

Willow House School

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

Inspection date

2 April 2025

Overall outcome

The school does not meet all of the independent school standards that were checked during this inspection

Main inspection findings

Part 1. Quality of education provided

Paragraphs 2(1) to 2(1)(b)(i)

- At the standard inspection in October 2024, the school's curriculum did not take into account the needs of all pupils, including those pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan. Moreover, some pupils did not have opportunities to learn and make progress across the curriculum. The proprietor had not ensured that the curriculum took sufficient account of the social and emotional needs of pupils. This hindered the progress that these pupils made in the range of subjects that they studied.
- When the school's action plan was evaluated in January 2025, it was found that leaders' plans to improve the curriculum were not sufficient to address these standards. This was because the targets set were vague and the timescales for actions were unrealistic. The actions did not address how staff would be supported to develop their curriculum thinking or adapt their resources to meet the varied needs of pupils, including those with an EHC plan.
- At this progress monitoring inspection, the school has begun to improve the curriculum for pupils. There are refined schemes of work and curriculum plans for some subjects. In these subjects, the school has considered the key knowledge that pupils should learn carefully, as well as how to meet the additional needs of pupils.
- Despite some improvements, curriculum plans and schemes of work relating to other subjects are at an earlier stage of development. This includes plans and schemes of work in aesthetic and creative education. Leaders have not developed their understanding and curriculum design across the school fully. For instance, in some subjects, the curriculum lacks clarity and does not take into account the needs of pupils as well as it should.

Paragraphs 3 to 3(g)

- At the previous standard inspection, staff did not have the subject knowledge needed to deliver the curriculum well. In some lessons, staff did not identify and address pupils'

misconceptions or missing knowledge. This meant that pupils did not make the progress that they should.

- When the school's action plan was evaluated in January 2025, it was found that leaders' plans to improve how the curriculum is delivered were not acceptable. This was because the details of staff training were unclear. The actions did not consider the time needed to embed strong practice and review the impact it has on pupils' learning.
- At the time of this progress monitoring inspection, some improvements have been made in these standards. For example, the school has designed subject-specific training for some subjects to support the design and delivery of the curriculum. However, for other subjects, this training and support for staff is at the early stages of development. This hinders how well the curriculum is delivered across school. In addition, the school has not ensured that staff have the knowledge and skills to check pupils' understanding consistently well.

Paragraph 3(h)

- At the previous standard inspection, this standard was not met. However, at the time of this progress monitoring inspection, the school has revised its behaviour management policy. Staff are better equipped to use strategies effectively to manage behaviour than they have been previously. The school reviews and monitors trends in behaviour more effectively than in the past. This is helping the school to remove barriers effectively to support pupils to behave well and engage in their learning.
- Some of the independent school standards (the standards) in this part continue to remain unmet.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Paragraphs 7 to 7(b) and 32(1)(c)

- At the time of the standard inspection in October 2024, this standard was met. At the request of the Department for Education (DfE), this standard was considered as part of this progress monitoring inspection.
- The proprietor has ensured that there is a suitable safeguarding policy in place and that it is published on the school's website. The policy has regard to the appropriate statutory guidance.
- There are secure procedures in place for staff to report any concerns that they might have about a pupil's welfare. The school communicates effectively with other agencies and professionals, such as the local authority, to ensure that pupils are safe.
- The school ensures that all staff receive regular safeguarding training. This helps staff to recognise when pupils may be at risk of harm.
- All new staff receive an appropriate induction programme, safeguarding training and regular updates on areas such as harmful sexual behaviour and online safety.
- These standards continue to be met.

Paragraphs 9, 9(b)

- When the school's action plan was evaluated in January 2025, it was judged that this standard was unlikely to be met if the proposed actions were implemented. This was

because there were no details of the specific behaviour management strategies that staff would be supported to use. Since then, leaders have revised the action plan. They have added detail and specificity for completing the required actions.

- At this progress monitoring inspection, evidence showed that the proprietor and school have worked together to improve the behaviour management policy. Staff and pupils are familiar with the new policy and shared expectations of pupils' conduct are communicated clearly. Staff are increasingly confident in applying the new behaviour management systems. Records show that negative behaviour incidents have declined. Furthermore, pupils' participation and engagement in lessons have improved. The school is reviewing and strengthening its strategies to support pupils to regulate their emotions and behaviour. This work is beginning to show some improvements to pupils' behaviour.

Paragraphs 16 to 16(b)

- At the time of the previous monitoring inspection, this standard was met. At the request of the DfE, this standard was considered as part of this progress monitoring inspection. The proprietor has a suitable risk assessment policy in place that is followed by staff. Appropriate action is taken by the proprietor and staff to reduce the risks that are identified.
- The previously unmet standards in this part are likely to be met.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Paragraphs 34(1) to 34(1)(b)

- At the school's standard inspection in October 2024, the standards in this part were unmet. The proprietor had not ensured that the standards were consistently and securely met. This is because staff were not equipped suitably to design and deliver the curriculum effectively. Additionally, they were not supported to manage behaviour effectively.
- The action plan that the school submitted to the DfE in November 2024 was evaluated by Ofsted in January 2025 as being unacceptable.
- During this progress monitoring inspection, evidence shows that leaders have refined their action plan. They have begun to develop their understanding of the requirements for independent schools. For instance, they are now checking actively the school's compliance with all the standards. This has helped them to revise policies and practices to improve the management of behaviour across school. Nevertheless, the work in improving the quality of education is less well developed.
- The proprietor is at the early stages of renewing its systems and procedures, especially in relation to checking pupils' learning and delivery of the curriculum. For example, the school has begun to explore the use of specialist support to help develop staff confidence and skills in designing learning activities. However, this support is not in place fully. Additionally, the impact of some of the school's improvement work has not had the time needed to be fully realised. Consequently, some staff are not equipped as well as they should be to design and deliver the curriculum across subjects effectively.
- The previously unmet standards in this part continue to be unmet.

Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010

- The school has an appropriate accessibility plan in place.
- This standard continues to be met.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school does not meet the requirements of the schedule to The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements that were checked during this inspection, as set out in the annex of this report. This included the standards and requirements that the school was judged to not comply with at the previous inspection. Not all of the standards and associated requirements were checked during this inspection.

School details

Unique reference number	136230
DfE registration number	356/6035
Inspection number	10388855

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

Type of school	Other independent special school
School status	Independent special 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 (executive headteacher)
Annual fees (day pupils)	£50,700
Telephone number	0161 498 9852
Website	www.halliwellhomes.co.uk/willow-house-school
Email address	jenny.illsley@halliwellhomes.co.uk
Dates of previous standard inspection	15 to 17 October 2024

Information about this school

- The previous standard inspection took place from 15 to 17 October 2024.
- The school is located at 120 Stanley Road, Cheadle Hulme, Stockport, Greater Manchester SK8 6RF.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- All pupils 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 is one of six schools operated by Halliwell Homes Limited.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out at the request of the registration authority for independent schools. The purpose of the inspection was to monitor the progress the school has made in meeting the independent school standards and other requirements that it was judged to not comply with at its previous inspection.
- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first progress monitoring inspection since the standard inspection in October 2024. It was conducted without notice.
- The DfE required the school to prepare a statutory action plan. Ofsted evaluated this plan on 14 January 2025. The proposed action plan was deemed unacceptable.
- During the inspection, the inspector met with the headteacher, senior leaders and staff.
- The inspector reviewed schemes of work and pupils' work. She also visited some lessons.
- The inspector spoke with a number of pupils about their learning and behaviour.
- The inspector reviewed documents, including the safeguarding policy, curriculum documents and documents relating to behaviour, leadership and management.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspector: reviewed the SCR; 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.

Inspection team

Amina Modan, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school does not meet the following independent school standards

Standards that were not met at the previous inspection and remain un-met at this inspection

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(f) utilises effectively classroom resources of a good quality, quantity and range;
 - 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.

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.

The school now meets the following requirements of the independent school standards

Standards that were not met at the previous inspection and now are met at this inspection

Part 1. Quality of education provided

- 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.

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