

Willow House School

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

Unique reference number (URN): 136230

Inspection report: 25 March 2026

Exceptional	
Strong standard	
Expected standard	
Needs attention	
Urgent improvement	

Safeguarding standards met

The safeguarding standards are met. This means that leaders and/or those responsible for governance and oversight fulfil their specific responsibilities and have established an open culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and concerns are actively identified, acted upon and managed. As a result, pupils are made safer and feel safe.

How we evaluate safeguarding

When we inspect schools for safeguarding, they can have the following outcomes:

- **Met:** The school has an open and positive culture of safeguarding. All legal requirements are met.
- **Not met:** The school has not created an open and positive culture of safeguarding. Not all legal requirements are met.
- **Insufficient evidence:** Inspectors were unable to gather sufficient evidence to judge whether safeguarding standards are met.

Strong standard ●

Attendance and behaviour

Strong standard ●

Attendance is high because pupils enjoy coming to school. This is a significant achievement given the previous experiences pupils have had of schooling. Their engagement in their learning is also evident in the pride they take in their work. On the whole, pupils are punctual.

Pupils respond positively to leaders' high expectations. Even when individual pupils experience moments of difficulty managing their emotions and actions, this rarely impacts on other pupils' work. Teachers are skilled in helping pupils during times when they need emotional support. Pupils quickly calm and re-engage in classwork, when this happens. These approaches result in sustained improvements for individuals, becoming increasingly independent over their time at the school. Pupils learn to trust adults. They develop increased confidence in themselves and they know that staff are there to support them in every aspect of their lives.

Leaders have established a typically calm, purposeful and inclusive school culture in which positive behaviour and relationships are expected. Clear routines and high expectations are embedded throughout the school and staff apply them with skill and consistency. Relationships between staff and pupils are respectful and warm. Most pupils demonstrate very positive attitudes to learning.

Inclusion

Strong standard ●

Leaders, including the proprietor body, have prioritised putting into place practices that focus sharply on identifying and meeting pupils' needs. For example, training staff to recognise how these needs may change over time and how other vulnerabilities may arise. There is an agreed approach among all schools in the Halliwell Group to supporting pupils, who have experienced crisis and trauma over a significant period.

Pupils have not experienced success in education before coming here. Leaders draw on additional support from the Group, including in clinical practice. They ensure highly effective communication with pupils' carers so that their learning and development continue after school ends for the day.

Leaders and staff know the pupils extremely well. They produce helpful support plans that are highly effective in addressing pupils' social and emotional needs through specific provision, such as adaptations in lessons, sensory breaks and targeted support sessions. They routinely check on how effective these support plans are and use a range of factors to decide how and when plans need to change.

The support pupils receive is having a consistently positive impact, particularly on their attendance and engagement in school, on their behaviour and their communication and teamwork skills.

Leadership and governance

Strong standard 

Leaders put pupils' best interests at the forefront of all their decision-making. They take an incisive and honest approach to school self-evaluation and improvement, focusing throughout on the extent to which all aspects of the school's provision impact on pupils' progress and wellbeing. They have correctly identified the school's next steps for development. They have an in-depth understanding of and appreciation for their responsibilities as regards their statutory duties.

Leaders have created a well-structured and purposeful environment in which staff feel genuinely supported, valued and equipped to do their jobs effectively. Professional learning, particularly in the approach the school takes to education, care and pupil wellbeing, is at the core of the success leaders have brought about here. Intensive professional learning takes place upon induction to the school and the impact of this is monitored through regular supervision and feedback. Ongoing training is provided, for example, in curriculum developments, but also in response to the changing needs of pupils. As a result of this, the curriculum and its implementation is improving and pupil achievement is increasing.

The proprietor has sustained their improvements to the oversight they have of the school's work. They are involved in checking on the practical implications of the policies they devise and provide suitable support and challenge to school leaders. They have ensured that the independent school standards continue to be met.

Personal development and wellbeing

Strong standard 

The personal development programme at Willow House has been carefully developed through the school's overall approach to therapeutic parenting. It begins with pupils' needs and the difficulties they have experienced previously. The approach focuses on rebuilding trust, developing emotional maturity and improving pupils' social interaction skills. Records demonstrate that this approach has a very positive impact on pupils' development over time. They leave the school with a much greater chance of success in their next educational placement.

The school provides a programme of personal development that is designed for the ages, needs and circumstances of all pupils. Pupils are supported to develop confidence, resilience and independence. Leaders promote pupils' physical and mental health. Staff have a very good understanding of the emotional needs of each pupil. They benefit from a multitude of enriching experiences, such as outdoor activities, learning to cook for themselves and their peers and a range of trips and visits. Most of these connect to the school curriculum, for example watching a film at the cinema in preparation for learning about these themes in English.

Alongside this core development work is a tailored and timetabled personal, social and health education programme. Pupils demonstrate an age and developmentally appropriate understanding of sex and relationships education and of the rights and responsibilities of citizens in the UK. For example, pupils develop a strong sense of fairness and understand that everyone should be treated kindly and that differences should be respected.

All pupils receive advice about their future careers from an external adviser, who meets with them individually. This advice includes the skills they are given the opportunity to develop in school to help them be more successful. Pupils have opportunities to contribute to school life and their voices are genuinely listened to. Pupils rise to the leadership positions they have and actively bring about improvements through their council.

Expected standard

Achievement

Expected standard 

Pupils start at the school below, or often well below, where they should be in terms of age-related expectations. While they are here, they very quickly re-engage in learning and make progress in all their subjects. They particularly make rapid progress in learning to read and develop a real enjoyment of stories and other texts.

Many pupils join with significant gaps in the basic skills they should have for their age. This is particularly the case in writing. Leaders have identified this as a priority for improvement. It is clear that pupils are benefiting from a more strategic focus on this. However, this is not yet consistently taught well, so some pupils continue to struggle with this area of learning.

When pupils leave Willow House, they do so having developed greater independence, emotional and academic maturity. Their destinations show that the school prepares them well for their future school placements.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Leaders have undertaken a review of the curriculum, recognising that it previously lacked the structure needed to give staff or pupils a coherent, sequenced programme of learning. Leaders took decisive action to introduce a well-designed, 2-year rolling programme that is organised around important concepts and, where possible, connections are made across subjects.

High-quality, relevant texts anchor each topic. There is a strong emphasis on subject-specific vocabulary, with drama, immersive experiences and teaching learners about concepts or skills before they encounter them in the classroom used effectively.

Leaders have made a considerable investment in training staff, not only in the new curriculum approaches, but also to ensure the specific needs of each individual child are understood. This means that the curriculum is being delivered well, is suitable for the pupils in the school and is enabling them to make progress. On the whole, it is delivered effectively through an appropriate range of activities.

Teachers check pupils' progress in real time, often adjusting activities and approaches based on pupils' engagement and understanding. Their progress through the curriculum is shared routinely with carers so learning can be supported effectively outside school as well.

There are aspects of the physical education curriculum that are not as well resourced as they could be. The outside area is underdeveloped and does not currently support the physical development needs that some pupils have.

What it's like to be a pupil at this school

Pupils who attend Willow House School come to school almost every day. This is because they enjoy the work that they do here and the dedicated support they receive from their teachers and other staff.

Pupils have experienced breakdowns in their schooling in the past. When they join Willow House, they quickly regain some self-confidence and interest in education. This is reflected in their high attendance, their improved behaviour and the pride and resilience they show towards their school work, even when it is difficult.

They particularly enjoy the many and varied events and visits they experience while they are at the school. They learn about other faiths and cultures and develop an appreciation of different artists. They have many opportunities to engage with the local community and this helps them to develop a sense of belonging. They leave the school well prepared for their next stages in education, which typically means successfully transferring into community schooling.

Pupils achieve well overall, especially in developing their personal skills, such as interacting socially and sensibly with each other. They also make steady progress through the well-designed curriculum, though they could improve their writing skills further.

Over time, pupils learn that they are safe and valued. Leaders hold high expectations for every pupil regardless of need. There is clear evidence that this makes a sustained difference to pupils' behaviour, engagement and wellbeing.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that teachers know the best approaches to improving pupils' writing skills.
- Leaders need to ensure that the physical development curriculum is well designed and resourced.

About this inspection

Inspectors carried out this standard inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, and checked the school's compliance with the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

Following our renewed inspection framework, all inspections are now led by His Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

This standard inspection was brought forward following a progress monitoring inspection in November 2025. The school met all the independent school standards at this progress monitoring inspection.

Inspection activities:

Inspectors met with school leaders and the chair of the proprietor body. Inspectors met with leaders to explore their arrangements for safeguarding pupils; the school curriculum and how leaders track the progress pupils make in their subjects.

Inspectors undertook activities to ascertain if the school continued to meet the independent school standards. These included checks on the school premises and checks on the arrangements for the welfare, health and safety of pupils and staff.

Inspectors met with pupils, staff and pupils' carers.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school is an independent special school catering for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs.

The school is registered for up to 7 pupils aged between 5 and 14 years. There were 6 pupils on roll at the time of this inspection.

The school uses no alternative provision.

The school's address is 120 Stanley Road, Cheadle Hulme, Stockport, Greater Manchester SK8 6RF.

The chair of the proprietor body is Mr Mathew Hargreaves.

The fees currently charged are £75,250.

The email address of the school is contact@halliwellhomes.co.uk.

Executive Headteacher: Emma Fletcher

Independent school standards

Independent school standards are either met or not met for each category.

All standards have been met.

2. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Standards met

All standards have been met.

3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Standards met

All standards have been met.

4. Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

Standards met

All standards have been met.

5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

Standards met

All standards have been met.

6. Provision of information

Standards met

All standards have been met.

7. Manner in which complaints are handled

Standards met

All standards have been met.

8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Standards met

All standards have been met.

Lead inspector:

Philippa Darley, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspector:

Cleo Cunningham, Ofsted Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

This data was available to the inspector at the time of the inspection.

 This data is from 25 March 2026

Total pupils

6

School capacity

7

Pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan

6

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

N/A

Our grades explained

Exceptional 

Practice is exceptional: of the highest standard nationally. Other schools can learn from it.

Strong standard 

The school reaches a strong standard. Leaders are working above the standard expected of them.

Expected standard

The school is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standard set out in statutory and non-statutory legislation and the professional standards expected of them.

Needs attention

The expected standards are not met but leaders are likely able to make the necessary improvements.

Urgent improvement

The school needs to make urgent improvements to provide the expected standard of education and/or care.

Insufficient evidence

Inspectors were unable to gather reliable enough evidence to grade an evaluation area. This is rare and normally only happens if there are no pupils on roll at the school.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) inspects services providing education and skills for children and learners of all ages, and inspects and regulates services that care for children and young people.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231

Textphone: 0161 618 8524

E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2026



© Crown copyright