

Aurora Brambles East School

Woodlands, Holly Tree Close, Darwen, Lancashire BB3 2NG

Inspection dates

3–5 October 2017

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher's vision of creating an environment where pupils feel safe, valued and respected underpins all aspects of school life.
- Leaders make sure that the independent school standards are met.
- Leaders, governors and all staff are dedicated and passionate about improving the life chances of pupils. They work as a close team to foster relationships of respect and trust which run throughout the school.
- Safeguarding is a strength of the school. Leaders are knowledgeable and put this knowledge into highly effective practice. They are fierce advocates for pupils and ensure that they receive timely and appropriate help.
- Pupils feel safe in school and trust staff. High-quality personal and social education and effective careers advice prepare pupils well for the future. Some pupils do not know enough about the religious beliefs of others.
- Leaders plan a wide range of learning opportunities for pupils. As a result, pupils learn well and make good progress as a result.
- Strong and effective relationships between families and carers contribute positively to all aspects of the progress of pupils. Parents and carers are vocal in their support of how the school is transforming the lives of their children.
- The quality of teaching and learning is good. Pupils acquire knowledge, skills and understanding which helps them to catch up with any lost learning. Some questioning is not effective in developing pupils' thinking. Some pupils do not display resilience in their learning.
- Leaders and staff have high expectations for behaviour. They establish routines which help pupils to move about the school in a generally calm and purposeful manner. However, some incidents of unacceptable behaviour do occur.
- The attendance of pupils is improving year on year but is still below the national average. Persistent absence remains high for some individuals.
- Leaders monitor the quality of teaching and learning and behaviour. These systems do not yet ensure that they have a strategic overview across the school.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

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

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - embedding new systems to monitor the quality of teaching and learning and behaviour to reduce variations in outcomes in subject areas
 - improving the behaviour and attendance of some pupils so that they make consistently strong progress in line with the majority of pupils.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by:
 - developing questioning which challenges pupils to extend their thinking and understanding
 - building resilience so that pupils develop skills to learn and work more independently.
- Extend opportunities for pupils to develop their experiences of different religions by:
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to develop knowledge, understanding and respect for faiths and religions other than their own
 - weaving through the curriculum and extended curriculum, activities which expand and challenge pupils' thinking and provide pupils with a fuller understanding of communities beyond their own immediate experience.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher is a committed, dedicated and passionate leader. He knows pupils, families and carers well. The headteacher is accurate in his evaluation of the school's strengths and areas for improvement.
- The headteacher's vision for the school is clear. His purpose is to ensure that pupils feel safe, valued and respected. He is resolute in his goal to provide a high quality of education for the most vulnerable, disenfranchised and hard to reach young people.
- The headteacher and senior leaders are experienced and knowledgeable. The leadership of safeguarding is strong and effective. The senior leadership team work well together to improve the school and the life chances of pupils. Staff enjoy working at the school and support the vision of senior leaders.
- Leaders, the proprietor and the regional director work closely to ensure that all of the independent school standards are met. The school building and classrooms are maintained to a high standard and well-resourced. Policies and procedures are current and appropriate risk assessments are in place.
- Leaders new to their roles demonstrate clear capacity to enhance the leadership of the school further. Professional development opportunities are planned through the effective appraisal process. However, leaders do not routinely use effective links with other schools so that good practice can be shared and staff can further enhance their skills.
- The curriculum meets the standards for independent schools. Leaders ensure that good teaching develops pupils' reading, writing and mathematical skills so that they begin to catch up on any lost learning. Pupils benefit from modern foreign languages, humanities, science, art, photography and a wide range of other courses. Good-quality vocational education and an array of outdoor educational experiences supplement the curriculum to give pupils a wide range of areas in which to succeed.
- Senior leaders use alternative provision and work experience to improve pupils' employability skills. Highly effective careers advice and ongoing careers support ensure that the vast majority of pupils gain and retain a place in college or secure an apprenticeship or job with training.
- Pupils often join the school after a period of significant turbulence in their lives. They arrive with significantly low starting points in attendance, behaviour and attainment. Once pupils settle in to school, they begin to re-engage with adults and with their learning.
- Pupils receive support from staff in school and from a wide range of external agencies. As a result, pupils show improvements in their progress, behaviour and attendance. This personalised support enables pupils to achieve academic success, often for the very first time.
- Communications with parents and carers are highly effective. Families and carers recognise that leaders and staff are deeply committed to improving the life chances of their children. They are generous in their praise of the school.
- Leaders have a new system in place to monitor the quality of teaching and learning but this is not embedded fully. As a result, variations in the quality of teaching and learning and in outcomes do exist.

- The school improvement plan is accurate but does not focus sufficiently on identifying trends and patterns in less serious behavioural incidents across the school.

Governance

- Governance is effective. Governors provide a balance of support and challenge for leaders. Governors and the chief executive ensure that leaders have a degree of autonomy while holding them firmly to account.
- Training is provided for staff and professional development is built in through the annual appraisal cycle. Professional development opportunities for support staff are less regular than those for teaching staff. Establishing links with other high schools is a priority for leaders and they are developing these links to share good practice through the school.
- During this inspection, a request for a material change to the school was considered. Leaders have requested a material change to increase the numbers and age range of pupils for which the school is registered. There is capacity within the current building to manage the increase in numbers in classrooms, dining facilities, outdoor provision and around the school. Leaders provided detailed curriculum plans to show the continued provision of level 2 qualifications for pupils as appropriate. This material change is recommended to be approved as the school is suitable to be registered to take up to 56 pupils aged from 10 to 19 years.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The safeguarding policy takes into account current government requirements and is published on the school website.
- Safeguarding is a strength of the school. Highly knowledgeable and experienced staff know policies, procedures and, most importantly, pupils and their families and carers extremely well. They use this deep knowledge and understanding to make sure that pupils receive timely and appropriate support and help.
- Staff undertake regular safeguarding training in line with the latest government guidelines. All staff are highly vigilant, referring concerns to leaders and authorities as appropriate. Leaders follow up referrals with tenacity. Vetting and recruitment checks are thorough and meet statutory requirements.
- Health and safety is managed correctly, with a wide range of risks assessed. Leaders make sure that pupils are safe on site, off site and when travelling.
- Leaders maintain strong and productive links with a range of local authorities and a multitude of external agencies. Leaders are committed to safeguarding the pupils under their care and are highly effective in this.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching overall is good. Positive relationships between staff and pupils underpin effective teaching. Teachers and key workers know pupils very well and use this knowledge to engage pupils and minimise any disruptions to learning.
- Teachers plan well-structured lessons. Pupils concentrate and focus on the tasks set when

teachers plan carefully to meet their needs. Classrooms are bright and welcoming environments in which to learn. Staff engage pupils in their learning using every method available. They work hard to capture the interest and enthusiasm of pupils.

- Pupils arrive at school with little academic information to support their transition. As a result, leaders assess pupils' starting points and use these to set personalised learning plans.
- Teachers have high expectations of what pupils can and should achieve. Teachers' strong subject knowledge and passion for their subject transfers to pupils. Consequently, most pupils respond positively. For example, in mathematics, pupils want to draw pie charts and bar charts accurately as they are engaged in their learning and also want to show their teacher how well they can do it.
- Teachers generally manage the behaviour of pupils skilfully in lessons. Teachers use additional adults well to support both learning and behaviour.
- Key workers are an integral part of the learning culture across the school. They work as a strong team with teachers to ensure that pupils remain focused in class. Incidents of unacceptable behaviour or disruption are dealt with quickly and effectively, in line with school policy.
- Pupils enjoy a range of sporting and outdoor education activities which raise their self-esteem and confidence. Pupils value highly these opportunities.
- Teachers assess pupils' work in line with school policy, identifying strengths and areas for improvement. When teachers make additional comments or pose questions, pupils do not yet typically rise to this challenge to deepen their understanding. Pupils' abilities to learn independently are variable. Over-reliance on teachers and key workers occurs when pupils do not have the skills necessary to think and reason for themselves.
- Teachers use questioning to ensure that pupils are paying attention and to establish their understanding. Some questioning does not encourage pupils to extend and deepen their thinking.
- Opportunities for pupils to extend their writing are not always developed. Many pupils present their written work well appropriate to their ability. However, the spelling, punctuation and grammar of some pupils, particularly younger pupils, are not developed well enough.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils overcome significant obstacles due to the care and support they receive in school. Leaders and staff work hard to improve pupils' confidence and self-esteem. This careful and personalised approach to each pupil improves their behaviour and progress.
- There is a strong culture of safeguarding which runs throughout the school. Safeguarding, rightly, is a high priority here, as the vast majority of pupils are vulnerable and have complex needs.
- Pupils say that they feel safe in school and travelling to and from school. They say that

the primary reason for feeling safe is because they trust staff. Pupils know that there is someone they can talk to if they need help or support.

- Pupils say that bullying is rare and that if it does occur, staff deal with it effectively. Parents and carers are confident that leaders work tirelessly to keep pupils safe.
- Leaders ensure that the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is strong. A thorough programme of personal, social and health education, supplemented by assemblies, ensures that pupils are well taught about issues such as gang culture, healthy eating, knife crime and dementia.
- Bright, informative displays make the school a warm and welcoming environment. These displays, often created by pupils, celebrate diversity and promote pupils' respect for others.
- Pupils understand clearly the British values which are taught in the school. Pupils talk knowledgeably about politics, democracy, rule of law and respect for others. However, some pupils do not have a strong understanding of different religions and faiths.
- On occasion, pupils' attitudes to learning are less than positive. In a small minority of lessons where teaching does not capture sufficiently the interest of pupils, or when pupils are experiencing emotional instability, there can be some instances of disruption to learning and use of inappropriate language.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good overall.
- Pupils join the school often following a period of unsettled and poor behaviour in other schools or pupil referral units. As pupils settle in to the school, there is a marked improvement over time in their behaviour, often from extremely low starting points.
- Pupils respond well to the highly organised and well-planned routines. These routines are supervised closely by staff and enable pupils to move around the school generally in a calm and purposeful manner.
- Permanent and fixed-term exclusions from school are falling considerably year on year. These exclusions are used as a last resort in response to serious infractions. Pupils generally respond extremely positively to the pastoral support provided by all members of staff. Pupils begin to grow and mature in the safe and secure environment provided for them by leaders.
- Behaviour is well managed at the school. When there is a pupil in crisis, staff deal with the situation quickly and effectively. The longer pupils spend in school, generally, the better able they are to manage their own behaviour.
- Attendance is below average but is improving on a three-year trend towards the national average. Attendance for the vast majority of pupils is significantly higher than their attendance before they arrived at Aurora Brambles East. Some pupils are placed at the school following significant periods of school refusal or other prolonged absence. As a result, even though attendance is below the national average, this very often represents a transformation in attendance for the majority of pupils.
- The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent from school is higher than average but this is falling. Again, due to the unsettled prior history of pupils, leaders do all they

can to ensure that pupils attend regularly, collecting pupils and returning them home each day. However, persistent absence rates are still too high.

- Parents and carers cannot praise the school highly enough. All parents and carers spoken to during the inspection believe that leaders and staff provide an environment where their young person can finally succeed. As a result, the pupil's behaviour at home often improves in tandem.
- Leaders do all they can to ensure that pupils attend school regularly. Key workers collect pupils at the start of each day and return them home. Parents are appreciative of this approach as it ensures exceptionally strong communication between home and school.
- Some pupils are yet to manage their own behaviour consistently, despite the clear support and guidance they receive. When pupils exhibit challenging behaviour, they are often remorseful and understand the consequences of their actions. However, serious incidents can and do occur. Leaders recognise the need to sustain and further develop their efforts to improve the behaviour of a minority of pupils who struggle to manage their own behaviour adequately.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Information provided by the school shows that, over time, pupils generally make good progress from their individual starting points.
- All pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress, including children looked after and disadvantaged pupils.
- The combination of the taught curriculum, outdoor education, vocational courses and work experience opportunities enables pupils to make good progress during their time at the school.
- Pupils achieve a wide range of qualifications and go on to college courses, apprenticeships or employment. The numbers of pupils who are not in education, employment or training are low and falling each year.
- Staff accompany pupils to courses with alternative providers. As a result, this ensures continued pastoral support so that pupils demonstrate good behaviour, attendance and progress on these courses. Pupils enjoy attending these courses and achieve useful qualifications and skills.
- Leaders work closely with each pupil to help them make choices about their next steps. Leaders and staff accompany pupils on taster days to colleges, help them to write curriculum vitae and prepare them for interviews. As a result, leaders and staff prepare pupils well for their next stages in education, employment or training.
- Former pupils often return to school to volunteer and act as role models and ambassadors for younger pupils. Staff, parents and carers are rightly proud of the successes of former pupils.
- When attendance, behaviour and attitudes to learning improve through support, pupils' self-esteem and confidence also improve. This leads to improved outcomes for pupils. Pupils who spoke with the inspector had clear ambitions for the future, wanting to attend college and training to become plasterers, mechanics and a range of appropriate careers.

- Work in books and that seen in lessons shows good progress across a range of subjects, but there are inconsistencies in some subject areas. Leaders are aware of these and have implemented a new system to monitor the quality of teaching and learning to ensure consistently strong outcomes across the curriculum.

School details

Unique reference number	138884
DfE registration number	889/6013
Inspection number	10020807

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	10 to 16
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	44
Number of part-time pupils	1
Proprietor	The Aurora Group
Chair	Stephen Bradshaw
Headteacher	Sam Clark
Annual fees (day pupils)	£36,034
Telephone number	01254 706600
Website	www.the-aurora-group.com/brambles-east
Email address	BES-reception@the-aurora-group.com
Date of previous inspection	24–26 September 2013

Information about this school

- Aurora Brambles East is an independent special school registered to provide education for up to 48 pupils, aged 10 to 16 years, who have social, emotional or mental health difficulties.
- There are currently 44 pupils on roll and all pupils have an education, health and care plan. The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage.
- The school is located in Darwen and works with a wide range of local authorities in the north-west region.
- Pupils often join the school after a history of poor behaviour, exclusions and/or prolonged

absence from schools or other specialist provision.

- The school currently uses the alternative providers The Preston Vocational Centre and 4Techmoto to contribute to the education of some pupils.
- The aims of the school are to provide personalised specialist education, support students to be part of an enriched school and community life and prepare students effectively for life beyond school.
- The school was previously inspected in September 2013.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed teaching and learning across a range of subjects and classes. The inspector toured the site, attended an assembly and observed a student council meeting.
- The inspector met with pupils, both formally and informally, to listen to their views.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, regional director, senior leaders and other staff. The inspector also spoke with the chief executive officer of the Aurora Group and a representative of a local authority by telephone.
- In addition, the inspector considered the views expressed by a small number of parents via the free-text facility on Parent View. There were insufficient responses to Ofsted's online survey for those to be taken into consideration. The inspector also met with some parents in school and spoke to one parent via telephone.
- The inspector took into account the views of 12 members of staff who responded to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.
- The inspector observed pupils before school, in lessons and during social time. The inspector also scrutinised pupils' work in lessons and looked at a sample of their folders.
- The inspector scrutinised a wide range of documentation, including: information about pupils' attainment; the school's self-evaluation and action points for improvement; and records relating to teaching and learning, pupils' attendance and behaviour, and safeguarding.
- The inspector checked the school's compliance with the appropriate regulations for independent schools.
- As part of the inspection, the inspector considered the school's request for a material change to increase the registered numbers from 49 to 56 pupils and increase the age range of pupils to 10 to 19 years.

Inspection team

Helen O'Neill, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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