

The Willows School

1 Weaver Road, South Hykeham, Lincoln LN6 3QN

Inspection date

19 November 2025

Overall outcome

The school is likely to meet all the independent school standards when it opens

Main inspection findings

Part 1. Quality of education provided

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

- The Willows School intends to deliver education for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs and/or autism. All pupils will have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and an education, health and care (EHC) plan funded by a local authority
- The proposed school has a curriculum policy in place, supported by appropriate schemes of work. These schemes reflect the needs and abilities of the pupils. They align with the school's ambition to provide an inclusive and challenging curriculum.
- Pupils will learn a wide range of appropriate curriculum subjects. There is an appropriate emphasis placed on core subjects such as English, mathematics and science. The school has suitable plans in place to help pupils learn to read or catch up using a systematic approach to the teaching of phonics.

Paragraphs 2(2)(d) to 2(2)(e)(iii), 2(2)(h) to 2A(2)

- The proposed school will also prioritise personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education. This curriculum has been crafted with care. It reflects the school's aims and addresses the additional needs of pupils who will attend the school.
- Pupils will be provided with daily PSHE lessons, themed projects and off-site experiences to promote curiosity, independence and social skills.
- The proposed school has considered how secondary pupils will be provided with impartial meaningful careers advice and guidance that will help them to make decisions about their futures.
- Pupils will learn about healthy relationships, identity and social issues at a level that is appropriate for their age and stage. Relationships and sex education (RSE) will provide pupils the opportunity for discussion and reflection. The curriculum will be adapted to ensure that the additional needs of pupils are considered.
- The proposed school has ensured that statutory requirements for the teaching of RSE are fulfilled. An RSE policy is in place. Leaders have considered how they will consult with parents and carers about this policy.

Paragraphs 3 and 4

- Staff will be provided with a wide-ranging programme of training on appointment. This training will ensure that they are well placed to deliver the curriculum and manage pupils' behaviour. They will continue to deepen their expertise through ongoing professional development and collaboration with other professionals. The proposed school will provide well-chosen, high-quality resources to support effective teaching.
- Leaders will carry out baseline assessments for all pupils. Alongside EHC plan targets, staff will use their knowledge of pupils' needs, aptitudes and prior attainment to inform their decisions about the planning and delivery of the curriculum for each pupil. Staff will use ongoing assessment to identify gaps in pupils' knowledge and adjust teaching accordingly.
- The proprietor has ensured that the school is likely to meet all the independent school standards (the standards) in this part.

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

Paragraphs 5 to 5(d)(iii)

- The proposed school's curriculum includes provision for pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development. It extends beyond academic learning to support pupils to develop the school's key values: 'respect, kindness, safety, hardworking'. Preparing pupils for their next steps will be at the heart of the school's work.
- The proposed school's offer will include off-site visits, community engagement and opportunities for pupils to deepen their understanding of other faiths and cultures. They will learn the importance of fundamental British values. Pupils will consider current affairs and other relevant issues at a daily 'nurture breakfast'. Discussions will include the value of diversity and an understanding of protected characteristics.
- Leaders will seek to gather pupil voice. Democracy will be promoted through a student council. Leaders will ensure that pupils are presented with a balanced point of view. The school will not allow pupils to be exposed to partisan political views.
- The school's 'Active Citizen' programme will support pupils to develop their self-esteem and self-confidence. It will provide them with the chance to contribute to society. This will lead to further opportunities such as work experience. It is intended to prepare pupils for life in modern Britain.
- The school's restorative approach to managing behaviour means that pupils will develop an understanding of what is right and wrong.
- The proprietor has ensured that the school is likely to meet all the standards in this part.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Paragraphs 7 to 7(b)

- The safeguarding policy is up to date with current statutory guidance. It is available on the school's website.

- Safeguarding leaders have completed the training they need to fulfil their roles effectively. They demonstrate a clear understanding of current national safeguarding challenges, as well as specific safeguarding challenges that the school may face. They will ensure that all staff have appropriate training so that they are well placed to spot the signs that a pupil may be at risk of harm, including when online.
- The proposed school has established systems in place for staff to raise their concerns about a pupil's safety or well-being. Staff will record these concerns on an electronic system. Safeguarding leaders will meet regularly to review these concerns and ensure that the right action is taken.

Paragraphs 9 to 9(c), 10

- The proposed school has suitable behaviour, exclusion and anti-bullying policies in place.
- Leaders are committed to understanding the behavioural needs of all pupils. They have established systems to ensure that pupils' additional needs are identified and will be clearly communicated to staff. Behaviour plans will provide staff with information about the best strategies to use to support each pupil to manage their behaviour. Leaders will ensure that staff have the training they need to understand pupils' behaviour. This work will be supported by additional expert staff such as the coordinators for SEND and psychologists.
- Any incidents of poor behaviour or bullying will be recorded. Leaders intend to review this information on a regular basis. They will use these records, alongside attendance and safeguarding information, to build a bigger picture of each pupil.

Paragraphs 11 to 13, 16 to 16(b)

- The proprietor has successfully addressed the concerns raised at the last inspection that led to standards being judged as unlikely to meet. Leaders now can demonstrate how they take their responsibilities for the health, safety and welfare of pupils seriously. They understand that they are accountable for the safety of pupils, staff and visitors to the school.
- The health and safety policy sets out the proposed school's intent and systems appropriately. Leaders have taken effective action to ensure that the proposed school is compliant with fire safety requirements. Suitable systems are in place for first aid. A wide range of appropriate checks, statutory and otherwise, are in place for the proposed school to monitor the effectiveness of the systems they have identified.
- Leaders have written an appropriate risk assessment policy. They have identified the actions they intend to take to reduce risk and how they will monitor the efficacy of the management of potential risks. A wide range of risk assessments are in place, for example, relating to the school's building and off-site visits.

Paragraphs 14, 15

- Leaders will provide a staff-to-pupil ratio, which means that pupils are likely to be suitably supervised throughout the school day.
- Attendance and admissions registers comply with statutory requirements.
- The proprietor has ensured that the school is likely to meet all the standards in this part.

Part 4. Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

Paragraphs 18(2) to 18(2)(e), 18(3) to 18(4)(c), 19(1) to 19(2)(d)(ii), 19(3), 20(6) to 20(6)(b)(iii), 21(1) to 21(3)(b), 21(6)

- The proposed school has clear systems for the recruitment of staff. Leaders have completed safer recruitment training. They understand the statutory checks they need to make to ensure that staff are suitable for the roles for which they are applying.
- These checks are recorded and made available on the single central record. This record meets the requirements for the information that it must contain, including that which relates to the leadership and management of the school.
- Leaders do not plan to use supply staff. However, they know which processes and checks to perform if they use supply staff in the future.
- The proprietor has ensured that the school is likely to meet all the standards in this part.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

Paragraphs 23(1) to 23(1)(c), 28(1) to 29(1)(b)

- Since the previous pre-registration inspection, the proprietor has made the necessary improvements to the premises to address the standards that were not likely to be met.
- The proposed school is located at premises which were previously a leisure centre. The building has been extensively refurbished to a high standard. Leaders have taken great care to create a pleasant and welcoming space for pupils to learn and socialise.
- Classrooms and other parts of the school are well resourced. Primary classrooms are bright and cheerful. Secondary pupils will learn in subject-based classrooms. Pupils will have access to well-stocked primary and secondary libraries. Throughout the school, there are a number of spaces for small groups and individuals to work. The school has developed a sensory room for primary-age pupils.
- There is plenty of outdoor space for pupils to play and learn. There is wide range of outdoor play equipment, a multi-use games area and spaces where pupils can choose to be quiet.
- The proposed school has washing, changing and toilet facilities which are appropriate for the age of pupils. The facilities have adequate hot and cold water. The hot water is set to an appropriate temperature and does not pose a risk of scalding to pupils.
- Pupils have access to clearly labelled drinking water.

Paragraphs 24(1) to 24(1)(b), 24(2)

- The proposed school has an appropriate medical room solely for the examination and treatment of pupils who are unwell. It includes a bed. There is access to washing and toileting facilities.

Paragraphs 25 to 27(b)

- The proposed school has been designed with pupils' needs in mind. It meets all the requirements for the health, safety and welfare of pupils.

- All 15 classrooms have suitable lighting and acoustics. Other spaces around the school are well lit, including outdoor lighting. While the acoustics in the school hall are appropriate, leaders are considering further ways in which they can improve this space to address pupils' potential sensory needs.
- The proprietor has ensured that the school is likely to meet all the standards in this part.

Part 6. Provision of information

Paragraphs 32(1) to 32(1)(d), 32(1)(f) to 32(2)(b), 32(2)(b)(ii), 32(2)(d) to 32(3)(g)

- The proposed school's website is already in place. Leaders have ensured that all of the information required by the standards is met.
- The website provides parents with contact details for the school and the headteacher. The address and telephone number of the proprietor are also provided.
- The website directs parents to a wide range of policies. These include safeguarding, admissions, behaviour, health and safety and first-aid policies.
- Leaders have designed a template for an annual report to parents which will provide them with information about their child's progress, attainment and personal development.
- Leaders understand their statutory duty to inform parents of any inspection reports and examination results relating to the proposed school.
- The proprietor has ensured that the school is likely to meet all the standards in this part.

Part 7. Manner in which complaints are handled

Paragraphs 33 to 33(k)

- The proposed school has a comprehensive complaints policy in place. This policy is available on the school's website and can be provided for parents at their request.
- The policy explains to parents how to complain. Leaders have made provision for complaints to be managed informally in the first instance. The arrangements for a formal complaint are clearly identified. The policy sets out the timescales at each stage of the complaints process.
- The proprietor has ensured that the school is likely to meet all the standards in this part.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Paragraphs 34(1) to 34(1)(c)

- At the previous pre-registration inspection, this standard was judged as not likely to be met. Since then, the proprietor has taken effective action, and it is now likely that the standards will be met. Concerns relating to the well-being of pupils have been resolved.

- The proprietor has worked closely with Lincolnshire local authority to identify a specific need for pupils with SEND in the local area. There is a clear vision for the proposed school. The core purpose to educate pupils in a caring and ambitious learning environment is clearly communicated. This vision has been ably translated into the proposed day-to-day running of the school by the headteacher and other senior leaders.
- Leaders bring a wealth of experience to their roles. They demonstrate key attributes and knowledge that provide a firm foundation for the leadership and management of the proposed school. They understand their statutory duties with regard to safeguarding pupils and promoting their well-being. They have an understanding of the standards and have systems in place to monitor the proposed school's compliance with these.
- The proprietor has ensured that the school is likely to meet all the standards in this part.

Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010

- The proprietor has written a suitable accessibility plan for the proposed school. It outlines how leaders will improve accessibility to the curriculum, the physical environment and the delivery of information.
- The proprietor has ensured that the school is likely to meet this regulation.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school is likely to meet the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Proposed school details

Unique reference number	152281
DfE registration number	925/6077
Inspection number	10425952

This inspection was carried out under section 99 of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's likely compliance with the independent school standards that are required for registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent day school
Proprietor	The Willows School Limited
Chair	Jawad Sheikh
Headteacher	Katy Edmondson
Annual fees (day pupils)	£61,500 to £79,000
Telephone number	015 2245 3910
Website	thewillowsschool.rests-sen.uk
Email address	thewillows@rests-sen.uk

Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal	Inspector's recommendation
Age range of pupils	Not applicable	5 to 15	5 to 15
Number of pupils on the school roll	Not applicable	90	90

Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal
Gender of pupils	Not applicable	Mixed
Number of full-time pupils of compulsory school age	Not applicable	90
Number of part-time pupils	Not applicable	0

Number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities	Not applicable	90
Of which, number of pupils with an education, health and care plan	Not applicable	90
Of which, number of pupils paid for by a local authority with an education, health and care plan	Not applicable	90

Staff

	School's current position	School's proposal
Number of full-time equivalent teaching staff	14	55
Number of part-time teaching staff	1	Not known
Number of staff in the welfare provision	Not applicable	Not applicable

Information about this proposed school

- The proprietor of the school is The Willows School Limited.
- The school will operate on one site located at 1 Weaver Road, South Hykeham, Lincoln, LN6 3QN.
- The proposed school intends to provide specialist education for up to 90 pupils aged five to 15 years who find mainstream school settings challenging. Pupils will have a diagnosis of autism and/or social, emotional and mental health difficulties. Pupils will have an EHC plan.
- The school does not intend to use alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- The Department for Education commissioned the inspection to check whether the proposed school is likely to meet the standards if it is given permission to open.
- This was the school's second pre-registration inspection. When the school was last inspected in July 2025, inspectors judged that the school was not likely to meet all the standards when it opened.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher and other members of the senior leadership team. The lead inspector met with two representatives of the proprietor body, including the chair.
- The lead inspector toured the school's site to check the suitability of the premises.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation, including schemes of work and policies and procedures related to safeguarding, health and safety, risk assessment, administration of first aid, complaints and fire safety.

Inspection team

Caroline Poole, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Dave Gilkerson	His Majesty's Inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Raising concerns and making a complaint about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-ofsted. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Parent View

You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk, or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: www.gov.uk/ofsted.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

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 <http://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 2025