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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Margaret Dunford
Willows Centre for Children
Battenburg Avenue
North End
Portsmouth
Hampshire
PO2 0SN

Dear Mrs Dunford

Short inspection of Willows Centre for Children

Following my visit to the school on 19 April 2018 with Jenny Boyd, Ofsted Inspector, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in June 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You, along with other school leaders, continue to foster a child-focused, calm, safe and welcoming school. Behaviour is exemplary and the children are happy, fully engaged, and often excited by their learning.

You and your leaders have an accurate view of the school's strengths and areas that need improvement. You have ensured that the drive to improve outcomes is shared across the school. You have successfully tackled the issues raised in the last inspection. For example, adults now consistently use agreed signing and symbols with children. In addition, you have made improvements to teaching, learning and some aspects of assessment. You astutely recognise that assessment systems need to be refined further and new strategies introduced.

Your staff have in-depth knowledge of the individual needs of children. This, along with effective support from a range of professionals, has a positive impact on children's well-being and progress. Governors know the school and children well. While they have a good understanding of day-to-day matters, they recognise that their grasp of assessment and children's progress is underdeveloped. As a result, governors do not always challenge school leaders confidently and the support they provide to you and your leaders is insufficient in some areas.

Parents and carers are very positive about the education and care that the school provides and feel well supported by the centre. One parent stated that they would give the school a score of '200 out of 100' if they could.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and meet the children's specific needs. Records are detailed and of a high quality. You and your team have an excellent awareness of any medical issues pupils have. You and your staff communicate effectively with pupils' families and outside agencies.

Children's individual behaviour plans are positive and offer clear, effective strategies. These, along with regular training and effective communication systems within school, mean that staff deal with any challenging behaviour confidently. Staff expertise in this areas helps them to keep children safe. This is a caring school in which children are well looked after. Carefully chosen routines help children to feel secure.

Inspection findings

- The curriculum is highly personalised and accessible for children. Staff know individual children very well and activities are based on children's own particular interests. Resources for children are interesting and imaginative. Teachers plan a broad range of stimulating experiences so that children thoroughly enjoy their learning, both in the classroom and in outside areas. As a result of thoughtfully planned approaches, children can apply their learning well in different environments.
- Therapists take a leading role in staff training, providing staff with useful strategies that support children's learning and their physical skills. For example, therapists have worked alongside staff so they can deliver physiotherapy programmes and have also trained staff in using sign language. This means that staff can use a range of therapies confidently and effectively. Well-trained staff successfully enhance children's communication and physical development.
- Children make good progress during their time at the centre. Staff focus on individual performance and effectively monitor progress towards the early learning goals. There is continuous assessment of children and their progress is tracked regularly using a variety of methods. Leaders are reflective and recognise that the systems they use require modification so that the tracking of children's small steps of progress is fully effective. They have plans to use a new, bespoke approach to assessment. You and your leaders are confident that this will enable secure tracking of children's small steps in progress.
- Leaders ensure that children in the school, and children who come to the centre for day care, get along well. They learn and play nicely together, helping children from the school to make good progress in their personal and social education.
- Although governors have a strong and detailed working knowledge of the school and children's needs, they do not have a good enough overview of children's progress. This limits the challenge and support they are able to provide for you and your leaders.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- assessment systems are refined so that staff are clear about children's small steps in progress
- governors have a stronger understanding of assessment and children's progress so they can better challenge and support leaders.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Portsmouth. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Maxine McDonald-Taylor
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

My colleague and I met with you and other leaders. We visited classrooms and the outside areas and I observed children at lunchtime. We used verbal and non-verbal communication to gather children's views and looked through their assessments. We held meetings with key staff about how you monitor children's progress, leadership, work with outside agencies and safeguarding. I met with members of the education governing body and a representative from the local authority. I considered responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View and the staff questionnaire. We spoke to parent/carers to hear their views. We scrutinised a wide range of school documentation and a selection of children's work and learning journeys.