

Inspection of Willow Park School

8 Danbury Court, Linford Wood, Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire MK14 6LJ

Inspection dates: 11 to 13 June 2024

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection Not previously inspected

Does the school meet the independent school standards? **Yes**

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy coming to this school, where they feel accepted and comfortable to be themselves. Positive and supportive relationships with pupils and their families are at the heart of the school's vision. Pupils are welcomed by the staff team every morning, which helps get everybody's day off to a great start.

Many pupils did not attend their previous schools for long periods of time and arrive here with negative associations with education. Staff get to know pupils and help them to feel safe. This enables pupils to make the most of the education on offer.

Tutor rooms are calm and inviting, designed with pupils' specific interests and preferences in mind. As a result, pupils feel comfortable, they respect adults and they apply themselves well in lessons. At social times, pupils relish playing games in small groups or with adults, which nurtures their self-worth as valued members of the school community. As one parent put it: 'Our child is happy, wants to be at school and is growing in confidence.'

Pupils enjoy going swimming and shopping together to experience involvement in the local community. Pupils' views are valued through contributions to new developments, such as the school library and the outdoor area.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Staff build trusting relationships with pupils right from the start and focus on building a deep and accurate understanding of what is causing pupils' barriers to education. Staff work together so that pupils' therapeutic support is intrinsically integrated into their learning. Specialist input from clinical, therapeutic and speech and language professionals plays a key role, providing staff with useful knowledge that enables them to carry out their work with confidence. Staff are highly skilled at giving pupils just the right balance of therapeutic support and academic challenge. They carefully foster a sense of success, which gradually builds the longer pupils attend. This helps pupils to develop the confidence and resilience to attend school much more often than they did at their previous settings.

Pupils quickly get hooked on books because teachers carefully choose texts which ignite their interest. Pupils enjoy reading quietly by themselves or listening to adults read to them. Where pupils need support to learn to read, their barriers to learning are identified precisely and expert support is put in place. Teachers skilfully weave phonics throughout the curriculum, so pupils recognise, and practise, sounds frequently in different contexts.

The school has developed a broad and interesting curriculum which motivates pupils to explore a wide range of interests, develop independence and achieve academic or vocational awards. As soon as pupils are ready, they study the school's full, ambitious curriculum and achieve academic success. Pupils are encouraged to build

relationships with their peers through deliberately planned interactions in their tutor groups, which builds their confidence and social skills.

Teachers identify pupils' starting points accurately and adapt future learning carefully in response. As a result, pupils enjoy their learning and grow in confidence. Adults incorporate opportunities to further build their understanding of pupils' needs and interests. For example, when learning about the artist Gustave Klimt, pupils in key stage 2 were first taught how to use pencils and different sized brushes to create tone and shade. They were then able to draw and paint their own tree of life in the style of Klimt. Pupils painted images of their interests and experiences into the tree, expressing their individuality and celebrating their identity.

As pupils progress through the taught curriculum, teachers build a fuller picture of pupils' interests and learning needs. This helps identify useful next steps for pupils' learning. Currently, assessments of pupils' academic needs are not as consistently precise as the checks on and oversight of their social, emotional and mental health needs.

Personal development runs through each pupil's individually tailored curriculum. The school uses trips in the local area to help equip pupils for the future. They learn practical life skills, such as how to keep safe on the internet and how to cook a healthy meal for themselves. During a recent visit by the police, pupils explored thoughtful questions about equalities and human rights for people with protected characteristics within the police force.

The proprietor and governing body are highly effective in fulfilling their roles. They challenge and support the school well through regular visits and monitoring so that the independent school standards are met successfully and consistently. Ongoing staff development sessions focus successfully on supporting everyone to continually improve outcomes for pupils.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve? (Information for the school and proprietor)

- Currently, checks on pupils' wider personal development needs are more precise than those made on their academic learning. As pupils engage increasingly with the subject-based curriculum, the school should ensure that teachers use assessment information with consistent precision to inform future learning, enabling pupils to make rapid progress through the taught curriculum so that they are even better prepared for the next stage of their education.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

School details

Unique reference number	149662
DfE registration number	826/6021
Local authority	Milton Keynes
Inspection number	10322077
Type of school	Special school
School category	Independent day school
Age range of pupils	9 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	16
Proprietor	Acorn Care and Education Ltd
Chair	Richard Power
Headteacher	Faye Causer
Annual fees (day pupils)	£57,680 to £86,915
Telephone number	01908 348 259
Website	www.willowparkschool.co.uk
Email address	admin@willowparkschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Since opening, there have been several changes to the leadership of the school.
- The school provides full-time education for pupils aged nine to 14 years. Pupils are referred to the school by their local authority. All pupils have an education, health and care plan. Many pupils have social, emotional and mental health needs.
- The school currently uses one unregistered alternative provision setting.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, the regional director and other leaders and staff. The lead inspector held meetings with the chair of the proprietor body and the chair of the governing body. She held telephone calls with one alternative provider.
- The inspection team carried out deep dives in reading, mathematics, PSHE and art. To do this, they met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum planning, had discussions with staff and pupils, visited lessons and looked at pupils' work.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders and staff; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts children's interests first.
- The lead inspector toured the school site to gather evidence about compliance with the independent school standards. Inspectors also reviewed a range of other documents and policies, including on the school's website.

Inspection team

Jo Brinkley, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Kate Fripp

His Majesty's Inspector

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