationships education is very effective and ensures that pupils learn how to form healthy relationships, about personal boundaries and about how to stay safe online and offline.

Staff reinforce values such as resilience, kindness and responsibility through assemblies, class discussions and daily routines. Pupils take part in a wide variety of clubs, trips and local projects, such as litter picking, that help them gain confidence and build character. Older pupils learn about careers, money management and how to prepare for secondary school. As a result, pupils become confident, respectful and thoughtful young people who are fully prepared for life in modern Britain.

Expected standard

Achievement

Expected standard 

Pupils achieve exceptionally well in reading, writing and mathematics. Leaders are rigorous in ensuring that pupils secure the knowledge they need at each stage of learning. This clear focus helps pupils build firm foundations and apply their skills with confidence. The school's work to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils in these core subjects is highly effective, so these pupils achieve particularly well. Pupils produce high-quality work and make rapid progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils with special educational

needs and/or disabilities progress particularly well from their starting points. Staff identify gaps in knowledge quickly and provide effective support.

Although achievement in those subjects is high, pupils do not consistently develop the same depth of knowledge in some wider curriculum subjects. As a result, some pupils struggle to remember important learning or explain it in detail.

Overall, pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their learning.

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

Leaders have effective systems in place to track and analyse attendance. These systems support leaders to identify patterns and act on concerns quickly. Leaders work closely with families to understand barriers and provide support that reduces absence. As a result, overall attendance is broadly in line with national levels and is improving over time. Persistent absence has reduced and sits below national levels. Leaders promote the importance of high attendance through clear communication and incentives such as certificates and prizes. Their actions help pupils build regular routines and improve their engagement with school.

Staff have high expectations of pupils' behaviour. They apply the school's behaviour policy consistently and use positive strategies to support pupils. Routines are well established and help create a calm, orderly and respectful environment. Relationships between staff and pupils are warm and caring, which helps pupils feel known, supported and safe. Leaders adapt provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities so they can follow routines and take part in learning with confidence. Pupils typically show positive attitudes in lessons and around the school. Bullying is not tolerated, and leaders respond quickly and appropriately when concerns arise. Leaders deal with any discrimination, harassment or abuse in a timely and consistent way. This ensures that pupils learn in a positive and respectful environment.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Leaders have a detailed understanding of the quality of the curriculum and teaching. They make well-judged decisions that improve provision. They design and adapt an ambitious, broad and balanced curriculum that prepares pupils well for their next steps. Leaders ensure that teachers have secure subject knowledge and provide training that helps them teach the curriculum effectively. Reading, writing and mathematics are taught highly effectively. Phonics teaching is precise and consistent. This helps pupils develop accuracy, fluency and confidence. The curriculum places a clear focus on spoken and written language, helping pupils build a secure and varied vocabulary.

The wider curriculum is clearly sequenced, and teachers revisit prior learning to reinforce key ideas. However, in some subjects, the way the curriculum is delivered does not always deepen pupils' knowledge or understanding. At times, teaching does not extend pupils' thinking or allow them to apply learning in more demanding ways to gain enough detailed and secure knowledge.

Leaders identify quickly and support effectively any pupils who need help with their literacy and numeracy. Leaders and staff know pupils' needs well. They make thoughtful adaptations for disadvantaged pupils, pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who face barriers to learning. These adaptations allow pupils to engage fully with the curriculum and succeed.

Early years

Expected standard 

Children get off to a positive start in the early years. Staff build warm, secure relationships with children and their parents and carers. Staff know children well and respond promptly to their emotional, social and developmental needs. Leaders ensure that the curriculum develops children's knowledge and skills across each area of learning.

The independent learning provision is purposeful and helps children to revisit learning and explore new ideas. Staff guide children well, encouraging independence and creating meaningful opportunities for learning, such as writing signs or exploring new vocabulary. Children cooperate well with one another and manage disagreements with sensitive support from staff. The provision for 2- and 3-year-olds is warm and inviting. Children have access to age-appropriate resources that support their physical development.

Communication, language and the teaching of vocabulary are high priorities. Children enjoy stories, songs and plenty of opportunities to talk. Staff choose books and learning opportunities carefully to encourage the use of new vocabulary. Phonics is taught in a clear sequence, and staff check children's understanding often, providing prompt support when needed. Early mathematics is also taught consistently well. However, leaders have identified that a more explicit focus on developing fine motor skills will, in turn, lead to higher writing outcomes at the end of Reception Year.

The school provides parents with regular updates about learning and how to support at home.

Children make effective progress from their starting points and are typically well prepared for Year 1.

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

Pupils are happy, kind and caring. They enjoy coming to school and learning. Each morning, pupils and staff greet one another warmly. Relationships across the school are positive. Pupils treat each other with respect and understand how to manage their emotions effectively. They take part in a vast range of experiences, including clubs, competitions, trips and workshops. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), disadvantaged pupils and those known to social care take part fully in school life. They feel included and valued. As a result, pupils develop a real sense of belonging, attend regularly and take pride in their school community.

Pupils achieve highly in reading, writing and mathematics because of typically effective teaching. They build knowledge securely and talk confidently about their learning.

Disadvantaged pupils achieve very well because staff remove barriers quickly. Pupils with SEND receive effective, targeted support, enabling them to access the ambitious curriculum and make secure progress from their starting points. Visits and enrichment activities bring learning to life and create memorable experiences. However, in some wider curriculum subjects, pupils' knowledge is less secure. They sometimes struggle to talk about their learning in enough detail.

Pupils behave well. They feel safe in school and trust adults to help them if they have concerns. Reported bullying is rare. Staff deal with any issues quickly and effectively. Pupils show high levels of tolerance and understanding. They learn about the beliefs and cultures of others, which prepares them well for life in modern Britain. 'The Willows Way' sets out clear values and expectations. These shape the curriculum, guide behaviour and support pupils' wider personal development. Pupils learn to be resilient, reflective, creative, confident and independent. British Values are woven into the curriculum and reinforced through regular assemblies. The school's '50 Things at Willows' programme broadens pupils' experiences and supports their personal growth.

Next steps

- Leaders should refine the implementation of wider curriculum subjects to ensure that all pupils develop a deeper understanding across the entire curriculum.
 - Leaders should continue the sharp focus on developing fine motor skills, leading to improved writing outcomes at the end of Reception Year.
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About this inspection

This school is part of Future Generation Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Jo Whitmore, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Felicia Jane Dale.

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

Following our updated 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 acting headteacher, acting deputy headteacher, subject leaders, teachers, support staff, school bursar, designated safeguarding lead, deputy designated safeguarding lead, inclusion lead/special educational needs and/or disabilities coordinator, CEO, chair of trustees, trustees, members of the local governing board, clerk to the governing board, virtual school, parents and pupils during the inspection.

The school runs provision for 2- to 4-year-olds.

The school has undergone a significant change since the last inspection. The school joined Future Generation Trust in November 2024, and the school currently has an acting

headteacher in place.

Acting Headteacher: Emma Leake

Lead inspector:

Victoria Jordan, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Gill Turner, Ofsted Inspector

Claire Medhurst, His Majesty's Inspector

Kerrise James, 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 3 February 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

432

Well 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

420

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)

38.96%

Above 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

2.08%

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

14.81%

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

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).

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)	4.6%	5.2%	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)	12.4%	13.3%	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.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) inspects services providing education and skills for children and learners of all ages, and inspects and regulates services that care for children and young people.

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