

Inspection of The Willows

Willow Grange, Henry Street, Rishton, Lancashire BB1 4JJ

Inspection dates: 8 to 9 July 2025

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
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Behaviour and attitudes	Good
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Personal development	Good
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Leadership and management	Good
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Does the school meet the independent school standards?	Yes
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What is it like to attend this school?

The school has created a highly successful ethos that supports pupils to focus on their learning. It has high expectations for pupils' achievement. From their different starting points, pupils achieve well. They are enthused by the enriching activities that the school provides. As part of their work on citizenship, pupils contribute by litter picking and reading with residents in a local care home. Such opportunities significantly enhance pupils' experience of, and contribution to, the wider world. The school helps pupils to be ready for their future lives.

Most pupils have found their previous experiences of education difficult. Many have been without education for some time. At The Willows, pupils re-engage well with learning the ambitious curriculum that the school has designed for them. Staff create a caring environment in which pupils begin to flourish. The carefully developed transition programme is impressive. Pupils quickly integrate into the school. They want to attend school and attendance levels are high.

Staff build trusting relationships that help pupils settle into school routines. The school supports pupils to behave well. Pupils rise to these expectations most of the time. When pupils find things more difficult, expert staff support them to regulate their emotions and get back on track quickly.

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

The school has established a broad curriculum for pupils to study. The proprietor and staff have established a vision for pupils to understand their needs and behaviours and learn how to live in the world. This vision is realised in practice.

In core subjects such as English and mathematics, the school identifies the essential knowledge and skills that pupils need to learn. For example, when pupils join the school, staff quickly check pupils' reading and phonics knowledge. This information is used to provide a reading curriculum that is matched to pupils' needs. For those pupils at an early stage of reading, the school ensures that they receive targeted support to help them to become confident and fluent readers. Over time, pupils learn to read fluently across range of subjects.

However, some aspects of the curriculum are in the earlier stages of implementation. In some subjects, including personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education, pupils receive an uneven experience. For example, at times, the tasks that pupils are given do not support the intended learning. The school is working to share best practice and to reduce variation in pupils' experience of the curriculum.

In mathematics, pupils persevere when learning and practising new methods. In other subjects, while staff check what pupils have understood, this information is not used well enough to inform pupils' next steps in learning. For example, at times, pupils need more opportunities to practice and consolidate their understanding.

Similarly, at times, misconceptions are not identified and addressed before moving on to new learning. This means that these misunderstandings persist.

Pupils arrive at the school with many gaps in their learning. All pupils have an education, health and care (EHC) plan to support their special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Staff meet pupils' wider needs well. For example, in PSHE, pupils learn about friendships and social skills. They increasingly use this knowledge to help them to navigate their own friendships.

Staff are skilled at encouraging pupils to behave well. They help pupils to manage their own behaviour. This results in increasingly positive attitudes and contributions to the life of the school. Attitudes to learning improve quickly after joining the school, and pupils attend increasingly well.

Pupils' personal development is of the highest priority. The school enhances its curriculum with external trips and visitors. For example, local police officers talk to pupils about their roles. Pupils visit a local zoo as part of their science learning and regularly learn to cook in the school kitchen. For many, their first experience of a school trip, or talking with visitors, is through the programme that the school provides. These experiences prepare pupils well by building independence and broadening their horizons.

The school provides pupils with information about different jobs. The school has an appropriate impartial careers information, education, advice and guidance programme for pupils as they progress into secondary education.

The proprietor has appointed leaders with the required expertise to ensure that the independent school standards (the standards) are met consistently. Policies, including a safeguarding policy that meets current statutory requirements, are available to parents and carers on the school's website. The proprietor ensures that the school meets the requirements of schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

The school ensures that the education it provides has a positive impact on pupils. The proprietor is fully involved in the life of the school and knows the school well. It has a clear oversight of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Staff's workload is prioritised.

The school meets the health and safety, and premises requirements. The building is maintained to a very high standard and teaching spaces are bright, clean and well resourced. There is a safe and well-resourced outdoor area that pupils can spend time in at breaktimes and to play sports.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- Although staff check pupils' understanding and progress through the curriculum regularly, teachers do not use the information that these checks give them to inform next steps. This means that pupils spend time learning things that they are not ready for, or things that they can already do, limiting their progress through the intended curriculum. The school should make more consistent use of these checks to better inform future learning.
- At times, the activities that pupils are given do not support the intended learning. This hinders pupils' achievement. The school should ensure that staff are supported to deliver the curriculum consistently well.

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	150634
DfE registration number	888/6135
Local authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	10375149
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	5 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	13
Proprietor	Toppers Childcare Ltd
Chair	Edward Gerald Smethurst
Headteacher	Rebecca Warhurst
Annual fees (day pupils)	£63, 375
Telephone number	01254 360 807
Website	www.thewillowsschool.com
Email address	info@thewillowsschool.com

Information about this school

- The school does not currently make use of any alternative provision.
- The school operates from one site based at Henry Street, Rishton, Lancashire BB1 4JJ.
- The school was registered by the Department for Education on 12 July 2024. The school admitted its first pupil in October 2024. Most pupils currently on roll joined the school after March 2025. This is the school's first standard inspection.
- The school is registered to admit up to 40 pupils. The school caters for pupils who have been out of education for extended periods. All pupils on roll at the time of the inspection have an EHC plan. The school caters for a range of special educational needs.
- Pupils' places are commissioned and funded by the local authority.
- At the time of the inspection, there were no secondary-age pupils on roll.
- At the time of the inspection, there were no pupils in the Reception Year.

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.

- 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 chair of the proprietor body and one governor, the headteacher, director of education and members of staff.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, early reading, mathematics and PSHE. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, considered curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to staff, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also talked to leaders, staff and pupils about some other subjects.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- During the inspection, inspectors reviewed a range of documents, including those relating to safeguarding. They also reviewed information relating to the standards. They also looked at records of pupils' behaviour and attendance.

- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View. They also spoke with some parents and carers and took account of their views.
- Staff's views were considered during discussions with them and through their responses to Ofsted's online survey for staff. To gather the views of pupils, inspectors spoke informally with pupils throughout the inspection.

The school's proposed change to increase the maximum number of pupils

The school has applied to the Department for Education (DfE) to make a 'material change' to its registration. At the DfE's request, we checked whether the school is likely to meet the relevant independent school standards if the DfE decides to approve the change. This part of the inspection was carried out under section 162(4) of the Education Act 2002.

- The outcome of this part of the inspection is: **the school is likely to meet the relevant independent school standards if the material change relating to increasing the maximum number of pupils from 20 to 40 is implemented.**

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Paragraphs 7(a) and (b), 11, 12, 14, and 16 to 16(b)

- The school has robust procedures in place to ensure that health and safety laws are complied with. Routine checks are carried out to ensure that the school complies with the requirements of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. For example, fire safety equipment is in good working order and fire escape routes are clear and well lit. The school site is safe and secure. These arrangements are suitable to accommodate the proposed increase in the number of pupils on roll.
- The school ensures that pupils are appropriately supervised. There are sufficient staff to ensure that an increased number of pupils would be properly supervised should the material change be approved.
- A written risk assessment policy is in place. There are a range of detailed risk assessments in place. These show that the school takes appropriate action to reduce and manage any identified risks to pupils. The risk assessments in place are appropriate should the number of pupils on roll be increased.
- The standards in this part are likely to be met if the request for the material change is approved.

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

- The school's single central record is compliant and contains all the necessary checks and information. The school carries out appropriate checks on the suitability of new staff. The school also checks on the suitability of other personnel who work onsite or with pupils. Leaders ensure that any visitor is suitably monitored by staff while carrying out their work.
- The standards in this part are likely to be met if the request for the material change is approved.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

- The school's building is refurbished to a high standard and is well maintained. It has sufficient classrooms, breakout spaces, toilet facilities and outdoor space to accommodate the proposed increase in pupils.
- The standards in this part are likely to be met if the request for the material change is approved.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

- The school has a clear rationale for its request to increase the capacity from 20 to 40 pupils. It has considered the impact on existing pupils. Leaders amply demonstrate the knowledge required to accommodate this material change request. They have proven systems in place to ensure that the standards are consistently maintained. They conscientiously fulfil their responsibilities to promote the well-being of pupils.
- The standards in this part are likely to be met if the request for the material change is approved.

Inspection team

Jen Sloan, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Julie Bather

Ofsted Inspector

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