

The Willows Centre for Children

Battenburg Avenue, North End, Portsmouth, PO2 0SN

Inspection dates 4–5 June 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Children achieve well. From very low starting points, they make good progress, particularly in their speaking, listening, social and physical development. Whilst many leave the school still below the age expectations, some attain the expected outcomes and are able to go to mainstream Reception classes.
- Teaching is good because it focuses on the needs of the individual child, starting from what he or she is interested in.
- Well organised and fun activities, both indoors and out, develop children's interests and help them to make good progress.
- Children are positive about school. They participate enthusiastically in all activities, which often enthral them and make them laugh. Their behaviour is outstanding.
- Parents are very positive about what the school offers and commented that some of their children's developments are 'life changing'.
- School leaders have managed the changing circumstances of the school well and continue to have a clear vision that children should receive the very best and of what needs to be done to improve.
- The governing body is very supportive of school leaders and has been very involved in ensuring the financial stability of the school so that it survives the challenges it faces.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The proportion of teaching that is outstanding is not high enough. Recording of children's progress is not always used to plan more difficult activities to help children move on.
- Adults do not use signing and agreed symbols consistently.
- Some planning of collaborative activities result in some children waiting too long or not being involved sufficiently.
- Middle leaders are not having a sufficiently effective role in raising achievement and teaching.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed teaching in six sessions, two of which were joint observations with senior leaders. These sessions were taught by four teachers. The inspectors also did four 'learning walks' looking more generally at children's learning across the school.
- Meetings were held with senior members of staff and with five members of the governing body. A meeting was held with two teachers responsible for subject areas and with two specialist teaching assistants who make home visits to support the partnership with parents. A meeting was held with two parents and another with a representative of the local authority. Meetings were held with the school nurse and with staff providing specialist help, such as speech language and communication support, and with the senior education psychologist.
- The inspectors took account of 19 parental responses to the questionnaire (Parent View) and the views of staff were analysed through the responses of 40 members of staff.
- The inspectors observed the school's work and analysed a large range and number of documents and policies including the school's own records on children's current progress, planning and safeguarding documentation as well as records relating to attendance. Samples of children's developmental records were also examined. The minutes of meetings of the governing body and sub-committees were reviewed.

Inspection team

Timothy Feast, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Alan Jones

Additional Inspector

Information about this school

- All the children on roll at The Willows have been referred by the local authority because they have been identified with special educational needs; many of the children have complex needs. Most of the children referred have speech, language and communication difficulties. The proportion of children with a statement of special educational needs or who are currently going through the statementing process represents nearly half the children.
- Children are from a number of different ethnic backgrounds but the majority are of White British heritage.
- About a quarter of the children speak English as an additional language and some of these speak little or no English when they start at the nursery.
- No children are supported by the extra pupil premium funding because children of this age do not receive it.
- The school provides additional 'wrap around' care both before and after school during term time and during school holidays, which is run by the governing body so falls within this inspection.
- The linked day-care provision run by the governing body and sharing the site with the school is inspected separately. Children at the nursery may at times learn alongside children accessing day care who may not have special educational needs, particularly when learning in the outdoor area.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise children's achievement by increasing the proportion of outstanding teaching by:
 - ensuring teachers consistently use their records and reflect on their observations of children's progress to plan more difficult activities, so that the children's next steps are reached rapidly
 - all adults consistently using agreed signing and symbols with all groups of children
 - ensuring that opportunities for learning fully involve children and are not lost because the children have to wait too long.
- Improve leadership and management by middle leaders taking a greater role in monitoring and evaluating achievement and the quality of teaching so that they have a greater impact on accelerating improvement.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Children typically join the nursery with skills and understanding that are well below those expected for their age of learning in all areas. Increasing numbers of children admitted have complex needs. Some children arrive at an early stage of learning English.
- Children make good progress, particularly in their speaking, listening, personal, social and physical development. Most leave the school having attained levels of understanding and skills that are still below those expected. However, an increasing proportion of children are at the level expected of them in some, if not all, of the areas of learning. This good progress is a result of the focus on learning from the minute children arrive at the school to the moment they leave.
- The children who speak English as an additional language progress well both with speaking and understanding English and in the other areas of learning.
- Children with delays in their speech, language and communications abilities make good progress. This is because they benefit from effective support from well-trained staff, as well as specific sessions with speech and language therapists.
- Children show particular enjoyment listening to stories, either read to them by adults or following them at their own pace on the computer. Staff effectively develop children's understanding of letters, single words and short sentences and increasingly children respond, showing their understanding.
- Children have plenty of opportunities to develop their writing skills. Activities encourage an early start to writing but this is an area where many children remain behind the expectations for their age.
- Opportunities are used to develop children's mathematical skills by counting different objects and getting children to describe mathematical shapes. However, for many, their specific learning difficulties limit understanding at the level that is expected for their age.
- As the children's confidence increases and as some of the barriers to learning are worked on by staff, children make good progress with their social development and play well with one another.
- Children make good progress with their physical development. This is helped by the swimming sessions in a nearby school and by using the exciting opportunities both on and off the site. Children with more profound physical difficulties progress well through the effective support they receive from well-trained school staff and from sessions with the physiotherapists and occupational therapists.

The quality of teaching is good

- The quality of teaching is good because staff have a thorough understanding of how to meet the specific needs of each individual child and know what excites and motivates them. Staff work together to plan innovative and fun activities that build on children's interests and extend their learning. As a result, children make good progress.
- Teachers deploy other staff effectively. They ensure that children are progressing well with activities that they have chosen for themselves. In addition, they ensure children are working on specific tasks that have been identified as the agreed focus for that week. Effective support was seen being given to children learning in the 'garage'. Specific support was given to children who needed a more directed approach, for example in a session on sorting shapes. Support staff use the exciting outdoor play areas, such as the boat, as the setting for reading stories to the children, who concentrate well as a result.
- Teachers and other staff record and reflect on their observations of children's progress. This information is not always used effectively to help accelerate the progress of the children.
- Children make good progress with their speaking and listening as there is a sharp focus on tackling this area, which is the main difficulty for most of the children at The Willows. Staff use good questioning to meet the differing needs of the children in their sessions. Staff implement a

number of well-tested and effective programmes to good effect and parents are very positive about the progress their children make. Sometimes adults do not use the agreed symbols and accepted signing procedures and this hinders some children's progress.

- Staff focus well on developing children's social skills, such as in taking turns. On occasions, children make less progress than they should as too much time is spent waiting for other children to complete their turn.
- Displays around the school celebrate children's achievements and experiences, such as those in the 'secret garden'. The displays illustrate the innovative ways that staff plan an extensive range of activities that help foster children's excitement and enjoyment of learning.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- The behaviour of the children is outstanding. The children consistently show a fascination with their learning, enthusiastically playing, exploring and responding to the activities presented to them. Children embark on activities with increasing confidence, secure in the knowledge that they will be helped to succeed where necessary.
- The consistently positive and calm management of behaviour by all adults strongly supports the excellent and sustained engagement of the children. Children confidently and expectantly move and settle to different activities when asked to do so by adults or when they are following their own interests, for example when painting their own pictures.
- There are often rapid improvements in behaviour for those children with particular behaviour needs. The improvement in reducing this barrier to learning helps these children to progress well. Incident logs show very few instances of poor behaviour. Children gain an understanding of what is right and wrong and the importance of sharing. They play and work well together, using the constricted outdoor area very sensibly. They use the large equipment in the outdoor area very safely, their confident use of this equipment demonstrating their good physical development.
- The school's work to keep children safe is outstanding. Discussions with parents indicate their complete confidence in the school looking after their children very well. They are particularly appreciative of the guidance and opportunities that staff provide to care for their children before and after school and during school holidays.
- The attendance of many children at The Willows is hindered by their medical conditions, but the school quickly follows the reasons for any absence.

The leadership and management is good

- The school has faced a number of significant challenges over the last few years and school leaders, including the governing body, have responded effectively to ensure the financial stability of the school whilst maintaining good quality provision.
- The school has at its core a vision that values all children. It focuses on them making the best possible progress. This is done by tackling the significant barriers to learning that most of the children have. They are successful in promoting equality of opportunity well.
- Leaders, including middle leaders, track children's progress systematically. Senior leaders monitor the quality of learning experiences by observing staff and children. Middle leaders are not sufficiently involved in the monitoring and evaluation of the areas for which they have responsibility. However, the school sees this as part of the development to help secure positive succession planning and is taking corrective actions.
- Senior leaders conduct performance management systematically and can demonstrate its impact on improving teaching at a time of significant staffing changes. The information from this monitoring is used to determine salary progression and to help plan professional development

for staff, which is linked to the school's improvement plan. Staff attend many training sessions, both in and out of school, and the expertise of specialist support services is used well to build the skills of staff.

- The school works well with parents who value the daily communication. They say the school listens to any concerns and takes speedy and effective action.
- A wide range of activities are planned by staff to meet the particular needs of the children. The classrooms, the outdoor area and off-site visits are used very well to support children's spiritual, moral, cultural and social development, with children developing respect for others from different backgrounds.
- The local authority has provided the nursery with light touch support but has been heavily involved in discussions with school leaders in respect of implementing further changes, such as the introduction of a Reception class from September 2014.
- Safeguarding arrangements meet requirements and the specific support for those children whose circumstances make them vulnerable is exceptional. This is helped by the excellent links with on-site and other local specialist support services.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The governing body has provided school leaders with support and challenge in areas where they feel they have expertise, such as finance and safeguarding. They have understandably challenged less in areas where there is no comparable information for benchmarking, for example around the achievement of children in the special school nursery. They have a good knowledge and understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development and use this knowledge to help identify priorities.
- Governors have taken appropriate steps to implement performance management and are well informed about the challenges posed by recent staffing changes. The headteacher's performance is managed rigorously.
- Governors use training effectively to extend their range of skills, and newly acquired skills are evident in the challenge brought to school leaders. They manage finances efficiently and all statutory requirements are met.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	116643
Local authority	Portsmouth
Inspection number	432084

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Nursery
School category	Community Special
Age range of pupils	2–4
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	72
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sandra Cornish
Headteacher	Margaret Dunford
Date of previous school inspection	14–15 July 2009
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