



The Willows Centre for Children

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 116643
LEA Portsmouth LEA
Inspection number 295112
Inspection dates 22 June 2006 to 22 June 2006
Reporting inspector Susan Gregory HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Nursery	School address	Battenburg Avenue
School category	Community		North End
Age range of pupils	0 to 5		Portsmouth PO2 0SN
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	02392666918
Number on roll	61	Fax number	02392626426
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr Dave Emson
Date of previous inspection	7 June 2004	Headteacher	Mrs Anne Swann

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
0 to 5	22 June 2006 - 22 June 2006	295112

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and one Childcare Inspector (CCI).

Description of the school

On 1st April this year, Willows became a children's centre which no longer caters exclusively for children with learning difficulties and disabilities. Willows provides care and nursery education for children who live in all areas of Portsmouth, including two children who are looked after by the local authority. The nursery children are aged 2 to 5 years and although the vast majority have special needs, the centre also admits some children without particular medical, physical or learning difficulties. Since January Willows has also provided day care for children aged 0 to 2 years, some of whom have special needs. Nearly all the children who attend the centre are of White British origin. The centre provides a broad range of outreach services for families and children including baby and toddler groups, family learning, Saturday and holiday play schemes. It has recently undergone extensive refurbishment and the building has been extended, which means that it is now large enough for community use by such groups as the National Childminders Association (NCMA).

Willows has an impressive track record. It was an early excellence centre for seven years until March 2006 and an outstanding Beacon School. It has an Investors in People Award, a Chartermark and a Healthy Schools Award. The head of the centre has recently attended a Prime Minister's reception at Number 10 Downing Street to honour 'heads of outstanding schools'.

Parents and families have huge regard for the work of Willows' staff and governing body and have complete confidence in leaving their children in the centre's care. Around 41% parents and carers of the nursery and day care children responded to the questionnaire distributed just before the inspection and several spoke to the inspectors. They all gave very favourable responses.

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 is a centre which provides an outstanding quality of care and education for children and families and excellent value for money. This is because the staff work extremely well together as a team and really do listen to what their 'users' say; they are very effective and do all they can to find ways of helping children and adults to move on quickly in their learning and personal development. As a result, children of all capabilities, including those with complex special needs and those who are looked after by the local authority make outstanding progress throughout their time at the centre. The children are settled and happily leave their parents and carers each day, eagerly engaging with activities as soon as they arrive. Strong, carefully nurtured relationships mean that children feel safe under the care and protection of the staff. Parents have nothing but praise for the centre's work and as several said: "I wish I had brought my child to Willows earlier. It's just brilliant, we love coming here!"

The Willows has been successful for a long time, and it is a tribute to the head, staff and governors that they continually strive to develop and improve what they already do well. The head has a strong vision and a determination that the centre will continue to be a place of excellence for the community. Her skilful leadership has ensured that staff have high expectations of themselves, the children and their families. She has led and managed the staff exceptionally well through an extraordinary period of building work and change, ensuring that staff know the strengths and weaknesses of the centre's work well and that they have a clear, accurate view of the steps they need to take to improve the quality of their work and develop services further.

High importance is given to the way in which children of all abilities can learn together and consequently the teaching and care are excellent. Staff are highly skilled and experienced, particularly in catering for the needs of those with learning difficulties and disabilities. The children's records and inspectors' discussions with staff show that adults gather information systematically about how well children are doing and know them very well. Great emphasis is placed on boosting self-esteem, confidence and language skills with the result that the children make huge strides in their development. The enthusiasm and exuberance of adults makes learning fun and exciting; babies, toddlers and young children are encouraged to persist at what they do, and they remain undaunted when things go wrong.

The curriculum has provided a good, secure basis for teachers' planning for a long time and has contributed very well to the children's progress. Now that the centre admits some children that do not have special needs, the staff have identified that they need to review the curriculum. This is a priority, to ensure that the breadth and range of activities provided, fully meet the needs of more capable children.

The hard work and professionalism of the staff and governors mean that the centre's outreach and day care services are excellent too. There is a good strategic plan for the development of the nursery and new services and the highly effective governing body works well with the head and deputy to keep a careful eye on the quality of what the

centre provides. The challenge that the staff and governors now face is to make even better use of the information they gather, in order to judge how well the different aspects of the education, day care and outreach services are working for children and their families. The capacity for the centre to maintain and continue to improve services is very high. The inspectors believe that parents are right to be proud of their centre and its well deserved reputation for excellence.

In order to improve the quality of its work even further, the centre should:

- put the revised curriculum in place as soon as possible
- ensure that its evaluation systems provide evidence about the impact of services on children's learning and personal development.

What the school should do to improve further

This information is included in the section on overall effectiveness, above.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

When children first come to the Willows the majority are at development levels that are well below those generally expected for their age. For many children, this reflects their high level of complex learning difficulties and disabilities. However when they leave, although still below the nationally expected levels most children have made such outstanding progress that their development is much closer to the national expectations for their age. Some of the most capable children achieve in excess to others of their own age. By the time they leave, most children have made great gains in their language and personal development, show high levels of curiosity and are starting to recognise and use numbers to count. As one mother said, her child's progress is "Unbelievable!". Staff and governors have very high expectations for the amount of progress that children will make by the time they leave the centre and over the past 5 years have set challenging targets which children consistently achieve and often exceed. Staff are not complacent and are now considering whether children can do even better.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The outstanding progress that all children make in their personal skills is clearly evident to all those who visit and work with the Willows. Children's attendance is good; they cannot wait to take part in exciting activities like hunting for buried treasure with a metal detector or blowing through a bubble gun to see how high the bubbles can go. They respond very positively to such learning opportunities and this helps develop skills that prepare them extremely well for the next stage in their lives. They are confident, very well behaved - often despite their complex needs - and happily work and play alongside one another. Babies, toddlers and older children express their likes and dislikes, and increasingly are able to make their own choices and take responsibility. They are excited about what they learn and show determination to succeed

independently at tasks that are sometimes very challenging. As a result, their spiritual, moral and social development is excellent. Whilst good, the children's cultural awareness is not yet as strong as other features of their development.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Outstanding teaching contributes significantly to children's excellent progress in their learning and personal development. Adults manage the children's behaviour very well and cultivate an atmosphere of mutual respect in which children are taught to accept each other's differences. Staff are knowledgeable about the needs of young children and babies and reinforce learning well, usually intervening at just the right moment to help children to reflect on what they are doing. The way in which staff continually check on children's learning throughout each session ensures that children are challenged and helped to practise skills in different contexts. Well-managed, unobtrusive support from professionals like speech and language therapists, contributes very well to children's individual learning programmes and helps accelerate their progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The good curriculum is well-planned and ensures that the staff are able to provide a diverse range of exciting activities which are appropriate for children's special needs and interests. Crucially, the staff have started to review the curriculum as it does not yet fully reflect the higher levels needed for the newer intake of children of average ability and above. The curriculum is well-resourced and the resources are of high quality. In particular, children of all ages benefit from, and are enthused by, the interactive whiteboard, programmable toys, and other information and communication technology (ICT). The centre's new range of ICT resources represents excellent improvement since the last inspection.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Children of all ages and abilities are extremely well cared for. Their personal needs are planned for meticulously, monitored carefully and discretely taken care of during each session. Consequently, staff make maximum use of 'learning time' as well as providing very good attention to individual children's 'care' needs. Parents and carers work in strong partnership with staff so that learning experiences at home and at the Willows complement one another, for example, to ensure that children develop good habits for healthy eating.

The staff and governors take all reasonable steps to ensure that children are safe; child protection procedures are robust and there have been no incidents of bullying

or racial discrimination. Parents, visitors and professionals, such as Health Visitors, remark on the high standards of cleanliness in the centre.

The centre offers an impressive range of activities to support families in catering for the needs of their children. Parents and carers speak very highly of the day care and outreach work. They particularly value the warm relationships with staff who are always ready to listen, share ideas when things are difficult and celebrate successes. Parents like being asked which activities would suit their needs and interests best and many, who would not wish to join other groups, are very keen to come to the centre for support.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The head, deputy, staff and governors have made an outstanding contribution to children's excellent progress and to the development of the centre's services. They have worked hard to maintain highly effective partnerships with other providers, such as the local Family Centre, the Sure Start ABC Centre, NCMA, local schools and settings and other professionals. This means that things happen as soon as possible, and in a well coordinated way. Staff are provided with very good opportunities for their professional development and training and this has had a strong, positive impact on the quality of the centre's work. The centre's rapidly developing range of services is checked and monitored systematically. The staff and governors are in a good position now to make more use of the information they already gather, to find out how well the centre's services contribute to the learning and personal development of children, parents and carers and staff.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	1	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	NA

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	NA

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	1	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	NA
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	NA

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Pupils

Thank you for letting the inspectors visit Willows. We had a lovely time meeting some of you and looking at all the great things that you are doing. The Willows is an excellent place for you to learn and play.

What we like most about Willows: * you are very happy and enjoy your work and play * you behave very well and try your best to learn and do new things * the adults look after you and your families very well * your head is an excellent leader and we have asked her to keep checking that things are going well for everyone.

We hope you will continue to help the grown ups and each other.

Yours sincerely,

Sue Gregory

HMI