

Inspection of Willow House School

120 Stanley Road, Cheadle Hulme, Stockport, Greater Manchester SK8 6RF

Inspection dates: 15 to 17 October 2024

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

No

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils cherish the positive relationships that they forge with staff. This helps most pupils to feel relaxed, safe and cared for. Pupils have experienced disrupted education prior to joining the school. Despite this, most pupils settle into school well and are eager to learn.

Pupils are typically polite and respectful of staff. Nonetheless, some staff are not equipped with the skills that they need to help pupils to manage their emotions and behaviour. This hinders how well some staff engage pupils in their learning.

Some pupils rise to the high expectations that the school sets for them. They are determined to succeed with targeted support from some staff. However, at times, pupils' achievement is hampered by weaknesses in the curriculum design and delivery.

Pupils benefit from the school's increased focus on their personal development. Individual curriculum pathways and wider therapeutic work is helping some pupils to flourish. For example, some pupils access play and art therapy to help them to build resilience. Pupils relish their gymnastics sessions and enjoy contributing to pupil council meetings. This empowers pupils to widen their knowledge beyond the curriculum.

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

All pupils have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. The school identifies the additional needs of pupils well. This helps staff to ensure that the curriculum is suitably tailored to meet pupils' needs. In recent times, the school has begun to improve the social, emotional and academic support that it gives to pupils. This helps some pupils to progress well from their starting points.

In the main, the curriculum is broad and rich. In some subjects, the school identifies the key knowledge that pupils should learn. The curriculum is sequenced carefully and logically. This helps pupils to revisit and retain essential subject knowledge before they move on to new learning. In other subjects, the curriculum thinking is less developed. This means that staff are unclear on the endpoints that pupils should achieve. In these subjects, some pupils do not develop a secure body of knowledge that they need to succeed.

At times, some teachers are not confident in designing learning activities across subjects. For example, some tasks are too easy for pupils and do not meet their additional needs or interests well. On occasion, this leads to pupils becoming disengaged with their learning. Furthermore, in some subjects, teachers do not check and address gaps in pupils' knowledge well. This hinders how well pupils remember and apply what they have learned securely over time.

The school effectively supports pupils who are at the earliest stages of reading. The phonics programme supports pupils to gain the phonics knowledge that they need to become confident and fluent readers. The school promotes reading for pleasure. For example, the school has daily reading time and initiatives to incentivise pupils to read. As a result, pupils are motivated to read and most do so with pleasure.

Some pupils benefit from expert staff who support them to regulate their emotions and behaviour. Pupils' attendance rate is high. However, some pupils easily become distracted in lessons. Often, this leads to pupils spending a large proportion of their time out of lessons to help them to calm down. The school does not identify these trends and patterns of behaviour closely. This hinders how well the school designs and implements behaviour management strategies. Consequently, the school does not effectively address the barriers that some pupils have to learning.

The school has developed a personal, social and health education (PSHE) and relationships and sex education curriculum that reflects the school's ethos and values. It pays particular regard to the protected characteristics as set out in the Equality Act 2010. The school ensures that pupils understand how to keep healthy and stay safe. Pupils benefit from talks and presentations about unhealthy relationships and online safety. Pupils' understanding of life in modern Britain is promoted well. For example, they enjoy their visits to different places of worship, galleries and museums. Some pupils' talents and interests are nurtured well. For example, pupils enjoy inter-school competitions, talent days and sporting events. This creates a positive atmosphere amongst the pupils and promotes a sense of belonging.

Pupils have access to an appropriate impartial careers information, education, advice and guidance programme. Through this programme, pupils gain a breadth of knowledge about the world of work and different career choices.

Staff speak positively about the support from members of the proprietor body. The school is considerate of the workload and welfare of staff. This boosts staff morale and promotes a sense of pride in their work. Staff are increasingly confident in carrying out their roles well. Nonetheless, the proprietor does not evaluate the school's improvement work well. Consequently, it has not addressed the school's weaknesses, notably in relation to the curriculum and behaviour management systems, quickly enough. As such, the proprietor has not ensured that the independent school standards ('the standards') are met consistently well. The school is taking sufficient steps to increase the capacity and expertise that is needed to ensure that the schools' improvement work is effective.

Policies, including an effective safeguarding policy that meets the current statutory requirements, are made available to parents and carers on the school's website and also on request. The school meets the health and safety and premises requirements of the standards. The building is maintained well and teaching spaces are bright, clean and well-resourced. There is a safe outdoor area that pupils can spend time in at breaktimes.

The proprietor ensures that the school meets the requirements of schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve? (Information for the school and proprietor)

- In some subjects, curriculum plans and schemes of work are underdeveloped. Detailed content knowledge is not clearly outlined for teachers. At times, this means that some pupils do not learn the essential knowledge that they need to succeed. The school should ensure that it develops the curriculum with clearly defined endpoints for all subjects.
- Some teachers do not have the skills and knowledge that they need to confidently teach some of the subjects that they are required to. Furthermore, activities are not well chosen and occasionally do not meet the needs of some pupils. This means that, in some subjects, the pupils do not learn as well as they should. The school should ensure that teachers build sufficient subject expertise so that they can help pupils to learn well across all subjects that they teach.
- The strategies to assess pupils' learning across subjects are not fully developed. At times, some teachers do not check that pupils have the knowledge that they need to access new subject content. This hinders how well some pupils progress through the curriculum. The school should equip staff to identify and remedy gaps in knowledge so that pupils achieve well.
- At times, the school does not design and use strategies to manage pupils' behaviour effectively. This hinders how well some pupils are supported to overcome their barriers to learning. The school should improve its behaviour management system to check how often pupils are missing learning and why this is happening so that it can improve access to learning for all pupils.
- The proprietor does not monitor and address some aspects of the school's work as well as it should. Consequently, some of the improvement work in relation to behaviour and the curriculum has not progressed quickly enough. The proprietor should ensure that it has the necessary knowledge and skills to be able to understand the quality of the school's provision across all areas so that positive changes can be made swiftly.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	136230
DfE registration number	356/6035
Local authority	Stockport
Inspection number	10342072
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent day school
Age range of pupils	5 to 14
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	5
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Halliwell Homes Ltd
Chair	Mathew Hargreaves
Headteacher	Jennifer Illsley
Annual fees (day pupils)	£51,300
Telephone number	01614 989852
Website	www.halliwellhomes.co.uk/willow-house-school
Email address	jenny.illsley@halliwellhomes.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	10 to 12 March 2020

Information about this school

- The school is located at 120 Stanley Road, Cheadle Hulme, Stockport, Greater Manchester, Greater Manchester SK8 6RF.
- The school's previous standard inspection was on 10 to 12 March 2020.
- All the pupils currently on roll have an EHC plan.
- The school provides education for pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, including those placed in a residential setting. It is registered to take a maximum of seven pupils aged between five and 14 years. At the time of the inspection, there were five pupils on roll.
- The school aims to reintegrate pupils to mainstream education within a 12-month period.
- The school is one of six schools operated by Halliwell Homes Limited.
- A new executive headteacher was appointed in September 2022. She is also responsible for two other schools within the Halliwell Homes group.
- The school does not make use of alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

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

The school has failed to meet the independent school standards. These are the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- The inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken this into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The lead inspector met with the chair of the proprietor body.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher and the deputy headteacher. They also held meetings with staff, including those responsible for attendance and pupils' behaviour, welfare, reading, special educational needs and/or disabilities and personal development.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documentation, including those relating to the standards and the curriculum.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour at breaktime, lunchtime, in lessons and around the school.
- Inspectors discussed reading with a group of pupils.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: mathematics, English and PSHE. They met leaders and teachers and visited a sample of lessons. Inspectors spoke with pupils about their learning in these subjects. They also considered the curriculum across some other subject areas and looked at examples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also met with leaders and visited lessons to review other areas of the curriculum.
- The lead inspector made a tour of the school premises to check the suitability of the premises and accommodation against the relevant standards.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors met with staff to discuss their workload and well-being.
- The inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted's online surveys for staff and pupils.
- There were no responses to Ofsted's online survey for parents. However, inspectors spoke with a representative of the local authority and the registered manager of the children's home.

Inspection team

Amina Modan, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Mark Cocker

Ofsted Inspector

Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school failed to meet the following independent school standards

Part 1. Quality of education provided

- 2(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if-
 - 2(1)(a) the proprietor ensures that a written policy on the curriculum, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work, which provides for the matters specified in sub-paragraph (2) is drawn up and implemented effectively; and
 - 2(1)(b) the written policy, plans and schemes of work-
 - 2(1)(b)(i) take into account the ages, aptitudes and needs of all pupils, including those pupils with an EHC plan.
- 3 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that the teaching at the school-
 - 3(a) enables pupils to acquire new knowledge and make good progress according to their ability so that they increase their understanding and develop their skills in the subjects taught;
 - 3(b) fosters in pupils self-motivation, the application of intellectual, physical and creative effort, interest in their work and the ability to think and learn for themselves;
 - 3(c) involves well planned lessons and effective teaching methods, activities and management of class time;
 - 3(d) shows a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the pupils, and ensures that these are taken into account in the planning of lessons;
 - 3(e) demonstrates good knowledge and understanding of the subject matter being taught;
 - 3(g) demonstrates that a framework is in place to assess pupils' work regularly and thoroughly and use information from that assessment to plan teaching so that pupils can progress;
 - 3(h) utilises effective strategies for managing behaviour and encouraging pupils to act responsibly.

Part 3. Welfare, Health and Safety

- 9 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor promotes good behaviour amongst pupils by ensuring that-
 - 9(b) the policy is implemented effectively.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

- 34(1) The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school-
 - 34(1)(a) demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently;

- 34(1)(b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently.

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