

# Willow Park School

Danbury Court, Linford Wood, Milton Keynes MK14 6LJ

**Inspection date**

4 May 2023

**Overall outcome**

**The school is likely to meet all the independent school standards when it opens**

## Main inspection findings

### Part 1. Quality of education provided

*Paragraphs 2(1)–2(2)(b), 2(2)(d)–2(2)(e)(iii), 2(2)(h)–2A(1), 2A(1)(a)–2A(2)*

- The school's curriculum is designed to enable pupils 'to become successful learners, confident individuals and responsible citizens'. Leaders intend that pupils will learn a suitably broad curriculum that is consistent with the requirements of the independent school standards. This will be a blend of academic and vocational subjects and therapies.
- Academic subjects will be largely shaped around the content of the national curriculum. For pupils in key stage 4, the curriculum will increasingly take account of the requirements of different qualifications. Pupils may work towards achieving functional skills qualifications, BTEC National Diplomas as well as GCSEs, depending on their needs, interests and aptitudes.
- Leaders know that they will need to adapt the curriculum to take account of pupils' starting points and their academic, social and emotional needs. Many pupils are likely to join Willow Park having not attended school regularly for some time. For some, their confidence and self-esteem may be at a low ebb. Therefore, leaders are planning careful induction arrangements to ease pupils' successful transition to full-time education.
- Long-term plans, schemes of learning and a curriculum policy are in place. Leaders are drawing on expertise from the proprietor's other schools to refine their curriculum. They are planning to develop their schemes of learning further once they know pupils' specific individual needs.
- Leaders have chosen a suitable phonics programme staff will use if any pupils joining the school are at an early stage of learning to read. They have also ensured that reading and English are timetabled daily, giving prominence to this aspect of the curriculum.
- Leaders plan to use a local leisure centre for physical education, including swimming. Enrichment activities will be timetabled every Friday afternoon to cater specifically for pupils' individual interests. Leaders plan to use facilities in Milton Keynes for activities such as rock climbing, sailing and forest schools. As well as contributing to the wider

curriculum, they intend that these activities will support pupils' social skills and provide opportunities for friendships to be forged.

- Personal, social and health education (PSHE), including relationships and sex education (RSE), will be timetabled each week. The curriculum for RSE takes account of statutory guidance. Leaders plan to consult parents about the school's policy. Assemblies and tutor times will contribute to these aspects of the curriculum. Leaders' intention is that pupils' personal and social development will form an important strand of the curriculum. This will include a particular focus on healthy relationships and how to keep safe.
- A suitable careers policy is in place. Careers education will be included as part of the school's citizenship programme. Leaders are planning to source an independent careers adviser to deliver aspects of this programme. They intend to offer work experience to pupils in key stage 4.

#### *Paragraphs 3–4*

- An experienced headteacher with a background of working in specialist provision has been appointed. Interviews for teaching and support staff are taking place shortly. Leaders plan to appoint suitably qualified teachers who have experience teaching pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).
- The staff team will 'grow' as the number of pupils on roll increases. All staff will undergo a full induction programme. This will include training specific to the school's curriculum and teaching approaches. Leaders express high ambition for staff to deliver an effective curriculum so that pupils make good progress socially and academically.
- Leaders are planning to have a high staff-to-pupil ratio. Each small class will have one teacher and one teaching assistant. In addition, it is anticipated that some pupils may need individual support. Specialist therapeutic staff employed centrally by Acorn Care and Education will provide outreach services. This will include psychotherapists, occupational therapists and educational psychologists.
- The school is adopting the proprietor's system for tracking and assessing pupils' learning and development. On joining the school, staff will complete a suite of assessments and observations to enable them to understand pupils' starting points. Staff will work with pupils and their families to help them understand pupils' barriers to learning and their previous educational experiences. They plan to establish positive, respectful relationships from the outset.
- It is likely that all the requirements in this part of the independent school standards will be met.

## Part 2. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

### *Paragraph 5–5(d)(iii)*

- Leaders intend that pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development will be woven through day-to-day life at the school. They wish to create a caring ethos founded on kindness, respect and tolerance. All staff will be expected to uphold these values and the school's code of conduct.
- The school's curriculums in PSHE and religious education include opportunities for pupils to learn about equalities, protected characteristics and other faiths. In lessons

and during assemblies and tutor times, key values will be discussed and promoted. This includes important values such as democracy. School events will include celebrations from different faiths.

- Leaders want to help pupils experience success and for them to develop confidence and self-worth. A key part of their approach will be helping pupils to identify, understand and regulate their emotions. They recognise that most pupils will need a high degree of support and carefully planned guidance. Some are likely to need therapeutic interventions.
- Leaders plan to provide enrichment activities and opportunities for pupils to mix socially and develop their personal skills. They understand the need to prepare pupils for life beyond school and for adulthood. Leaders intend that provision will be bespoke to pupils' needs.
- It is likely that the independent school standard in this part will be met.

### Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

#### *Paragraphs 7–7(b), 9–10*

- The school's safeguarding policy is aligned with the latest statutory guidance. Leaders plan to publish this on the school's website. The policy sets out clearly the school's approach to safeguarding, including roles and responsibilities.
- The headteacher will be the designated safeguarding lead (DSL). Her induction will include training specific to her role as the DSL. All staff will have safeguarding as part of their induction to the school. This will include training on how to use the school's online platform for recording concerns.
- Leaders are very aware that pupils with SEND have increased vulnerability to safeguarding risks. Therefore, they plan to make safeguarding a priority and update staff regularly on safeguarding issues and good practice. Leaders and the proprietor have appropriate systems in place for them to maintain oversight of safeguarding. This includes regular audits and safeguarding reports.
- The school's policies for behaviour and anti-bullying are appropriate and reflect the context of the school. Leaders plan to put in place a consistent approach based on an understanding of pupils' individual needs and barriers. Positive relationships and a restorative approach will form the foundation of this work. Leaders know that for pupils to thrive, it is vital that they feel safe and secure in school.
- Leaders intend for positive handling to be used only as a last resort. All staff will be trained in the school's approach including de-escalation strategies. Every pupil will have a positive support plan. Plans will identify any risks and include preventative measures, potential triggers and the support that staff will provide.
- Leaders intend to use the school's recording system to analyse behaviour and to identify and respond agilely to any patterns or emerging issues.

#### *Paragraphs 11–16(b)*

- Leaders have a strong understanding of health and safety requirements. Policies for health and safety, first aid and risk assessment are all fit for purpose. Leaders intend for key staff to be trained in first aid, including paediatric first aid. They plan for all staff to receive a minimum of basic first-aid training.

- Leaders have completed a comprehensive suite of risk assessments. They intend to update these regularly and ensure that swift action is taken to mitigate any risks. A fire risk assessment has been completed. A new fire alarm has been installed, along with new fire extinguishers. Emergency exit routes are clearly signed. Leaders have invited the local fire and rescue service to visit the school prior to admitting pupils.
- Appropriate electrical checks and an asbestos check have been carried out by suitably qualified contractors. Legionella checks on the water supply have also been completed. Leaders have a very strong understanding of the ongoing checks and maintenance programme they will need to have in place once the building is occupied.
- Leaders intend there to be high staff-to-pupil ratios. They are planning to ensure that pupils are appropriately supervised throughout the school day. Leaders intend to increase the number of pupils on roll very gradually. They are very mindful of the need to ensure that they deploy staff well to ensure pupils' safety.
- The requirements for this part of the independent school standards are likely to be met.

#### Part 4. Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

*Paragraphs 18(2)–18(2)(e), 18(3), 19(2)–19(2)(d)(ii), 19(3), 20(5)–20(6)(c), 21(1)–21(7)(b)*

- Leaders know what checks need to be completed for staff on appointment and for any adults working in the school. Recruitment processes appear to be thorough. These include all the necessary checks as outlined in the statutory guidance. The regional director of education has had safer recruitment training. She plans to ensure that leaders at the school also receive this training.
- The single central record (SCR) is set up and ready to populate as staff are appointed. The SCR already includes members of the proprietor body and centrally employed staff such as senior leaders and other staff who are likely to visit the school regularly.
- While the required checks had been carried out for relevant personnel already employed, the SCR did not include a distinct standalone barred list check. Leaders took immediate action to rectify this before the end of the inspection.
- The school is likely to meet this part of the independent school standards.

#### Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

*Paragraphs 23(1)–24(1)(b), 24(2)–29(1)(b)*

- The proposed school is a former single-storey, detached office building in the Linford Wood area of Milton Keynes. The building has been extensively remodelled to provide suitable accommodation for the proposed school.
- The building is attractive and finished to a high standard. Lighting and acoustics are appropriate, and there is sufficient outside lighting. The school site is securely fenced. Entrances to the school are secure, and there is provision for disabled access. The 'in and out' entrances in the car park provide for suitable vehicle drop-off.
- The building now includes seven classrooms, a hall and some specialist teaching rooms. These include art and design and science and a very well-equipped food technology room. There are also small group rooms, a sensory room, office spaces

and a professional kitchen where meals can be prepared.

- Leaders are aware that the classroom spaces are relatively small. Therefore, they plan to limit the number of pupils in these smaller rooms to approximately six. In addition, they plan to use specialist rooms flexibly and to plan timetables carefully to take this into account.
- There is an outside, multi-use, fenced games area which may be used for sports and during social times of the day. Additionally, there are indoor social spaces for pupils to use during break- and lunchtimes. Leaders plan to use the local leisure centre for physical education.
- The medical room is well appointed and there are adequate toilet and washing facilities for pupils and staff. Showers and changing rooms have been installed. The temperature of the hot water is regulated appropriately. Drinking-water is available in the food technology room and labelled as such. Additionally, leaders plan to install water coolers in the school before it opens in September.
- This part of the independent school standards is likely to be met.

#### Part 6. Provision of information

##### *Paragraph 32(1)–32(1)(d), 32(1)(f)– 32(4)(c)*

- Leaders are knowledgeable about the requirements of the independent school standards in relation to what information should be published on the school’s website. They have built a website that is ready to ‘go live’ if the proposed school is approved by the Department for Education. The content and layout of the website are consistent with the proprietor’s other schools and include the required information.
- Leaders are experienced and knowledgeable about conducting and overseeing annual reviews for pupils with education, health and care plans (EHC plan). They are aware of their duty to provide local authorities with information to support pupils’ annual reviews.
- Leaders intend to provide annual reports to parents. Between these reports, leaders intend to update parents regularly about their children’s progress. They recognise that this will be particularly important during the induction period for new pupils.
- The school is likely to meet this part of the independent school standards.

#### Part 7. Manner in which complaints are handled

##### *Paragraph 33–33(k)*

- The complaints policy sets out how complaints will be managed, including the timescales for the informal and formal stages of the complaints process. The policy includes the requirement for complaints to be heard by a panel, following the correct protocols for the membership of this panel.
- Leaders intend to publish the complaints policy on the school’s website.
- This part of the independent school standards is likely to be met.

#### Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

##### *Paragraph 34(1)–34(1)(c)*

- The regional director of education and other leaders have considerable expertise and

experience of working with pupils with SEND. They hold a shared vision to establish provision that is appropriate to the needs of the pupils they anticipate joining the school. Leaders and proprietors have a strong understanding of the independent school standards.

- The proprietor plans to create a governing body. Members will include the headteacher, the regional director of education and three headteachers from the proprietor's other schools. Leaders and proprietors plan to implement their well-established accountability, quality assurance and performance management systems. This will include regular visits from the regional director of education aligned with the proprietor's expected cycle of review.
- The school is likely to meet this part of the independent school standards.

#### Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010

- The school's accessibility plan fulfils leaders' duties under the Equality Act 2010. Leaders plan to publish this on the school's website. As part of their regular planned review of policies and procedures, they will review this to ensure that it remains fit for purpose.

## **Compliance with regulatory requirements**

The school is likely to meet the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

## Proposed school details

Unique reference number	149662
DfE registration number	826/6021
Inspection number	10282468

This inspection was carried out under section 99 of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's likely compliance with the independent school standards that are required for registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Other independent special school
School status	Independent special school
Proprietor	Acorn Care and Education Ltd
Chair	Richard Power
Headteacher	Gemma Mann (Interim)
Annual fees (day pupils)	£57,680 to £82,770
Telephone number	01908 99177
Website	None
Email address	admin@willowparkschool.co.uk
Date of previous standard inspection	Not previously inspected

## Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal	Inspector's recommendation
Age range of pupils	Not applicable	9 to 16	9 to 16
Number of pupils on the school roll	Not applicable	60	60

## Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal
Gender of pupils	Not applicable	Mixed
Number of full-time pupils of compulsory school age	Not applicable	60



Number of part-time pupils	Not applicable	0
Number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities	Not applicable	60
Of which, number of pupils with an education, health and care plan	Not applicable	60
Of which, number of pupils paid for by a local authority with an education, health and care plan	Not applicable	60

## Staff

	School's current position	School's proposal
Number of full-time equivalent teaching staff	Not applicable	14
Number of part-time teaching staff	Not applicable	0
Number of welfare staff	Not applicable	14

## Information about this proposed school

- Willow Park is proposed as a new independent special school for up to 60 pupils between the ages of nine and 16. If registered, the school will join Acorn Care and Education which is part of the Outcome First Group.
- The proposed school will cater for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs and pupils with autism spectrum disorder. It is anticipated that some pupils will have other needs, including cognition needs. All pupils will have an EHC plan and will be placed at the school by local authorities.
- The proposed school is located in a single-storey, detached former office building in the Linford Wood area of Milton Keynes. The local area comprises light industry, office buildings and public open spaces. The building has undergone extensive adaptations to ensure that it is suitable for use as a school.
- The school has already recruited a headteacher who will take up her role in August. Until this date, the regional director of education is the interim headteacher. Interviews are due to take place shortly for other teaching posts and support staff. The proprietor expects to appoint other senior leaders, qualified primary and secondary teachers and support staff before its proposed opening in September 2023.
- The proprietor intends for the school to open with between six to eight pupils and for the number of pupils on roll to grow gradually. Leaders plan to increase the staff team

as the number of pupils at the school increases.

- If the proposed school opens as planned, the regional director of education will continue to oversee the quality of education at the school. She will also be the chair of the proposed governing body.
- It is not intended that the school will use alternative provision.

## Information about this inspection

- This was the first pre-registration inspection of the proposed school. The purpose of the inspection was to check whether the proposed school is likely to meet the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. Schools must comply with the independent school standards to be registered.
- This pre-registration inspection focused on compliance with the regulatory requirements of the independent school standards, including safeguarding procedures and schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.
- The inspector reviewed relevant plans and documents for the new school. She met with the proprietor's regional director of education and the director of operations. The inspector held an online meeting with the chair of the proprietor body.
- The inspector toured the school's premises and grounds and met with the facilities manager.

## Inspection team

Sue Cox, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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