



QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEW

REVIEW REPORT FOR WILLOW DENE SCHOOL

Name of School:	Willow Dene School
Headteacher/Principal:	Rachel Harrison
Hub:	London Special and AP
School phase:	Special
MAT (if applicable):	Compass Partnership of Schools

Overall Peer Evaluation Estimate at this QA Review:	Leading
Date of this Review:	11/05/2022
Overall Estimate at last QA Review	Leading
Date of last QA Review	08/03/2021
Grade at last Ofsted inspection:	Good
Date of last Ofsted inspection:	05/12/2019

Quality Assurance Review

The review team, comprising host school leaders and visiting reviewers, agree that evidence indicates these areas are evaluated as follows:

Leadership at all levels Leading

Quality of provision and outcomes Leading

AND

**Quality of provision and
outcomes for disadvantaged
pupils and pupils with additional
needs**

Area of excellence Not applicable

**Previously accredited valid areas
of excellence** Not applicable

Overall peer evaluation estimate Leading

*The Quality Assurance Review estimates are not equivalent to Ofsted grades.
The QA Review uses a different framework to Ofsted and the review is
developmental not judgmental.*

1. Context and character of the school

Willow Dene serves Greenwich and surrounding local authorities. All 274 children have significant learning difficulties. Each child either has an education, health and care plan (EHCP) or is undergoing an assessment for an EHCP.

The school provides early years, primary and secondary (Key Stages 3 and 4) education across two sites. There is an additional provision for two year olds with complex needs. Currently, 217 children attend the early years and primary phases.

Children with a primary need of autism make up 65% of the roll and 35% have complex needs. Approximately two-thirds are boys, with about half of all children are eligible for pupil premium funding. There are 34 classes in total.

A range of accreditations have been achieved, including Advanced NAS accreditation. Willow Dene is a Move Centre of Excellence.

Willow Dene is part of the Compass Partnership, which also includes eleven primary schools.

2.1 Leadership at all levels - What went well

- Leaders know what they want for children at Willow Dene. This directly relates to the coherent vision statement 'seeing possibilities, realising dreams'. Leaders have built their provision on sound theory – both for generic teaching and learning and for the education of children with complex needs. An example to illustrate this is early reading, where generic principles underpin the tailored approach for each child.
- Leaders are committed to the cause, which is about providing the very best offer for each and every child. Independence is at the centre of supporting each child to become a valued member of society. Curriculum planning captures this well, which helps all staff rehearse their personal understanding of provision (intent). This commitment also supports parents in their aspirations for their children.
- The curriculum offer is well considered. A 'no ceilings' mantra is evident around Willow Dene. All children benefit from a curriculum which covers aspects, such as sensory processing and physical development. For example, leaders have worked in partnership with clinicians to introduce an innovative Trycycle project. Practice (implementation) is then thoughtfully tailored for each group and each child within the group. For example, communication techniques and use of technology will vary according to need.

- Leaders at Willow Dene were structuring their thinking about provision, practice and outcomes well before intent, implementation and impact vocabulary came to the fore. This logical approach enables rich dialogue to evolve when reflecting on the curriculum offer. Threads evolve which prompt leaders to be curious about specific aspects. Leaders line manage staff in each class, which means that a range of staff build an in-depth knowledge of the offer and of the children. Consequently, threads are well informed.
- Leaders verbally articulate what strong progress through the curriculum looks like for each child. They recognise that assessments of each child's progress need to be useful and meaningful. This is why specific academic aspects (such as early reading) are used in tandem with other pertinent indicators (such as those relating to well-being). This enables staff to build a holistic picture of progress for each child. As a result, subsequent planning is influenced accordingly.
- Leaders lead all aspects of provision with passion and ambition. In the early years, for example, each child is at the centre of their own learning journey. Prime and specific areas of learning are built into the offer with characteristics of effective learning evident in day-to-day provision. This results in children progressing securely, being well prepared for future learning.
- Willow Dene leaders are keen to learn. They form a cohesive team. The team is strengthened through individual leader's engagement with different networks. An example is with the Trust, where leaders' knowledge is shared with mainstream colleagues and Willow Dene benefits from mainstream thinking, such as that relating to phonics. Leaders also work with organisations, advisory teams, local cultural places and clinical teams. This outward-looking approach, coupled with individual leaders bringing knowledge gleaned from relevant reading, means that staff and children are well placed to thrive.

2.2 Leadership at all levels - Even better if...

...leaders articulated their written vision in a way that matches the culture at Willow Dene.

...when visiting lessons, leaders stated clearly how the session fits with prior and post learning.

...leaders created a Willow Dene professional development 'tube map' to enable all staff to see personal growth opportunities.

3.1 Quality of provision and outcomes - What went well

- Teaching staff are very knowledgeable. Across the school, teachers 'own the room'. This means that they are secure in what they are teaching and how to teach it. Teachers use their skills and knowledge to facilitate learning. This

includes teaching assistants (TAs) knowing how best to support the individual child, or small group of children, they are working with.

- Staff know what 'child-led' and 'adult-led' learning entails at Willow Dene. In the early years, staff expertly enable each child to voice / express their opinions. This leads to a more child-led session, which in turn enables staff to check out how well each child has secured pertinent learning.
- Communication threads through all teaching. This is about each child using different means of communication in the day-to-day learning. In a design and technology lesson, all children in the group participated in designing their own pizza by communicating their views to staff in different ways. A common theme is repetition of key vocabulary, with all adults using technically correct vocabulary.
- Early reading, most notably phonics, is taught very well. The senior leader with responsibility for this provision, has ensured that staff have quickly understood and implemented a new scheme. Staff show fidelity to this scheme, making specific adaptations when children would benefit from a slightly different approach. Staff recognise that phonics is a means to an end. Hence, strong links exist between phonics and how children can develop a love of reading, being able to comprehend and infer.
- Children use specific regulation strategies, tailored to their personal needs. This provision is integrated and embedded in classroom routines. Staff expertly facilitate these during lessons. For example, some children respond best when sensing pressure, whilst others benefit from movement. This results in children making the most of time available for learning in lessons.
- Each child receives a generic curriculum offer which is personalised for them. This means that all children benefit from a learning diet which includes sensory support and communication, but the means by which they make strong progress will vary. For example, children will engage with different symbols and objects to enable them to express preferences. This illustrates well the integrated link between therapeutic and educational provision.
- Teachers use their planning to consider where a particular lesson fits in the sequence of learning. Through talking with relevant leaders and teachers, the latter are empowered to consider how to modify the plans so that each child can benefit well. They refer to each child's developmental stage, which helps steer the pedagogical choices.
- Staff possess and utilise secure pedagogical knowledge. For example, some staff vary the pace of learning to both enable and check a child's understanding of what is being taught. Staff expertly model learning. They demonstrate awe and wonder by over-emphasising anticipation – such as when mixing paint to see which colours can be created.
- Success is engineered at Willow Dene. This is seen in the way children are taught and also in supporting children on their journey post Willow Dene. The language is not so much about which provision will a child go to next, but more about what does the child want and what might they go on to do. Parents recognise this

thinking and aspiration, linking to the vision for each child to become a valued member of society.

3.2 Quality of provision and outcomes - Even better if...

...in some sessions, teachers thought carefully about moving a child on more quickly in their learning and to do so if appropriate.

...teaching staff thoroughly understood the importance of connecting a child's learning from previous lessons and demonstrated this when teaching.

4.1 Quality of provision and outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with additional needs - What went well

- Parents feel valued and welcome at Willow Dene. A genuine parental partnership is in place – one by which the school can learn from what parents see and say, and vice versa. The family support adviser ensures that parents have frequent and varied opportunities to network with each other, the school and with a range of external colleagues who can support parents with their areas of expertise. For example, parents are supported to be aspirational for their child through discussions around careers and future life. This helps parents realise that their child has a place in society.
- Staff benefit from well-planned professional development. Trust-level provision encompasses all staff, with career paths mapped, pedagogical strategies explored, and aspiring leaders supported. More specific to Willow Dene is mandatory school training, which includes medical learning. Staff are supported in respect of school priorities through INSET, class team discussions and therapeutic input. More specific individual professional development is explored and implemented via appraisal work. A range of critically considered documentation, such as 'indicators of outstanding practice', are used to help staff implement their learning in their day-to-day roles.
- The school has a strong ongoing focus on well-being. During the pandemic, practices were embedded quickly to support families and staff. For example, families talk about how the school was a lifeline during Covid lockdowns. Staff describe how the response to the pandemic and recovery has supported their well-being. One member of staff said, 'children add value to the lives of staff'.

4.2 Quality of provision and outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with additional needs - Even better if...

...meaningful career opportunities outside Willow Dene were diversified and extended.

5. What additional support would the school like from the Challenge Partners network, either locally or nationally?

Leaders enjoy strong links with the hub. Leaders would welcome asking the central team to consider if estimate descriptors could be more reflective of special school contexts and children and young people with SEND in mainstream schools.

This review will support the school's continuing improvement. The main findings will be shared within the school's hub in order that it can inform future activities.

Schools can access the School Support Directory; the Challenge Partners online tool that enables schools to connect with other schools in your hub and across the national network of schools.

Schools can also attend Sharing Leading Practice events where schools showcase excellent and/or innovative practice. Sharing Leading Practice events allow school leaders with specific improvement needs to visit a school or attend an online webinar hosted by a school, with outstanding provision in that area.

Both the School Support Directory and the Shared Leading Practice events can be accessed via the Challenge Partners website.