

Inspection of a good school: The Willows School and Early Years Centre

Fishermead Boulevard, Fishermead, Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire MK6 2LP

Inspection dates:

3 and 4 July 2023

Outcome

The Willows School and Early Years Centre continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are happy at this inclusive school. They trust that adults in the school will help them be the best they can be. Pupils meet the high expectations that adults have for them in both their learning and their conduct around the school. As a result, a sense of calm pervades every classroom. Pupils are considerate towards each other and are inclusive when they talk about the ways in which people are different. Pupils learn about healthy relationships and how to keep themselves safe. They know who their trusted adults are who they can talk to if they have any worries.

There are equal ambitions for every pupil, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Pupils' wide range of needs are rapidly identified and mostly met well. Many pupils benefit from the specialist support leaders have put in place.

The school has a strong community feel. Pupils are proud to demonstrate the school's mission statement, 'To become honest, active citizens and lifelong learners in a global society'. The focus on this helps pupils to learn how to be positive members of their community. This is clear to see in how they celebrate the diversity of cultures in the community.

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

Leaders have created an ambitious curriculum that spans from Nursery to Year 2. Most subjects have been well sequenced to show the knowledge that pupils need and in what order they need to build it. An example of this is in mathematics, where leaders have precisely set out steps of knowledge. Consequently, in Nursery and Reception, children learn important mathematical concepts, so they are ready for learning in key stage 1.

Leaders have not yet completed their work on changing the curriculum. Due to this, there are a small number of non-core subjects that are not as well sequenced. This means pupils are not learning as precisely as they could be through the entire curriculum.

However, teachers have secure subject knowledge and plan engaging and effective lessons. As a result, pupils are progressing well through most of the curriculum.

The Nursery and Reception classes make up a large proportion of the school. Staff in this provision provide effective support to help children to learn early numeracy and literacy skills. Staff also expertly plan effective activities for children's physical and communication development. Children are confident and excited learners. They communicate effectively and follow the routines of school very well.

Teachers use information from assessments to spot when a pupil falls behind. In phonics, staff put in place extra activities to help pupils keep up with their reading. While all other key stage 1 published outcomes were in line with national figures in 2022, those for reading were low. Leaders have refined how phonics is taught. Consequently, current pupils are learning to read well.

Behaviour is consistently positive in the school. Teachers apply the agreed approach to support pupils with this. In classrooms, pupils show how much they love to learn, and low-level disruption is extremely rare. As a result, classrooms are purposeful learning environments. When a pupil needs support with their behaviour, staff talk to them skilfully and work with them to resolve any issues quickly. Leaders have put in place targeted provision for pupils with complex SEND needs. In this classroom, staff are trained very well to support pupils. However, not all staff across the school are trained well enough to provide the precise support these pupils need.

Pupils' personal development is at the heart of this school. Leaders make sure that pupils see the benefit of sharing their views by providing them with opportunities to do so. Through surveys and meetings with community leaders, pupils have been able to share what they feel needs to change in their local area. In addition, the school's 'Global week' teaches pupils about different cultures and traditions from around the world and also within their local community.

Pupils also learn to be leaders in their community through their involvement with the school council. In the school council, pupils make decisions on aspects of school life such as the clubs they will be able to take part in. From this, leaders have created a rotation of activities like pottery, den building and tennis club, which truly captures the interests of pupils.

Governors fulfil their statutory duties well and provide effective support and challenge to leaders. Leaders and governors have high ambitions that this school will help pupils to achieve the best possible outcomes. Leaders' aspirations inspire staff who are proud to be part of the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have trained staff to spot when a pupil may be at risk and in need of further help. Staff raise all concerns swiftly and effectively. As a result, leaders take quick action to keep pupils safe.

Leaders keep detailed records of all safeguarding concerns. These records show leaders' tenacity in how they work with external agencies to make sure that pupils and their families get the best possible support.

Leaders make robust checks on all staff who work in the school. Staff teach pupils how to be safe both online and in the community.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Provision for pupils with SEND is being further refined by leaders. Currently, the support that a small number of pupils with the most complex needs receive is not as precise as it could be. Leaders should continue their work to enhance and embed practice across the entire school.
- Leaders are still making changes to a small number of subjects within the curriculum where pupils do not learn as well as they could. Leaders should ensure that, for all subjects taught, staff have secure understanding of the steps of knowledge pupils will build over time and the subsequent ambitious end points they will achieve.

Background

When we have judged good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called an ungraded inspection and, it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in March 2014.

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.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	110379
Local authority	Milton Keynes
Inspection number	10287842
Type of school	Infant
School category	Community school
Age range of pupils	2 to 7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	195
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Cath Broadhead
Headteacher	Joanna Orbell
Website	www.thewillowseyc.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	13 March 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school includes provision for two-year-olds as part of the early years phase.
- The school does not currently make use of any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

The inspector carried out this inspection under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The lead inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspector met with the headteacher and other members of the leadership team. They also met with the chair and vice-chair of the governing body.
- The inspector also met with a representative from the local authority.
- The inspector carried out deep dives in the following subjects: early reading, mathematics and physical education and art. They discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.

- The inspector observed pupils' behaviour around the school and in lessons. They also spoke to pupils in lessons and during play and lunchtimes.
- The inspector considered a range of documents including leaders' evaluations of the school, their school improvement plan and minutes from governors' meetings.
- The inspector spoke to parents and carers and also took into account their responses to Ofsted Parent View.
- The inspector took account of the views of staff through conversations and the responses to the online staff survey.
- The inspector evaluated the effectiveness of the safeguarding arrangements in the school by speaking with leaders, staff and pupils. They met with the designated safeguarding leads to discuss the arrangements for safeguarding. During these meetings, the inspector scrutinised records and sampled case files to explore how the school identifies and supports pupils at risk of harm. The inspector also examined the school's work to recruit and check on the suitability of staff, as well as checking the knowledge of staff about their responsibilities.

Inspection team

Nina Marabese, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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