Willow Bank School

Learn Grow Achieve Together

A guide to our Ofsted Inspection Report Card **2026**

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Headteacher's introduction to the report

Dear Parents and Carers,

Following the publication of our recent Ofsted report, I am writing to share a brief summary highlighting some of the key findings from the inspection, which took place in May.

This year saw the introduction of a significantly revised Ofsted inspection framework. The new framework is still in its infancy and is far more rigorous, with expectations and standards set higher than ever before.

During the inspection, a team of three inspectors spent two days speaking with staff, pupils and our governors, visiting lessons and observing social times. Inspectors commented on how welcoming our staff and pupils were and how both pupils and staff are proud to be a part of the Willow Bank Community. They spoke positively about what they saw during the inspection and recognised the journey we have been on over the last 12 months, and how we are making strong progress towards our vision for Willow Bank School. We have made positive changes during this time, and the inspectors recognised this, stating leaders and governors "have carefully reviewed how well the school is performing and used this understanding to improve pupils' learning and overall experiences", "they quickly identify where things need to improve and take action to make the necessary changes".

This report recognises many of the things we are most proud of: our strong safeguarding culture, the positive relationships between staff and pupils, and the inclusive environment we create for every child. Inspectors saw first-hand how hard our staff work to ensure that pupils feel safe, valued and supported to grow in confidence and independence.

Our school vision is to provide a safe space for pupils to engage in learning, personal growth and achievement to their best of their abilities. Page 4 of this document is dedicated to the Ofsted report section 'What it's like to be a pupil at this school'. Here, you will find Ofsted's insights and feedback from those who know our school the best - our pupils.

As part of the new Ofsted framework, areas of school practice can be graded as 'Needs Attention'. Ofsted uses this grade to highlight areas in which they feel further and continuing development is required. Willow Bank has received some 'Needs Attention' judgements, which simply confirm the aspects of our provision that we had identified as needing further focussed work. Our feedback from the inspection team, pupils, parents and carers was very positive and reflects the strong direction we continue to move in.

I encourage all parents and carers to read the full report. A link is provided on the last page of this document to where the report can be accessed. It is an exciting time to be a part of the Willow Bank Community as we continue to develop and shape our provision. I would like to say a sincere thank you for your continued support and feedback as we move forward together, providing the very best care and education for each of our pupils.

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Nicola Laughton

Headteacher

Highlights

During their visit, Ofsted Inspectors identified many strengths, including our positive culture of learning and support and the well-being of our pupils.

We'd like to share some of these key highlights with you.

"The school is committed to making sure that every pupil feels included and supported"

"Highly effective pastoral support ensures that pupils' social, emotional and mental health needs are supported"

"The school provides a calm and orderly place where pupils feel safe and ready to learn"

"Pupils make progress from their starting points.. in their behaviour, pupils regulate their emotions increasingly well. These are clear strengths."

"Pupils generally enjoy their learning. They show positive attitudes in lessons"

"The curriculum is broad and balanced. It is carefully planned so pupils build their learning step by step. Leaders ensure that teachers make the adjustments required so that pupils can access their learning"

"Pupils benefit from a broad and varied enrichment programme"

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

This section places pupils at the centre, capturing their experiences, voices and day-to-day realities, and offering a genuine insight into what life at Willow Bank feels like from those who know it best.

Inspectors spoke directly with pupils, who consistently shared that the school is a safe and welcoming environment, where they feel supported and valued. Pupils express strong confidence in staff, trusting them to listen carefully and resolve any concerns effectively. This sense of security allows them to focus on both their learning and wider development, helping them to improve their ability to recognise and manage their emotions more effectively.

Inspectors recognised that pupils often join Willow Bank after experiencing a disrupted experience of education. The report states, **"From the moment they arrive, staff work tirelessly to help them settle quickly and feel welcome"** and that **"...pupils overcome barriers to learning and grow in confidence. Pupils achieve increasingly well and make progress from their individual starting points".**

During the inspection, pupils spoke with enthusiasm about their learning and how they are able to take part in different experiences. They have staff that they trust and know that their voices are heard.

The report states, **"Beyond the classroom, pupils enjoy a wide range of activities. They especially value opportunities that help them grow in confidence, independence and leadership skills such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award".** It also states, **"Pupils play an active role in helping the school to improve through their various leadership roles, for example, though the school council".**

Pupils spoke confidently to the inspectors, painting a picture of school where they feel confident and secure, happy to learn and are well supported by adults that they trust.

"Adults build secure, positive working relationships with pupils so that they feel valued, supported and part of the school community." – Ofsted

Inspection Report Card 2026

Ofsted have created a 3 minute video to explain the new style inspection Report Cards, we recommend that all parents and carers view this to understand how the new inspection framework is applied in schools:

New Ofsted Report Cards: A Guide for Parents and Carers

To read our full Ofsted Report, please click here

Next steps

Following the recent inspection, we remain fully committed to continuing our journey of school improvement and ensuring the very best outcomes for all pupils. Our next steps will focus on further developing and enhancing the quality of teaching across every area of the curriculum, while continuing to strengthen pupils' foundation skills so that they are well prepared for the next stages of their education and beyond.

Alongside this, we will be reviewing and refining our approach to supporting pupils' personal development and their communication skills. This will include establishing a clear and more consistent approach to helping pupils understand the impact of the words they use, the importance of appropriate language, and how to communicate respectfully with others across our school community.

We know that strong partnerships between home and school are essential in helping children to thrive. The continued support of parents and carers is incredibly important as we move forward with these priorities, and we would like to thank you for the encouragement, trust and support you have shown to the school so far. By continuing to work together, we are confident that we can build even further on the strengths of our school for the benefit of all pupils.