

# Inspection of Willow School

25 Jermyn Street, North Kesteven, Sleaford, Lincolnshire NG34 7RU

---

Inspection dates: 15 to 17 July 2025

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>
------------------------------	-------------

---

The quality of education	<b>Good</b>
--------------------------	-------------

Behaviour and attitudes	<b>Good</b>
-------------------------	-------------

Personal development	<b>Good</b>
----------------------	-------------

Leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
---------------------------	-------------

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected
--	--------------------------

Does the school meet the independent school standards?	<b>Yes</b>
--	------------

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Within a short period of time, the school makes a positive difference for its pupils and their families. Parents and carers appreciate how strong relationships are built as soon as pupils join the school. Each pupil is seen as an individual. Pupils know that teachers will help them to feel safe and happy.

The values of grow, achieve, inspire and nurture underpin the school's calm, caring environment. The proprietor and staff care deeply about helping pupils to succeed. Pupils learn to be empathetic and respectful towards their peers. They learn with minimal interruption because staff quickly identify and support any pupils who need help to recognise and manage their emotions.

The school has high aspirations for what pupils can achieve. Staff build pupils' confidence in their ability to succeed, both academically and socially. Consequently, pupils re-engage with their education, try hard and learn to persevere.

Pupils learn the importance of patience and setting goals for themselves. They strive to earn 'Willow' tokens, which they exchange for rewards. Highly individualised programmes help pupils overcome their fears and anxieties. For some, this allows them to fulfil their basic self-care needs. They learn how local services can support their physical health and well-being.

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

Most pupils arrive at Willow School after prolonged periods of time out of school or having had a disrupted education. During the induction process, teachers and clinical staff work together to identify each pupil's needs. This includes any additional special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Staff often check to ensure that the support each pupil receives is appropriate. Staff listen carefully to the views and aspirations of pupils and their families. This information is used to design a suitable curriculum and inform each pupil's education, health and care (EHC) plan.

Pupils follow the school's broad and ambitious 'branch' curriculum. For each subject, pupils may work on a different branch depending on their needs. Staff know exactly what knowledge pupils should remember at each stage. This helps them to spot and fill any gaps in pupils' learning caused by previous low attendance.

The school checks routinely how well pupils are doing in their studies. These checks have helped raise standards, especially in mathematics. Staff are developing their expertise to lead on subject improvements. However, this work is only just beginning. As a result, the implementation of the curriculum and how well it is learned by pupils varies across subjects.

Many pupils have had negative experiences of reading and writing previously. This often creates a sense of anxiety. Staff boost pupils' confidence with daily phonics

teaching and repeated practice. Teachers check closely how well pupils are learning to read and give extra help when needed. Pupils who follow the school's early reading programme do well. However, over time, some pupils do not become independent readers and writers. For example, some pupils struggle with forming letters correctly. They do not receive sufficient opportunities to rehearse their reading and writing knowledge. This limits how fluent and independent they become in these necessary skills. As a result, the negative attitudes and weak writing habits they arrive at the school with are sometimes not resolved fully.

Morning briefings keep staff, including the pastoral team, up to date with strategies they can use to help pupils. Different approaches to support pupils' sensory needs ensure that they stay focused and involved with their learning. Each small step that pupils make in their progress and personal growth is celebrated.

Pupils' behaviour improves significantly during their time at the school. They follow a clear behaviour curriculum that includes social skills such as table manners, staying calm and listening to others. Staff teach everyday routines step by step, leaving nothing to chance. This clarity helps pupils to regulate their emotions and supports their mental health. As a result, pupils want to come to school and their attendance improves significantly.

The school's strong personal development programme has pastoral support at its core. Pupils learn to manage their emotions, build independence and form positive relationships. Daily sessions focus on key life skills such as following routines, trying new foods and staying safe and healthy. For example, toothbrushing sessions help pupils to learn self-care, while 'soothe your senses' assemblies promote well-being and emotional regulation. The school provides a meaningful careers programme. Pupils explore jobs in the local community and visit businesses to learn about the services they provide, including public institutions like the emergency services.

Staff are overwhelmingly positive about the school. They value the support they receive to manage their workload and support their well-being.

The proprietor fully understands its responsibilities and is committed to giving pupils the best opportunities. This starts with providing high-quality accommodation and resources that help pupils to learn in a nurturing environment. Staff who work at the school have a wealth of expertise to support pupils with SEND. The proprietor completes appropriate checks on the quality of the provision and has a clear and accurate picture of the school.

The school consistently meets the independent school standards, including its legal duties under 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)**

- The curriculum limits opportunities for pupils to rehearse their reading and writing skills. This makes it harder for them to become more fluent in the necessary knowledge or to change any negative perceptions they may have. The school must ensure that staff provide pupils with sufficient opportunities to learn to read and write in a systematic way, so that pupils become increasingly independent when using these skills.
- In some subjects, the curriculum is implemented inconsistently. When this happens, pupils' recall of important subject knowledge is varied and their learning slows. The school must ensure that staff deliver the curriculum in each subject effectively and that they check that pupils can recall more subject content over time.

## **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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	150438
<b>DfE registration number</b>	925/6065
<b>Local authority</b>	Lincolnshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	10374830
<b>Type of school</b>	Other independent special school
<b>School status</b>	Independent day school
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	7 to 14
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	10
<b>Number of part-time pupils</b>	0
<b>Proprietor</b>	Willow Independent Ltd
<b>Chair</b>	James MacKay
<b>Headteacher</b>	Rebecca Miller
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£50,000
<b>Telephone number</b>	01529 668400
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.willow-school.co.uk">www.willow-school.co.uk</a>
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:enquiries@willow-school.co.uk">enquiries@willow-school.co.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected

## Information about this school

- The school was registered by the Department for Education in February 2024. This is the school's first standard inspection.
- The school operates from 25 Jermyn Street, Sleaford NG34 7RU. From September 2025, the school intends to operate from two additional sites. Up to seven pupils will be based at 7 White Hart Mews, Sleaford NG34 7RY. The school will provide its key stage 3 provision at 27 West Banks, Sleaford NG34 7PX.
- The school's headteacher is also a director of Willow Independent Ltd.
- The school caters for pupils with a primary SEND of communication, interaction, cognition and learning needs. All pupils have an EHC plan. Some pupils may be in the care of the local authority.
- The school is registered to admit up to 20 pupils. There are currently 10 pupils on the school's roll.
- The school does not use the services of any 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 meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in 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.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the school's directors, including the headteacher. They also met with a range of staff.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in English, including early reading, mathematics and personal, social and health education. They also considered the school's 'The world around us' curriculum which incorporates history, geography and religious studies. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, looked at curriculum plans, visited sample lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. An inspector also listened to pupils read.
- Inspectors sampled other subjects, including computing, physical education (PE), science, and art and design.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors: met with leaders;

reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; reviewed safeguarding records; and considered the extent to which the school has created a positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.

- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour and conduct and spoke with them about their views about various aspects of school life.
- Inspectors considered a range of documents and policies, including those relating to health and safety, risk assessments, curriculum and complaints.
- The lead inspector toured the school's three premises to review the suitability of the accommodation.
- Inspectors considered the views of staff and parents on site and through their responses to Ofsted's surveys.

### **The school's proposed change to the maximum number of pupils.**

The school has applied to the Department for Education (DfE) to make a 'material change' to its registration. At the DfE's request, we checked whether the school is likely to meet the relevant independent school standards if the DfE decides to approve the change. This part of the inspection was carried out under section 162(4) of the Education Act 2002.

- The outcome of this part of the inspection is: **the school is likely to meet the relevant independent school standards if the material changes relating to the school provision are implemented.**
- The school has clear plans in place to increase the number of teaching and welfare staff, subject to approval of the material change. In September 2025, it intends to increase the number of full-time teaching staff from three to nine. The necessary recruitment checks will be undertaken before these new staff start working at the school. As the school continues to grow, further staff will be recruited.
- The school has acquired two additional sites to support its proposed increase in the number of pupils it intends to admit. These sites are likely to meet the requirements of the standards and are appropriate for their intended use.
- The school has a sound understanding of the necessary health and safety checks required for the proposed material change. The proprietor intends to set up online systems to monitor and check attendance, behaviour, safeguarding, and health and safety checks.
- Key stage 3 pupils at the West Banks site will use PE and shower facilities at a nearby secondary school. Staff have completed the necessary risk assessments to facilitate this.
- Leaders have planned carefully for the proposed changes. The school will increase pupil numbers gradually at each site to avoid any disruption to learning for current pupils on roll.
- The proprietor's work to ensure that the standards are met consistently is suitable, if the DfE approves the material change.

### **Information about the material change inspection**

- The proprietor has requested a material change to increase the number of pupils it intends to admit to the school from 20 to 52. This is the school's first material change inspection.
- The lead inspector met with leaders to discuss the proprietor's material change application. The school's curriculum, pupils' welfare, health and safety arrangements, and the additional premises and accommodation were considered in relation to the proposed material change.

### **Inspection team**

Shaheen Hussain, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Peter Monk

Ofsted Inspector



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](mailto: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/](http://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](mailto: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](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)

© Crown copyright 2025