

The Willows

Willow Grange, Henry Street, Rishton, Blackburn BB1 4JJ

Inspection date

6 June 2024

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

Paragraph 2, 2(1)–2(1)(b)(ii), 2(2), 2(2)(a)–2(2)(d)(ii), 2(2)(h), 2(2)(i)

- The proprietor has prepared an appropriate curriculum policy. The policy emphasises the contribution that each subject will make to pupils' spiritual, moral, social, and cultural (SMSC) education. The information set out in the policy also shows that the active promotion of fundamental British values is at the core of leaders' work. This includes values such as tolerance and respect, together with the development of pupils' knowledge and an understanding of being a British citizen.
- The curriculum policy is supported by schemes of work for each subject. The curriculum design and schemes of work are appropriate. Leaders have thought carefully about what they want pupils to learn during their time at the school. Leaders' curriculum design considers the specific and individual needs of pupils, some of whom will be pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- There is suitable importance placed on speaking and listening, reading, writing and mathematics in the curriculum. Additionally, there will be an emphasis on pupils studying subjects such as science, information and communication technology, religious education, history, and geography. The subjects offered will also include art and design and physical education (PE).
- Pupils' personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education will be taught through timetabled lessons. Aspects of PSHE education will also be woven into the whole school curriculum, including careers education. The development of pupils' life skills and their emotional and well-being skills are considered an essential part of the curriculum by leaders. The topics to be covered are suitably wide ranging and include all of those that pay particular regard to the protected characteristics as set out in the Equality Act 2010.

Paragraph 2A(1)–2A(1)(b), 2A(1)(d)–2A(1)(g), 2A (2), 2A (3)

- The PSHE education curriculum will include the development of pupils' understanding of relationships, sex, and health education. Leaders have taken into consideration the relevant statutory guidance. They have drafted a policy statement, and they have

considered how they will consult with parents and carers about the policy. Leaders are aware that this statement will need to be placed on the school's website.

Paragraph 3, 3(a)–3(j)

- The proprietor has already recruited some staff. The proprietor is in the process of recruiting other staff. It has a clear idea of the calibre and expertise that it is looking for in new teachers and other staff.
- The school has created templates for short-term curriculum design. Leaders will ask teachers to set out the content of lessons in these templates should the school be approved to open. Teachers will be expected to consider the needs of the pupils when designing lesson activities. The school is well resourced with a range of appropriate educational books and equipment. These are relevant to the age range of pupils who the school proposes to admit.
- The proprietor is committed to providing a good-quality education for pupils. The headteacher has already been appointed and has the knowledge, skills, and experience to guide and support teachers. This should enable teachers to provide a suitable quality of education if the school opens.

Paragraph 4

- Leaders have a suitable assessment policy in place.
- Leaders will assess pupils' attainment and personal needs when they start at the school. Pupils' progress and attainment will be assessed routinely. Pupils' progress will be communicated regularly with parents and those responsible for governance. Teachers will use these assessments to inform their teaching.
- Where appropriate, pupils will complete national end-of-key-stage assessments.
- All of the independent school standards ('the standards') in this part are likely to be met if the proposed school opens.

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

Paragraph 5, 5(a), 5(b)–5(b)(vii), 5(c), 5(d)–5(d)(iii)

- Pupils' SMSC development is a thread that runs through the curriculum for the proposed provision. Pupils' SMSC development is central to the school's aims, policies and plans for enrichment activities.
- Aspects of SMSC development are threaded through the PSHE scheme of work. For example, pupils will learn about democracy and different faiths. Enrichment activities will be offered to all pupils to ensure that they experience a diverse range of social and cultural activities and traditions. For instance, plans are in place to help pupils to be involved in charity work and local community events.
- Leaders have plans to provide opportunities for pupils to discuss local and national issues in an impartial way. Pupils will be encouraged to put into practice the values that are fundamental to living in modern Britain.
- The school's policies include appropriate references to all the protected characteristics set out in legislation.

- The standard in this part is likely to be met if the proposed school opens.

Part 3. Welfare, health, and safety of pupils

Paragraph 7, 7(a), 7(b)

- The proprietor has paid attention to the current statutory guidance for safeguarding pupils. A suitable and up-to-date safeguarding policy is in place. Leaders have introduced all the necessary arrangements to keep pupils safe and to promote their welfare at the school.
- The headteacher is already appointed as a designated safeguarding leader (DSL). It is likely that other senior staff will also be trained to DSL level. All new staff will receive appropriate induction training, safeguarding training and regular updates on areas such as radicalisation and extremism, sexual exploitation, sexting and e-safety.

Paragraphs 9, 9(a)–9(c), 10

- The proprietor has detailed and suitable behaviour and exclusion policies in place. There is also an appropriate anti-bullying policy. Any incidents of poor behaviour will be recorded. Leaders intend to cross-reference these with any other concerns so that they can gain a full picture of an individual pupil's behaviour and respond quickly to any additional needs that arise. The policy includes appropriate and proportionate sanctions.

Paragraphs 11, 12, 13, 16, 16(a), 16(b)

- The proprietor has a health and safety policy that is tailored to both buildings at the proposed school. It complies with all relevant laws. Regular fire-safety checks of both buildings are planned. The proprietor intends to ensure the school's compliance with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.
- The proprietor has an appropriate first-aid policy in place. The staff already appointed have undergone first-aid training.
- A written risk assessment policy is in place. The risk assessments that have already been completed show that leaders plan to take appropriate actions to minimise risks to pupils. This includes risk assessments for the school buildings, staff, events, and individual pupils.
- Leaders have made appropriate arrangements to ensure that the school's computer network has appropriate monitoring and filtering systems in place. This is to assure pupils' safety when they are working online.

Paragraph 14

- Pupils will be supervised by the deployment of sufficient staff, including at breaktimes, when arriving at school and on leaving the school premises.

Paragraph 15

- Leaders have appropriate systems in place to register pupils' attendance and to allow them to monitor pupils' absences effectively. Leaders will report on pupils' attendance on a regular basis through the governance arrangements at the school.

- The proprietor has published a suitable admissions policy for the school. Systems are in place to ensure that records of admissions will adhere to the Education (Pupil Registration) Regulations 2006.
- All of the standards in this part are likely to be met if the proposed school opens.

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

Paragraphs 18(2), 18(2)(a), 18(2)(b), 18(2)(c)–18(2)(c)(iv), 18(2)(d), 18(2)(e), 18(3), 19(2), 19(2)(a), 19(2)(a)(i), 19(2)(a)(i)(aa)–19(2)(a)(i)(cc), 19(2)(a)(ii), 19(2)(b)–19(2)(d), 19(2)(d)(i), 19(2)(d)(ii), 19(3), 20(6), 20(6)(a)–20(6)(a)(ii), 20(6)(b), 20(6)(b)(i)–20(6)(b)(iii), 20(6)(c), 21(1)–21(3), 21(3)(a), 21(3)(a)(i)–21(3)(a)(viii), 21(3)(b), 21(4), 21(5), 21(5)(a), 21(5)(a)(i), 21(5)(a)(ii), 21(5)(b), 21(5)(c), 21(6), 21(7)–21(7)(b)

- The single central record is in place and meets the requirements for the information that it must contain. Leaders understand the need to complete all the required checks on the suitability of staff before they take up an appointment.
- Records relating to the proprietor are included on the school's single central record. All of the suitability checks, including those relating to the leadership and management of a school, have also been carried out.
- The proprietor, headteacher and head of human resources have completed appropriate training to support the appointment of suitable staff to work in a school. Some teaching staff have already been appointed. Plans to recruit additional teachers and support staff are in place. The induction documentation for new staff makes it clear that they will undergo a full suite of safeguarding training, and other appropriate training, on appointment.
- Leaders are aware of the procedures that they should follow in the event of employing agency staff to ensure that they are suitable to work with pupils.
- Leaders do not intend to engage volunteers. However, they are clear about their responsibility for checking the suitability of volunteers who may work with pupils if this does occur.
- All of the standards in this part are likely to be met if the proposed school opens.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

Paragraphs 23(1), 23(1)(a)–23(1)(c), 28(1)–28(1)(d), 28(2)–28(2)(b)

- The proposed school is formed of two buildings on the same site. One is a large Georgian townhouse that was formerly used as a private nursery. The second building has been purpose-built by the proprietor. Both are good-sized buildings which have been finished to a high standard. The accommodation comprises of several teaching rooms, communal spaces, breakout areas and kitchens. There is also a medical room, reception area and office space in each building. In the space between the two buildings, there is a large outdoor area.
- There are appropriate toilet and washing facilities. All the toilet cubicles can be secured from the inside. There is hot and cold running water. The hot water is set at an appropriate temperature. There are signs indicating that the water is not suitable for drinking. Pupils will have access to drinking water throughout the day.

- There are no separate changing facilities for boys and girls and there are no shower facilities. However, the sports centre that the school will use for their weekly PE sessions has suitable, separate changing and shower facilities. The inspector saw evidence to confirm that the school will have access to and sole use of these facilities when visiting this centre.

Paragraph 24(1), 24(1)(a), 24(1)(b), 24(2)

- A medical room has been set aside in each building. Both of these rooms have a sink. There is easy access to a toilet. A bed and first-aid kit were in the medical rooms at the time of the inspection.

Paragraphs 25, 26, 27, 27(a), 27(b)

- The accommodation throughout is of an appropriate standard and it meets all requirements for the health, safety, and welfare of pupils. This includes suitable acoustics and lighting. Teaching rooms have a suitable source of natural light. The exterior and interior lighting is of an appropriate standard. Access through main doorways and gates will be via keypads and coded locks.

Paragraph 29(1), 29(1)(a), 29(1)(b)

- The proposed pupils will have access to an outdoor area that is safe. It will be an appropriate space in which pupils can play when not in lessons and for younger pupils to engage in PE activities. PE activities will be regularly timetabled in accordance with the school's curriculum requirements. PE sessions for older pupils will be conducted at a local sports centre. Leaders have risk assessments in place to ensure pupils' safety when travelling to and from the sports centre, and when using this facility.
- All of the standards in this part are likely to be met if the proposed school opens.

Part 6. Provision of information

Paragraph 32(1)–32(1)(k), 32(2)–32(2)(d), 32(3)–32(3)(g)

- The proprietor has set up a school website that contains all of the required information. The proprietor is fully aware of the requirements for the information that a school should publish on its website.
- There is a suitable range of information available for parents and pupils when they join the school. This includes information on admissions, behaviour, the curriculum, and safeguarding. All key documents will be made available for parents on request from the school office, as well as being published on the school's website.
- Leaders intend to provide termly and annual reports on pupils' progress and attainment to parents. Reports will be detailed and provide a holistic picture of a pupil's progress. Leaders will also report on pupils' personal development and emotional health and well-being. They are aware that any inspection reports and examination results need to be made available on the school's website once released.
- The standard in this part is likely to be met if the proposed school opens.

Part 7. Manner in which complaints are handled

Paragraph 33, 33(a)–33(k)

- The complaints policy is appropriate. It outlines all of the required stages. It includes appropriate timescales and information about the storage and sharing of written

records. The policy is detailed. It ensures that the school's intended complaints procedures are transparent.

- The standard in this part is likely to be met if the proposed school opens.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Paragraph 34(1)–34(1)(c)

- The proprietor has an appropriate understanding of the standards. The proprietor has plans in place to monitor compliance with the standards regularly.
- Leaders demonstrate the knowledge required to set up and run this independent school successfully. They have experience of, and a commitment to, providing an effective quality of education for pupils. They are likely to fulfil their responsibilities to promote the well-being of pupils.
- The standard in this part is likely to be met if the proposed school opens.

Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010

- The school's accessibility plan fully reflects statutory requirements.

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	150634
DfE registration number	888/6135
Inspection number	10332602

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	Independent special school
School status	Independent school
Proprietor	Toppers Childcare Limited
Chair	Edward Smethurst
Headteacher	Alex Marcroft
Annual fees (day pupils)	£63,375 to £85,000
Telephone number	03300 880 999
Website	None
Email address	head@willowsschool.uk

Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal	Inspector's recommendation
Age range of pupils	Not applicable	5 to 16	5 to 16
Number of pupils on the school roll	Not applicable	20	20

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	20
Number of part-time pupils	Not applicable	None
Number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities	Not applicable	20
Of which, number of pupils with an education, health, and care plan	Not applicable	Not known
Of which, number of pupils paid for by a local authority with an education, health, and care plan	Not applicable	Not known

Staff

	School's current position	School's proposal
Number of full-time equivalent teaching staff	2	6
Number of part-time teaching staff	0	0
Number of staff in the welfare provision	0	8

Information about this proposed school

- This proposed independent school is located in Blackburn. It is housed in two buildings on the same site. The first, a large Georgian house, is a repurposed former nursery. The proprietor intends to only use the ground floor of this building initially. The second is a purpose-built, one-storey building. The proposed school is located at Tree Toppers Nursery, Henry Street, Blackburn BB1 4JJ.
- It is proposed that the school will provide full-time education for up to 20 mixed-gender pupils aged between five and 16 years. It is intended that the school will cater for pupils who are struggling to cope with mainstream education by providing them with a small, nurturing environment.
- Leaders aim to re-engage pupils who are struggling with traditional education pathways and may be at risk of exclusion. Leaders aim to offer a personalised curriculum. This will include both educational and therapeutic provision.
- All pupils will have social, emotional, and mental health needs. It is anticipated that some pupils will have an education, health, and care plan.
- The proprietor is Toppers Childcare Limited, which is part of Prosperity Children's Services Limited. There are two members of the proprietor body, including the chair.
- The proprietor has appointed a chair of governors and a headteacher.
- The proposed school's website is under construction.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) to determine whether the school is likely to meet the standards if the DfE approves the application.
- This was the school's first pre-registration inspection.
- The inspector held discussions with the headteacher, who is also the DSL. She held discussions with an external consultant who has worked with the school leaders to set up the proposed school.
- The inspector met the chair of the proprietor body. She also spoke to the proprietor's head of human resources who has oversight of the single central record for the proposed school.
- The inspector had a tour of the school to check the suitability of the proposed premises against the relevant standards. She also looked at a wide range of documents and policies, including those relating to the curriculum, behaviour, health, and safety. She also checked documents relating to safeguarding.

Inspection team

Sue Eastwood, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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