

Willows

Manleys Farm, West Buckland, Wellington, Somerset, TA21 9LQ

Inspection dates

21–23 January 2015

Overall effectiveness	Good	2
Leadership and management	Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Good	2
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Achievement of pupils	Good	2

Summary of key findings

This is a good school.

- The school has made excellent progress in all areas of its work. The headteacher leads with conviction and an unswerving commitment to provide the best education for each student.
- The headteacher has skilfully established a strong staff team who shares her vision. Morale is high and students say they enjoy coming to school.
- Teaching is consistently good in all subjects. Students settle quickly when they join the school and make good progress from their starting points.
- The school has developed effective systems for checking and recording pupils' academic and personal progress.
- Arrangements for keeping students safe and secure are rigorous. They receive high quality guidance and care to ensure they feel safe and know how to keep themselves safe.
- Students' behaviour is good. The headteacher and staff set clear boundaries which everyone understands. The daily 'handover' meetings, between teachers and care staff, ensure consistency of expectations between the school and homes.
- There is a good range of accredited courses that matches students' needs and aspirations.
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is given a high priority. Students learn to show respect for adults and each other. This is helping them to behave well and manage their own behaviour effectively.
- The standard of art work is very high. This is making a positive contribution to developing students' self-esteem and confidence.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The quality of teaching is not yet outstanding. Marking of books and the feedback given to students do not always set out how they must improve their work. Not enough time is given in lessons for students to act on teachers' feedback.
- Teachers do not have enough professional development to develop their range of teaching skills fully to maximise learning in every lesson.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets schedule 1 of The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, as amended by The Education (Independent School Standards) (England)

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed six lessons taught by staff and looked at students' work, teachers' planning and information about students' progress. The headteacher observed four lessons jointly with the inspector.
- Meetings were held with the proprietor, senior leaders and teaching staff. Informal discussions were held with students throughout the inspection to seek their views.
- School policies and the school's documentation were scrutinised. Records relating to behaviour, attendance, bullying and safeguarding were examined.
- The inspector took account of seven staff questionnaires.
- There were too few responses to the online Parent View questionnaire for these to be published.

Inspection team

Catherine Leahy, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Willows is an independent special day school. The school was established in 2005. It moved to its current site in May 2007.
- The school offers provision for up to 12 girls, aged 11 to 16, with severe social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.
- There are currently 10 girls on roll, all of whom are disadvantaged. Four have a statement of special educational needs. All students are looked after by their respective local authority and live in one of the homes provided by the same proprietor, some of which are on the same site as the school.
- The school was last inspected in December 2011, when it was judged to be good.
- The proprietor, who is the company's representative, has responsibility for the governance of the school.
- Students attend off-site provision at Taunton College one afternoon a week to take part in physical education. This session is jointly delivered by an independent sports teacher employed by the school, and a member of the school's teaching staff. The lead inspector visited this provision during the inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that an increasing proportion is outstanding by ensuring that:
 - marking and feedback consistently inform students how well they have done and what they need to do to improve
 - teachers give students time to respond to their marking and feedback and discuss with them how best to improve their work.
- Provide further training for teachers, so that they extend their range of teaching skills and are able to gain a further level of commitment from the students to tackle harder work.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management

are good

- The headteacher leads the school with determination and a steadfast resolve to improve the life chances of every student. All staff share her vision to improve standards of achievement and learning for the students. Staff say the school is well led and managed. Morale is high.
- The support for students' welfare, health and safety is of a high quality. The headteacher has established a safe and secure environment. This is underpinned by explicit boundaries and high expectations of their behaviour and academic success. This has raised aspirations and enabled students to make good progress from their starting points in their academic and social development. They are well prepared for the next stage of their education.
- The headteacher has an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. The proprietor and headteacher work closely together to check on the school's performance and safeguarding procedures. As a result, the school meets all the Independent Schools Standards.
- The school has implemented effective systems for checking and analysing information about students' academic and personal achievement. This is enabling teachers to track their progress rigorously, especially in English and mathematics. Effective one-to-one support helps students catch up quickly.
- The headteacher checks the quality of teaching carefully. The staff meet frequently to discuss and share their practice, leading to improvements in teaching. Teachers use checks made on students' progress to plan lessons which develop both academic and personal skills.
- Leaders set high expectations for the performance of teachers and provide support to improve their knowledge and skills. However, staff lack opportunities for further professional development to develop aspects of their practice that encourage students to be resilient and attempt the more challenging work. As a result, some students are not achieving the targets set for them.
- The school is uncompromising in its work to keep students safe. The proprietor, together with school leaders, ensures that all staff understand, and rigorously implement, the school's safeguarding policy and procedures. Recruitment practice meets requirements. All staff, including the designated safeguarding officer, receive appropriate training to be able to undertake their roles effectively.
- Leaders take care to plan the most appropriate pathways for students, based around their interests and aptitudes. This enables them to take GCSE examinations, and other externally accredited and nationally recognised courses. The teacher with specific responsibility for careers helps students choose appropriate courses to support their chosen pathway. The school's records show previous students go on to employment, colleges, and, on occasion, university. All students have an equal chance of succeeding in this school.
- The school places a high priority on teaching personal, social, and health education to all students. This is at the heart of its work. Students learn to be respectful of others and develop tolerance and understanding of other cultures and religions. This fosters good relations and tackles discrimination effectively.
- Staff promote high quality spiritual, moral, social and cultural education. Students' exceptional art work is an example of the school's work in developing spiritual and cultural awareness. Planned visits link closely with lessons taught in school. A recent trip to the local magistrate's court enabled students to learn about life in modern, democratic Britain. They also gained a respect for the British legal system.
- Leaders implement health and safety policies and procedures in full. This serves to keep students safe and sets out the school's expectations for protecting them. Risk assessments are appropriate and protect students on the premises and on off-site visits. Leaders ensure all students attend the weekly PE lesson off-site. They have established high standards of behaviour during these sessions. The students enjoy these lessons and are developing a range of sporting skills.
- The proprietor and headteacher have ensured the premises are well maintained and provide a well-resourced and attractive learning environment.
- **The governance of the school:**

The proprietor shares the headteacher's vision for the school. She is just as committed to ensuring the safety and personal development of the students. This is evident in the rigorous implementation of the school's welfare, health and safety policies. The proprietor visits the school regularly and checks on the performance of the school and the welfare, health and safety of the students.

The proprietor ensures the students benefit from a high quality education appropriate to their needs. This enables them to move successfully to the next stage of their education. As a result, every student is given an equal chance to experience success and achieve well.

The premises are of a high quality and classrooms are well resourced.

The proprietor ensures the headteacher sets targets to improve teaching. Effective systems are in place to check the performance of staff with clear links to staff salaries and pupil progress.

The proprietor and headteacher meet regularly. This ensures the proprietor is well-informed and has an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the school's performance and quality of teaching.

Teaching is monitored so that students make progress in their academic and personal skills. The proprietor recognises the need to strengthen opportunities for staff training to improve teaching further.

The proprietor manages financial resources efficiently to enable the students to achieve well.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good. Students take pride in achieving points for good behaviour and learning. This approach is supporting them in managing their anger and controlling their emotions. As a result, students behave well in lessons and say they 'like being in school'. A typical comment from a parent was, 'The school meets all my child's requirements. I think they are doing a very good job.' Local authority social workers agree with this view.
- Students settle quickly when they arrive in the school. They receive high quality care and support from staff they soon learn to trust. Girls then become role models for new students who join the school throughout the year. They arrive on time for lessons, which start promptly. They work hard and develop positive attitudes to learning.
- Staff deal sensitively with occasional lapses in behaviour. They consistently implement procedures set out in their policies. Strong links with the care staff at the beginning and end of the day ensure a common approach and shared expectations for good behaviour. As a result, students learn to take responsibility for their own behaviour. They build positive and trusting relationships with the staff and each other. On occasions, the school does not act with sufficient rigour to follow up some lapses in behaviour. Therefore, behaviour is not yet outstanding.
- Attendance is good. The school monitors absences carefully and only authorises absences for exceptional circumstances. Students are keen to be in school and say, 'I love it here. The teachers have high hopes for me.' They are confident they are making good progress and being well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. The girls are taught how to keep themselves safe through the school's personal, social, health and citizenship education programme. They are clear about the different kinds of bullying that exist. In particular, they receive regular instruction in keeping safe on the internet. Consequently, students say they feel safe and secure. 'This is a cool place to be. There is some name calling, but staff sort it out.' Social workers and parents agree with these views.
- All staff implement the school's safeguarding policies and procedures rigorously. Training for staff in behaviour management, child protection, first aid and fire safety is up to date. The designated safeguarding officer keeps detailed records and ensures all concerns are followed up without delay. The headteacher has developed a thorough and detailed risk assessment policy to keep students safe.
- The school is calm and orderly. There is no litter or graffiti and classrooms are tidy and clean. High quality work is displayed around the school which boosts the students' self-esteem and pride in their achievements.
- Staff carefully monitor the students when they attend the off-site provision. They ensure the students attend regularly and behave well. They insist students act safely in these lessons. Consequently, they feel safe in this change of environment.

The quality of teaching

is good

- The quality of teaching is good. During their time at the school, students make good academic and social progress. The high priority given to developing students' basic skills in English and mathematics ensures they achieve well. Staff have high expectations of them. This raises aspirations and encourages the girls to do their best and achieve well.
- On arrival, teachers check students' knowledge, skills and understanding in English and mathematics. They quickly identify gaps in learning and in personal development. Teachers and teaching assistants plan

interesting and engaging lessons to address misconceptions and set challenging learning and development targets. As a result, all students begin to catch up quickly.

- Staff regularly check students' progress and implement appropriate support quickly. This enables teachers to adapt their planning to ensure every student makes good progress. The school shares records of achievement with parents, carers, the students and the local authority. This shared approach to learning and involvement of families and carers are raising personal and academic achievement further.
- Teachers' planning is detailed to take account of the students' wide range of needs. Teachers plan sequences of work to challenge and support each individual, including the most able. For example, students discussed conflict in the novel *Catcher in the Rye* in a GCSE English lesson. The teacher skilfully questioned them to think deeply, form opinions and justify their arguments. The level of whole-class discussion was outstanding. Students confidently planned the opening of their essay and achieved a high standard of writing. However, teachers currently lack training opportunities to develop their skills further to extend and deepen learning.
- Students read regularly. The school invests in a range of books to interest students and encourage them to read widely. The majority have reached reading levels appropriate for their age or even better. Others are improving their reading and comprehension skills quickly. Teachers choose demanding texts to teach GCSE English. This serves to challenge the most able students. Students have successfully analysed Shakespeare's *Macbeth* as part of their assessed course work.
- Teachers use questioning effectively to check on learning and understanding in lessons. In a mathematics lesson, the teacher adjusted his teaching and reshaped tasks throughout to secure understanding of the key concepts. As the lesson progressed, students' confidence in tackling the tasks set improved. As a result, most students secured good progress.
- Teachers give students frequent opportunities to develop their literacy skills in subjects other than English. Learning activities, such as designing and making a leaflet in personal, social and health education, and planning and recording investigations in science provide opportunities to practise and develop literacy skills. This enables the girls to achieve well in other subjects and prepares them for successful outcomes in external examinations.
- Teaching assistants are skilled. For example, the standard of art and textiles achieved by the students is outstanding. Students are highly engaged in these lessons taught by the school's teaching assistant and they strive to achieve high standards. This work builds self-esteem and confidence.
- The school's marking policy is not yet being consistently applied in all classes. In the best lessons, students read and discuss the teachers' comments. These interactions give students the support and advice they need to improve their work and make better progress. However, in some lessons, this practice is not well established which slows progress for some. The quality of teaching is therefore not yet outstanding.

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Most students join the school at different times of the academic year with skills and knowledge which are typically below average for their age. This is because they have missed education and, consequently, have significant gaps in their learning. Some have decided that school is 'not for me'. Despite this initial reluctance to engage in formal learning, they settle quickly and all students make good progress from their starting points. This includes those with a statement of special educational needs, and the most able.
- Teachers carefully identify gaps in learning and provide tailored intervention and support. This initially focuses on developing English and mathematics skills. Students respond positively to one-to-one and small group teaching. They begin to catch up and develop positive attitudes to learning. Once secure, students move into the two main teaching groups. Students who arrived at the school very recently are already accessing whole group teaching and demonstrating improved attitudes to learning. This is a marked transformation from their starting points.
- All students receive the additional government funding for disadvantaged pupils. Therefore its specific impact cannot be measured.
- Work seen during the inspection confirms that students learn English and mathematics skills steadily, enabling them to access external qualifications. However, teachers do not always have sufficient skills to engage the reluctant learners in some lessons. Consequently, students sometimes do not achieve their predicted grade in English and mathematics.
- Students study courses which are appropriate to their ages and capabilities. At Key Stage 4, they take GCSEs and externally accredited examinations in a range of subjects. On occasions, the most able

students take GCSE examinations early when appropriate. This successfully boosts their achievements. They also take qualifications to demonstrate achievement in developing their personal skills. The school ensures all are challenged to achieve high standards. All students make good progress from their starting points and some excel in English and science.

- Most students take up post-16 placements in education, employment and/or training. However, the school recognises their challenge is to secure the higher grades in English and mathematics for the most capable students to increase their choices after leaving the school.
- Students are each given their own laptop. This helps them record their work, particularly when their writing skills are less well developed. On occasions, teachers do not mark work written on laptops sufficiently well. Students do not have teachers' comments to read and act on to improve their work. This slows the pace of learning.
- Students attend a local college gym, one afternoon each week, to develop physical education skills in a safe and secure environment. They enjoy the opportunity to practise their skills and develop team work and cooperation.
- Students develop their creative and aesthetic skills through planned lessons and activities. They take part in drama productions and have recently had an opportunity to learn to drum. Visits support learning. For example, the students visit the art exhibition at the local museum. Students also visit the First World War exhibition in the same building to support their history work and bring the subject alive. This increases their engagement and interest in these subjects.

What inspection judgements mean

School	
Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Non-association independent school inspection handbook* which is published on the Ofsted website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/non-association-independent-school-inspection-handbook.

School details

Unique reference number	135278
Inspection number	446253
DfE registration number	933/6215

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

Type of school	Independent special day school for girls
School status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number of pupils on the school roll	10
Number of part time pupils	0
Proprietor	Jennifer Gould
Chair	Jennifer Gould
Headteacher	Elizabeth Sharpe
Date of previous school inspection	6–7 December 2011
Annual fees (day pupils)	£42,250
Telephone number	01823 653880
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