

The Willows Centre for Children

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	116643
Local Authority	Portsmouth
Inspection number	326421
Inspection dates	14–15 July 2009
Reporting inspector	Jo Curd

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

Type of school	Nursery
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	0–5
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	245
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr David Emson
Headteacher	Mrs Maggie Dunford
Date of previous school inspection	22 June 2006
School address	Battenburg Avenue North End Portsmouth PO2 0SN
Telephone number	02392 666918
Fax number	02392 626426

Age group	0–5
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The Willows Centre is a special school Nursery which became a Children's Centre in 2005. Since then the numbers on roll, the complexity of children's needs, staffing and the size of accommodation have all increased significantly. The Centre is now open from 07.45 until 18.00 50 weeks each year. It is only closed for Bank Holidays, staff training and between Christmas and New Year. It provides courses and support for parents, and events for children and families some weekends and holidays. It has received Healthy School accreditation. Of the 245 children on roll, 75 have been referred for various health, learning or social needs. There are 76 children who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Two children currently have statements of special educational needs and most of the referred children have statements by the time they leave. Some of the needs are complex and profound; most are linked with language, communication or moderate learning difficulties. The majority of the referred children are boys. Most are of White British heritage and few speak English as an additional language. The current headteacher was appointed in March 2008 and the deputy headteacher in June 2009.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

The Willows Centre provides an outstanding level of education and care for its children. Largely due to very positive relationships and very high levels of inclusion and support, personal development and well-being are excellent. Parents are very appreciative. The words of one summed up the feelings of many, 'Willows is an outstanding school, I could not have put my son in a better place. Not only is it excellent for education, but the care and support for the child and families are second to none. I do not want my son to leave'.

The Willows has a legacy of success and a very high reputation and consequently has a relatively long waiting list for both education and care. Extremely effective leadership and management have successfully maintained and built on this reputation. Leaders have responded effectively to several recent challenges and changes, including the new Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum and integration of children who have a much wider range of complex needs. Self-evaluation is thorough and accurate and enables senior managers to know very well the Centre's strengths and areas for development. The highly experienced, committed headteacher expertly identifies, draws on and develops the strengths of each member of staff in order to maximise provision for all children. Delegation of tasks and responsibilities among staff is very successful and effective. There is very strong teamwork between all the staff, parents and other professionals such as speech therapists and educational psychologists. Together, they successfully form seamless, 'teams around each child', caring for and supporting each child exceptionally well. Notable developments since the last inspection have been managed very effectively. Over a hundred children without identified additional needs have been successfully integrated. Parents of these children are delighted with the very high levels of care and education provided. These include opportunities to integrate, work and play with a wide range of individuals.

Learning and development are excellent because activities are exceedingly varied, practical and usually appropriate. Support for the children is excellent and staff have high aspirations for them all. Children are continuously learning through play and from staff and each other. They greatly enjoy the Centre and develop a strong interest in, and love of, learning. Staff interact sensitively and effectively with all the children to extend their learning, personal and social development. Although all children achieve extremely well, some could do even better. Staff rightly give a very high emphasis to open-ended activities and play. Occasionally, however, some activities are not quite as focused or challenging as they could be. Leaders have already identified this and agree that it is particularly true of activities outside. They are reorganising staff next year to share practice and maximise expertise.

All the children are encouraged to be as independent as possible. This contributes well to their confidence, achievement and self-esteem. Some children who were not expected to walk or talk are now moving independently and chatting to others as they go. All the children contribute significantly to the community by selecting activities, making suggestions and helping to tidy up. Children are kept healthy and safe and are developing good understanding and habits. Because learning and development are so good, self-esteem and acceptance of others are positive, and attitudes to learning are very favourable, the children are very well prepared for their next steps in life.

The very successful track record, highly astute leadership and strong commitment of all staff all indicate that the capacity for further improvement is excellent.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase learning and development even further by ensuring that all activities, including those outside, are always sufficiently focused and challenging.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

All children achieve exceedingly well because activities are open-ended and stimulating, and support for the children is highly effective. Consistent expectations and regular routines contribute to good progress in personal and social skills. Staff expertise, the use of signs and symbols and very effective partnerships with speech and language therapists help all children, including those who have social, speech and language difficulties, to achieve very well in communication and language. Children develop a very good range of creative skills, because of the varied art activities on offer. They explore and use different materials, using all the senses, such as playing with jelly and making patterns in 'gloop' made of cornflour and water. Opportunities for imaginative play contribute to the very good physical development of children. An extensive range of open-ended activities indoors and out and good use of resources contribute to mathematical development and knowledge and understanding of the world. All these activities contribute to excellent achievement, even though some are very occasionally not as well focused and challenging as they could be. The Centre has a huge range of children including those who have extensive learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those whose development exceeds expectations for their age. Given this huge range, standards overall are below those expected in most Nurseries when children start and broadly in line with expectations by the time they leave.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Children are inquisitive, show high levels of enjoyment, and play together enthusiastically. They are captivated by the adventure in the soft play area and the sensory room, which are particularly accessible to children who have sensory or mobility difficulties or disabilities. Strong encouragement and vigilant monitoring of attendance successfully contributes to higher rates than in many other Nurseries. Effective health and safety policies and very good role models from adults support children's excellent safety and growing understanding of how to keep themselves safe. Children enjoy a happy family atmosphere at mealtimes and are developing a very good understanding of which foods help to keep them healthy. This reflects the work of the Centre in attaining the Healthy School award. Swimming, outdoor play and exuberant exercise in the soft play room also contribute well to health. Children help with tasks around the Nursery, share their ideas and help shape the learning environment for all. Some children come to the Centre with behavioural difficulties and challenges. As they receive highly effective support and develop other forms of communication, their behaviour improves significantly. Overall, behaviour is exemplary. Through very practical engaging activities, outdoor play in all weathers, consistent expectations and a diverse range of visitors, the children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Parents are particularly appreciative of the way their children are developing confidence, self-esteem and respect for diversity. These factors, along with excellent achievement, help prepare children extremely well for their next steps in life and learning.

Quality of provision

Effectiveness in promoting children's learning and development

Grade: 1

Learning and development are excellent because activities are highly appropriate, fun and engaging, and staff provide extremely high levels of encouragement and support. One example was an activity in which children greatly enjoyed highly imaginative play in a 'campsite' complete with tent, sleeping bags, barbecue with play and real food, and opportunities to make their own passports. This very successfully helped develop their skills and understanding in communication, language, literacy, creativity and knowledge and understanding of the world. Children's information and communication technology skills are well developed through using digital cameras, buttons, and computers effectively. All the children have excellent opportunities to work and socialise with a highly diverse range of children. This really helps those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities as well as those who find mobility and learning easier. From a very young age, children are strongly encouraged to become as independent as possible, for example choosing where and what they will work with. The extremely wide range of very well planned activities and sensitive interaction from staff help all children make excellent progress. The curriculum inside and out is extremely good although, occasionally, a few activities, notably outside, are not as focused or challenging as they could be. This slightly reduces the progress of a few children.

Effectiveness in promoting children's welfare

Grade: 1

The extremely strong ethos of valuing each child as special and unique contributes to the excellent quality of the welfare provision. This underpins the exemplary achievement and personal development of children. Effective teamwork from a wide range of professionals, and excellent role models have successfully created a very safe and stimulating place for all. Systems to safeguard children's health and safety are thorough and well monitored. A team of expert teacher mentors provide high-quality support, training and management of new staff. As the team grows and new staff join, this ensures that the excellent welfare procedures are followed by all. Inclusion is central to all thinking and planning. From the time children start, parents are partners in their child's education. As one parent said, 'We feel so well supported and know how important we are to our child's development'. Key workers play a particularly effective role in this. Parents are welcome to visit at any time and make significant contributions to assessments of progress and development. Excellent relationships with parents are confirmed by their comments which frequently include the words 'fantastic' and 'wonderful'. Frequent and thorough assessments of the progress of all children are used well to plan activities and the next steps for learning. Children know what is expected of them and most readily engage in their own choice of activities and 'special jobs' with staff. This guides and supports their learning extremely well.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leaders and managers at all levels are highly competent and effective. The provision maximises the skills and experience of staff. For example, the new deputy headteacher brings extensive

experience of mainstream schooling and special educational needs, which is helping to include challenges for children who find learning easier. Monitoring and evaluation accurately identify strengths and weaknesses, leading to highly appropriate development planning. One very positive example of this is the way children are grouped and staff are developed to ensure that children's welfare and developmental needs are met. The commitment and passion of the whole school community leads to a very special family ethos. Equality of opportunity is central. Governors are extremely involved, knowledgeable, supportive and challenging, and are intrinsic to Centre reviews and development.

Families and the local community are very well supported. A group of staff are employed solely to run community and family groups including 'Men United' for Dads, health groups, 'Sing and Swing' and 'Mums and tums' for those who have just had or are about to have babies. Through these groups and the very positive interactions between various children, parents and families, supportive relationships and attitudes are formed. Leaders have undertaken a thorough review of who in the local community use the facilities. This has led to the implementation of extensive provision for a very wide diversity of groups, and ongoing evaluation of the impact this is having. Community cohesion is excellent.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	1
The standards[1] reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	1

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

The quality of provision

How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	1
How effectively is the welfare of the children in the EYFS promoted?	1

Leadership and management

How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

27 July 2009

Dear Children

Inspection of The Willows Centre for Children, Portsmouth, PO2 0SN

Thank you for being so friendly and helpful when we visited the Willows recently. Thank you especially to those children who showed me around and told us about their favourite places and activities. It was lovely to see you working, playing and eating together and having such fun with the water and jelly and in the pretend campsite.

I think your Children's Centre is excellent.

This is largely because you do such interesting fun activities which are so suitable for you all and because you are all looked after and supported so well. In fact, several of you told me how safe and happy you are because the teachers are so kind and helpful to you. You are all very kind and helpful to each other too. You behave extremely well and are very friendly and considerate. All the teachers, especially the headteacher, work very hard and well to make the Willows such a very special place to be; no wonder so many mummies and daddies want their children to be there too.

The progress you all make is extremely good. However, some activities, especially outside, do not always help you all learn as much as you could. This is the only thing I have asked the adults to improve.

Perhaps you could help them by telling them things that really help you with your learning or asking them for things that would help you even more.

With best wishes to you and your families,

Yours faithfully

Jo Curd

Lead Inspector