

The Willink School

Address: School Lane, Burghfield Common, Reading, Berkshire, RG7 3XJ

Unique reference number (URN): 110048

Inspection report: 6 May 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.

Expected standard

Achievement

Expected standard 

On the whole, pupils achieve well. At the end of key stage 4 examinations, most pupils achieve above the national average. Typically, disadvantaged pupils achieve as well as disadvantaged pupils nationally. In a small number of subjects, examination outcomes are not as high. In these cases, the impact of leaders' work to improve outcomes is evident through pupils' work and the progress they make in those subjects.

In most subjects, pupils make secure progress from their starting points. They learn the knowledge and skills they need to build on their prior learning. This includes pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. However, although leaders plan support for pupils with gaps in their basic skills for reading or writing, some of this help is not quite as specific as it should be for a few pupils.

Sixth-form students achieve well in their programmes of study. Their work in lessons is of high quality. They make good progress from their starting points and achieve well in national examinations. Students are well prepared for their next steps and go on to suitable destinations.

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

Leaders have a well-developed approach to increasing and sustaining the high attendance of pupils. They analyse patterns in data to identify where they can improve further. Actions such as adjusting the school calendar and working with pupils before they start in Year 7 have helped to improve attendance over time. As a result, pupils' attendance is in line with national averages, as is the attendance of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Disadvantaged pupils attend slightly less well compared to their peers, but this is increasing. Leaders have a clear strategy to improve this. They understand that different groups of pupils have different reasons why they find it difficult to come to school. Their work with these groups of pupils is beginning to have an impact.

School leaders have created a safe environment built on positive relationships and clear expectations. This creates a calm atmosphere. During social times, pupils generally show respect to each other. Bullying rarely happens. Pupils feel confident staff deal with it quickly when it does. An emphasis on clear routines means that lessons start quickly and disruption to lessons is rare. The school's expectations of behaviour, 'The Willink Wheel', are well understood by pupils. Pupils feel positive about the emphasis on recognising positive behaviours.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

The curriculum is broad and ambitious for all pupils. Leaders have an accurate understanding of strengths and areas for development. They take action to improve the experience of pupils. For example, they have acted swiftly to improve the curriculum in languages so that pupils gain confidence and achieve better outcomes. Leaders sequence what pupils learn so that pupils build on their prior learning and gain knowledge over time.

Teachers are experts in their subjects and teach the curriculum well. Effective professional training helps teachers to set expectations and follow clear routines so that pupils know what to expect from lessons. Teachers use appropriate resources to help pupils learn and collaborate. Teachers deliver the sixth-form curriculum with the same rigour as in the rest of the school.

Staff provide highly effective support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Teachers receive information about pupils' needs and helpful strategies, which they use effectively to adapt lessons. Although disadvantaged pupils are generally well supported, adaptations are not as well developed as they are for pupils with SEND.

Leaders' work to increase pupils' vocabulary and reading fluency is well developed. The school's changing context means that, recently, some pupils have joined the school with larger gaps in their knowledge of early reading and writing than previously. Leaders have identified that these pupils need more precise help, especially with phonics. Work to help these pupils is underway.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Leaders typically provide vulnerable pupils with a variety of support, which helps them to become fully involved in school life. Leaders regularly check the impact of this support. They know what is working well and what needs to improve further. When needed, they change their approach. The school works closely with parents and other agencies to provide tailored support.

Leaders precisely identify the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, as well as those known to social care. Effective training helps teachers to adjust their teaching appropriately to meet the needs of these pupils during their lessons. As a result, these pupils generally achieve well from their starting points. Pupils who are disadvantaged in other ways have their pastoral needs met particularly well. Leaders recognise that, sometimes, these pupils' gaps in learning are not identified or addressed precisely enough.

Leaders check that the systems to keep pupils safe who attend an alternative provision are appropriate. They check the provision is suitable. Pupils who receive their education in this way make positive progress in their learning. Leaders ensure that pupil premium funding is used appropriately.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Leaders have created a positive professional culture where staff feel valued, supported and heard. By streamlining policies and reducing unnecessary paperwork, leaders have successfully reduced staff workload. This supports teachers to focus on their core roles. Leaders communicate well with staff. Staff describe leaders as approachable and visible.

Professional learning is a high priority, and leaders focus on building staff expertise. Staff enjoy collaborative learning opportunities, such as professional book clubs, which foster a culture of ongoing development and improvement.

Leaders have a clear and accurate understanding of their school's performance. Leaders are, rightly, sharpening their analysis still further to focus more precisely on the needs of some groups of pupils.

Governors understand their strategic role and possess the necessary expertise to hold the school to account effectively. Through regular visits and reports, they are typically well informed. While sometimes their understanding of the academic needs of the most vulnerable pupils in the school is not as well developed as it could be, governors generally use the information they collect to provide a healthy balance of support and challenge to school leaders.

Leaders listen to parents and carers. They take their views into account when making key decisions. For example, sensible solutions to mobile phone use are working very well. Leaders work well with outside agencies, especially those who keep pupils safe. Leaders always act in the interests of children. They are proactive in working with other schools and organisations to share expertise. They seek appropriate support and guidance when needed.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

Leaders prioritise how they approach the personal development and wellbeing of pupils. They have built a programme to teach pupils the knowledge and skills they need to prepare them for life in modern Britain. Beyond being a series of taught topics, leaders help pupils to develop empathy, understanding and tolerance. Effective pastoral support means pupils get the help they need.

In recent years, the school has established a more rigorous approach to teaching personal, social and health education. Lessons are well taught and designed to develop pupils' knowledge in an age-appropriate manner. Pupils develop knowledge of keeping safe, of consent and healthy relationships. They also learn about the importance of respecting others and of how the country is governed. They develop a secure understanding of fundamental British values. Pupils in the younger years have especially benefited from the school's renewed approach.

The approach to careers education is very well embedded, especially in the sixth form. Leaders help pupils develop the skills employers are looking for from key stage 3 onwards. In key stage 4, pupils experience more extensive engagement with employers, which helps them develop these skills. A dedicated 'futures officer' in the sixth form, as well as a comprehensive careers programme, supports students into appropriate and ambitious next steps. Leaders consider the needs of all pupils, especially disadvantaged pupils, and provide opportunities for them to have high-quality experiences of the workplace.

There is an extensive programme of trips and clubs that all pupils can attend. Pupils enjoy these. Leaders check who participates. They are working hard and with increasing success to address any barriers to participation faced by the most vulnerable pupils. Pupils and students in the sixth form have a range of leadership opportunities and contribute to the school community. For example, students help younger pupils with their reading.

Leaders know the strengths and areas for development of the sixth form. For example, where historically some subjects have not been as well taught as others, they have acted to improve this. Leaders and staff have high expectations. Students are helped to develop key skills, for example how to study independently and organise their time productively. This approach aids all students to achieve and is especially supportive for disadvantaged students.

In examinations, students typically achieve in line with national averages and make suitable progress from their starting points. They benefit from skilled teaching. Teachers have the subject knowledge to explain clearly and to help students progress through the curriculum. Adaptations to lessons are effective in enabling students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, to access the curriculum.

Careers education and guidance are well developed. Leaders place a clear emphasis on giving information early to students, parents and carers. This includes information on a variety of pathways, such as apprenticeships, further studies or employment routes. Leaders are particularly aware of students who need more support in planning an appropriate next step. A dedicated team supports students to go on to appropriate destinations.

Students engage in lots of opportunities to develop their leadership skills and to serve the community. For example, students volunteer and take on school leadership roles.

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

Pupils at The Willink School enjoy coming to school. Warm relationships with staff start at the school gate, where pupils are welcomed by staff who know them well. Pupils appreciate the introduction of a phone-free school. They say this makes them feel safe. Pupils know how they should behave, and most pupils behave well. Pupils are confident that staff deal quickly with bullying when they report it. Pupils know staff will help them if they have a problem. Pupils generally attend school well because they feel that they belong.

Pupils learn a broad and ambitious curriculum that prepares them well for life in modern Britain. Most pupils take a language at GCSE, which supports the school's vision that pupils in this rural school will become 'global changemakers'. Pupils enjoy holding positions of responsibility in the house system, which helps them to develop their maturity.

Effective teaching helps pupils to learn well. Clear routines mean that lessons are purposeful and rarely disrupted by inattentive behaviours. Pupils' barriers to learning are typically well understood by staff. As a result, pupils, especially those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and service children, achieve particularly well.

Pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, have lots of opportunities to develop their talents and interests. They like the wide range of clubs and trips that the school offers. For example, they enjoy attending football, swimming, gardening, LEGO and creative writing. Students in the sixth form take an active role in planning their own experiences. This includes supporting

local charities. Students take advantage of leadership opportunities, such as running school events through the sixth-form committee.

Next steps

- Leaders should refine the support for pupils who are at the early stages of developing their foundational knowledge of reading and writing, so that pupils learn the precise skills they need to progress well.
 - Leaders should embed strategies to improve the attendance of disadvantaged pupils, so that their attendance continues to rise and is in line with other groups of pupils.
 - Leaders should continue to develop their work to have detailed oversight of the needs of all groups of pupils, so that the most vulnerable pupils thrive.
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About this inspection

The chair of the board of governors in this school is Margaret Baxter.

Inspectors carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

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.

Inspection activities:

Inspectors spoke with the headteacher, the chair of the board of governors, other senior leaders, staff and governors during the inspection.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school makes use of 2 registered and 2 unregistered alternative provisions.

The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical educational qualifications and apprenticeships.

Headteacher: Nicolle Browning

Lead inspector:

David Stevenson, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Mark Bagust, Ofsted Inspector

Alison Robb-Webb, Ofsted Inspector

Samantha Ingram, His Majesty's Inspector

Andrew Morrison, Ofsted Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

The data was used by the inspector(s) during the inspection. More recent data may have been published since the inspection took place.

 This data is from 6 May 2026

School and pupil context**Total pupils**

1,233

Close to average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils currently at this school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 1,067

School capacity

995

Close to average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils who can attend the school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 1,154

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

13.84%

Well below average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years.

National average: 28.9%

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

3.73%

Close to average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan. This covers pupils with more support than is available through special educational needs support.

National average: 3.09%

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

15.73%

Close to average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with reported special educational support needs at the school.

National average: 13.4%

Location deprivation

Well below average

What does this mean?

Based on the English Indices of Deprivation (2019) and the school's location, we have calculated whether the school is located in a more or less deprived area.

Resourced Provision or SEND Unit (if applicable)

No resourced provision

What does this mean?

Whether school has Resourced Provision or SEND unit (if applicable).

All pupils' performance

English and maths GCSE

Percentage of pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (final)	57.1%	45.4%	Above
2023/24 (final)	54.1%	45.9%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	58.7%	45.3%	Above

Attainment 8

A measure of pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (final)	51.9	46.1	Above
2023/24 (final)	49.1	45.9	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	51.3	46.3	Above

Progress 8

How much progress pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	0.04	-0.03	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	0.31	-0.03	Above

Disadvantaged pupils' performance

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after.

Disadvantaged pupils' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (final)	19.4%	25.8%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	26.3%	25.8%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	14.3%	25.2%	Below

Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (final)	31.9	34.9	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	36.1	34.6	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	32.1	35.0	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	-1.14	-0.57	Below
2022/23 (final)	-0.84	-0.57	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils' performance gap

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after. The school disadvantage gap is the difference between the performance of the school's disadvantaged pupils compared to the performance of all non-disadvantaged pupils nationally.

Disadvantaged pupils' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (final)	19.4%	53.1%	-33.7 pp
2023/24 (final)	26.3%	53.1%	-26.8 pp
2022/23 (final)	14.3%	52.4%	-38.1 pp

Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (final)	31.9	50.4	-18.5
2023/24 (final)	36.1	50.0	-13.9
2022/23 (final)	32.1	50.3	-18.2

Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2023/24 (final)	-1.14	0.16	-1.30
2022/23 (final)	-0.84	0.17	-1.00

Destinations after 16

Destinations after 16

Percentage of pupils staying in education or employment for at least 2 terms after the end of secondary school (key stage 4).

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023 leavers (revised)	95%	92%	Average
2022 leavers (revised)	97%	93%	Above
2021 leavers (revised)	98%	94%	Above

16 to 18 performance

A-level average point score

The average points that students achieved per A-level entry.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (final)	35.28	35.00	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	32.83	34.38	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	34.80	34.16	Close to average

A-level value added

A score showing students’ progress between the end of key stage 4 and the end of their academic qualification studies.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (final)	0.2	0.0	Close to average
2023/24 (revised)	-0.1	0.0	Close to average

Absence

Overall absence

The percentage of all possible mornings and afternoons missed due to absence from school (for whatever reason, whether authorised or unauthorised) across all pupils.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (3 term)	8.1%	8.4%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	8.0%	8.9%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	7.7%	9.0%	Close to average

Persistent absence

The percentage of pupils missing 10% or more of their possible mornings and afternoons.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (3 term)	20.7%	23.4%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	21.3%	25.6%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	20.2%	26.5%	Below

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.

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.

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk



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