

Aurora Hedgeway School

Rookery Lane, Pilning, South Gloucestershire BS35 4JN

Inspection dates

14–16 November 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	Adequate

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders at all levels have a clear strategic vision to provide high-quality education and care for the school's pupils. They have ensured that the independent school standards are met.
- Leaders, including those responsible for the governance of the school, have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas that require further development. Planning for school improvement is ambitious.
- Leaders rigorously monitor the quality of teaching and learning to ensure that it meets pupils' needs. Information about pupils' academic attainment is used effectively to identify what they need to learn next.
- Pupils benefit from a range of therapies to support their holistic development. However, systems of communication between therapists and class teachers are not fully embedded.
- In a range of subjects, good teaching leads to pupils making strong progress from their starting points. However, the progress pupils make in their writing is not as rapid as in other subjects, particularly mathematics.
- Leaders have established an engaging curriculum which is focused on pupils' individual needs. However, the range of vocational courses open to older pupils is more limited.
- Pupils are polite, welcoming and accepting of the differences of others. They know how to keep themselves safe, particularly when online.
- Although below the national average, pupils' attendance is improving. Leaders have put in place effective strategies to reduce the absences of individual pupils.
- Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education. Effective careers advice supports older pupils in making choices about future destinations and the majority go on to further education. However, opportunities for pupils to take part in work-related learning, including work experience, are more limited.
- Behaviour is good. As a result of staff's high expectations and engaging teaching, the number of incidents of poor behaviour continues to fall.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

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

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve communication so that all members of staff have a clear understanding of the therapies pupils are receiving and how these can be integrated into classroom practices.
- Further raise the progress pupils make in writing by:
 - exploring different methods by which pupils can record their ideas
 - planning more opportunities for pupils to apply their writing skills in subjects other than English, and in areas that interest and engage them.
- Broaden the school's curriculum offer for older pupils by:
 - developing a programme of work-related learning which provides pupils with opportunities to learn through the experience of work, learn about work and working practices, and learn the skills they need to be successful in the workplace
 - providing a wider range of vocational courses which are tailored to pupils' interests and needs.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The effectiveness of leadership and management is good. Although only in post for a short time, the interim head of education demonstrates a determination to build upon the improvements instigated by the previous principal. The school's proprietor, the Aurora Group, is ensuring a smooth transition of leadership and has ambitious plans for the future development of the school.
- Leaders have ensured that all of the independent school standards and associated requirements are met. Leaders, including those responsible for the school's governance, have a secure understanding of the standards and have systems in place to keep them under regular review. Where monitoring identifies a risk of non-compliance, for example around premises, this is rectified swiftly.
- Leaders at all levels have a well-articulated vision to provide pupils with the care, support and levels of challenge they require. This develops not just their academic abilities, but also their self-confidence, life skills and independence. Leaders and staff share a common determination to do the best for all pupils and ensure that the school's vision permeates their work. As a result, pupils flourish and achieve well.
- Leaders' self-evaluation of the school's strengths and areas that require further improvement is accurate. Well-established systems are in place to monitor the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Leaders use a range of information, including observations of learning, scrutiny of work in pupils' books and a detailed analysis of pupils' progress, to identify school improvement priorities. Targets set are ambitious and are ensuring that the quality of teaching continues to improve.
- Leaders hold staff rigorously to account. Leaders' raised expectations and a greater scrutiny of staff performance have ensured that any weaker teaching in the school has now been eradicated. Leaders provide staff with precise guidance on how they can further develop their practice. Pupils benefit from teaching which, over time, is consistently good or better. As a result, they make progress in their work and learning behaviours.
- Leaders make effective use of the school's assessment system to check pupils' progress from their starting points. Where progress is less than that expected, assessment information is used well to identify gaps in pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding and inform future provision. In addition to information regarding pupils' academic progress, the school also collates detailed information about other areas of pupils' development. For example, levels of engagement, resilience, independence, and social and emotional development. However, this information is not routinely shared to inform teachers' planning or the interventions and therapies that pupils receive.
- The curriculum is engaging and individually tailored to pupils' needs. Pupils get opportunities to take part in visits to support their learning, for example to Bristol Zoo and the Neolithic stone circles at Stanton Drew. A carefully constructed programme of personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education encourages pupils to reflect upon their own learning behaviours and prepares them for life outside school.
- The introduction of a programme of outdoor learning is developing pupils' wider skills. As

one pupil told the inspector, 'We do learn new things but it is more about learning new skills.' The school's focus on creativity, collaboration, resilience and responsibility (2C2R) is beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' academic work as well as helping them develop their social skills.

- Leaders have ensured that pupils of secondary-school age have a range of academic and vocational courses to choose from. However, the choice of vocational courses currently on offer is limited by the school's facilities and, as a result, does not cater fully for all pupils' interests and skills. Leaders have identified the need to explore ways in which the school can engage with other local providers to broaden the school's vocational curriculum. However, this work is still in its early stages.
- Leaders ensure that the curriculum promotes British values and pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development effectively. This is supplemented by the work of the Pupil Parliament as well as enrichment activities and visits. For example, during the inspection, older pupils visited Bristol Crown Court to learn about the British judicial system, democracy and the rule of law.
- The majority of parents who spoke with the inspector or completed Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, stated that they are pleased with the school. They are particularly positive about the care and guidance that pupils are given and said that their children are well looked after. Parents typically state, 'Since attending Hedgeway, my child's confidence, self-esteem, physical and mental health have all improved.' Again: 'The teachers and leadership team genuinely care about my child even at their most difficult times. We have worked together as a team to resolve concerns and find new, imaginative ways to help them access the education they deserve. I now have confidence in my child's future.'

Governance

- The Aurora Group is providing strong strategic direction and holding leaders to account for the quality of the provision and pupils' outcomes. Discussions held with the chief executive officer and group directors demonstrated their secure understanding of the school's strengths and the areas in need of further development.
- Directors provide the school with effective levels of support and challenge. They visit the school regularly and, where appropriate, commission external reports in order to validate their judgements and those of senior leaders.
- The introduction of a range of management systems is further securing school leadership, especially around administration, health and safety, risk management and the upkeep of the school site.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders, including the proprietor, have made the arrangements necessary to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils. These meet statutory requirements in line with guidance from the Secretary of State. The school's safeguarding policy is published on its website and a paper copy is available on request.
- The designated safeguarding lead ensures that staff are well informed about risks to pupils' safety. Staff understand that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and know

how to recognise different signs of abuse or neglect. Staff spoken to during the inspection were clear about the processes they should follow if they have a concern about the safety or well-being of a pupil in the school.

- Staff provide pupils with frequent opportunities to learn how to identify and manage risks to their safety. This includes the safe use of digital technologies.
- Staff build positive relationships with pupils. Consequently, pupils are confident that they can turn to a trusted adult should they have a concern or need help.
- Staff work effectively with outside agencies to support pupils and their families, providing early help where it is needed.
- During the inspection, the school was undergoing extensive building works. Scrutiny of risk-assessments and discussions with leaders demonstrate that possible risks to pupils have been considered and control measures put in place as necessary.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers know their pupils well and have a secure understanding of their needs. This, combined with strong relationships built on mutual trust and respect, is ensuring that pupils make good progress from their different starting points.
- Across the school, teachers generally use questioning effectively. Where practice is strongest, teachers carefully select questions which explore pupils' understanding and require pupils to think more deeply about their responses.
- Teachers make effective use of assessment information regarding pupils' academic attainment. Planned activities build upon what pupils already know and can do. However, systems for the routine sharing of information about pupils' holistic development are not fully embedded. For example, class teachers do not have a full understanding of the strategies being used by therapists to support pupils' development or the impact these are having. As a result, the number of therapeutic strategies that teachers and teaching assistants are able to integrate into class-based lessons is limited. In some cases, this is slowing the progress that pupils make.
- Teachers are flexible, adaptable and responsive to pupils' needs and emotional states. They have good subject knowledge and combine this with their understanding of pupils' needs to plan learning that interests and engages them. As a result, pupils apply themselves to the tasks teachers set and try hard to do as well as they can.
- Teachers and teaching assistants have high expectations of what pupils are capable of achieving. They establish classroom routines and pay close attention to pupils' safety, for example in food technology, when working online, and in outdoor learning.
- Staff make effective use of resources to support pupils' learning. This includes the use of digital resources and practical apparatus in mathematics. These aid pupils' understanding and contribute well to their progress.
- A focus on the teaching of reading is paying off. The majority of pupils continue to make strong progress from their starting points and this is helping them to access the curriculum and work more independently. Younger pupils are making good progress towards their acquisition of early reading skills and phonics. Books are generally well matched to pupils' reading abilities. This enables them to grow in confidence and make

good progress with their reading.

- In mathematics, teachers demonstrate a growing understanding of a 'mastery' approach to learning. Resources are used effectively to support pupils' grasp of basic skills. Work in pupils' books, demonstrates that most pupils are developing their conceptual understanding and becoming increasingly efficient in their use of calculation. Teachers provide pupils with carefully crafted opportunities to consolidate their skills. They then guide them through more challenging application and reasoning activities. This deepens their understanding.
- Work in pupils' writing books shows that while they make progress from their starting points, this is not as strong as the progress made in mathematics and reading. This is often as a result of pupils' more limited engagement in this subject and a reluctance to get their ideas down on paper. Through their analysis of pupils' writing, leaders are currently investigating how adaptive technology could be used to better engage pupils in their writing.
- Teachers have focused on ensuring that pupils develop their understanding of spelling, grammar and punctuation and this is beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' writing. Pupils have opportunities to write across a range of genres, including poetry, diaries, letters and explanation texts. However, opportunities for them to apply their writing skills in subjects other than English are more limited.
- Good teaching and a well-developed curriculum ensure that pupils receive a varied diet of experiences and make good progress in a range of subjects, for example in science, humanities and art. In humanities, pupils, and especially those of secondary age, are working at a good level, supported by high expectations from teachers. Work in history books shows that pupils are expected to apply their understanding, to evaluate and to think critically about what they have learned. For example, pupils took part in discussions about whether the war in Afghanistan was a just war. In art, pupils develop their skills, for example in the use of colour and tone, and study the work of famous artists such as Mondrian, Rothko and Kandinsky.
- Homework is provided in some cases, but this is not a regular feature of the school's approach. Some parents who completed the online survey expressed dissatisfaction with the amount of homework their children receive. Leaders have, in the past, consulted parents with regards to their homework policy and, with a number of new families joining the school recently, have plans to repeat this process.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils adopt safe practices in school and were observed interacting safely together at lunchtimes and breaktimes. They move safely around the school and handle equipment with appropriate care. For example, during outdoor learning, pupils knew how to use the bow saw safely. Pupils say they like school and feel safe. The majority of parents, but not all, agree.
- Pupils say that bullying used to happen but is now rare. This is supported by the school's records. Pupils know that if they have any concerns, they can talk to a trusted adult. They

are confident that any incidents would be taken seriously and dealt with quickly and effectively.

- Pupils have a good understanding of the importance of staying safe online. Each pupil has an individual e-safety plan which identifies the risks to their safety and details the control measures that staff have put in place. Safe practices are taught through computing and PSHE lessons and reinforced in Pupil Parliament sessions.
- Staff ensure that transitions when pupils join and leave the school are as smooth and stress free as possible. Pupils benefit from good pastoral support and this ensures that they settle into school each day and engage with their learning. Pupils told the inspector that staff help them when they feel anxious.
- Pupils talk positively about the work of the Pupil Parliament. They say that they enjoy hearing about other pupils' successes and feel proud when their achievements are celebrated. Pupils are confident that their views are heard and that they can make a difference to school life. For example, one pupil told the inspector how one of their suggestions had led to leaders introducing the annual Christmas Fair.
- Older pupils receive effective careers guidance and advice. This assists them in making choices about their future destinations. However, opportunities for pupils to participate in work-related learning, including work experience, are limited.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils are polite, courteous and respectful. They display good manners to each other and to adults. They welcome visitors warmly and many are keen to share their work.
- The school's records of behaviour over time demonstrate that the conduct of pupils continues to improve. Most pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. This was confirmed during the inspection. Classrooms, corridors and outside areas are generally calm and orderly. The environment is stimulating and supports pupils' learning well.
- The vast majority of pupils have good attitudes to learning. This is reflected in the pride they take with their work and their eagerness to learn. Some pupils have difficulties in regulating their emotions and this can, at times, result in incidents of challenging behaviour. When this occurs, staff use the strong relationships they have formed with pupils to provide effective support. Similarly, staff are proficient at using a range of de-escalation techniques.
- Overall, pupils' attendance is below the level typically seen nationally. This is affected by a small number of pupils who have particularly high absence rates. Leaders monitor individual pupils closely. Those with low attendance have bespoke support plans in place. Leaders liaise with a range of external agencies to support pupils and their families. This is proving effective at reducing barriers to pupils' attendance, for example for those with anxiety. Case-by-case evidence presented by the school shows that the number of pupils with poor attendance is reducing.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- The large majority of pupils make good or better progress from their starting points. As a result, pupils' overall outcomes are good across a range of subjects. They are particularly strong in reading and mathematics. Most pupils arrive in school with prior attainment which is significantly below average. Many have had to manage barriers to learning relating to their social, emotional and mental health needs.
- Staff have high expectations of what pupils are capable of. Where pupils have the potential to achieve recognised qualifications, the school is preparing them for formal assessment and public examinations. For example, a number of pupils are currently working towards GCSEs, BTEC National Diplomas and Functional Skills Certificates. In 2016/17, there were no pupils in Year 11.
- The most able pupils are suitably challenged. Older pupils working at levels above that expected for their age are considered for early entry into public examinations.
- Children who are looked after make progress which is at least in line with that of their peers.
- Older pupils benefit from individual careers guidance and advice from an independent, impartial adviser. This helps pupils choose routes which interest them and where they can succeed. The majority of pupils leaving the school go on to further education, with many attending mainstream colleges and sixth forms.

School details

Unique reference number	138563
DfE registration number	803/6009
Inspection number	10026043

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	8 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	20
Number of part-time pupils	1
Proprietor	The Aurora Group
Operations director	Dan Alipaz
Interim head of education	Nik Hobson
Annual fees (day pupils)	£45,463–£66,781
Telephone number	01454 632532
Website	www.the-aurora-group.com/hedgeway/
Email address	nicola.hobson@the-aurora-group.com
Date of previous inspection	6–7 November 2013

Information about this school

- Aurora Hedgeway is a small independent special school which provides full-time education for children between the ages of eight and 19. It was previously known as the NAS Anderson School. The Aurora Group took up ownership of the school in November 2016.
- There are currently 20 pupils on roll. All pupils have an education, health and care plan or a statement of special educational needs in relation to autistic spectrum disorders.
- The previous principal left the school at the end of October 2017. At the time of the inspection, the school was being led by an interim head of education. A process to recruit substantive leadership was in place.

- The school's previous standard inspection took place in November 2013. This judged the school to be adequate overall. At the request of the Department for Education, the school received an emergency inspection in June 2015. This found that a number of independent school standards relating to Parts 1, 3, 6 and 8 were not met. A subsequent progress monitoring inspection, undertaken by Ofsted in July 2016, judged that the school was, at that time, meeting all of the independent school standards.
- The school does not currently use any alternative provision.
- At the time of the inspection, there were no students in the sixth form.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector visited classrooms and therapy rooms with the interim head of education in order to observe pupils' learning. Together, they looked at pupils' work from subjects across the curriculum.
- Discussions were held with school leaders, staff and representatives of the Aurora Group. This included a telephone conversation with the chief executive officer. The inspector also took into account 13 responses to questionnaires completed by staff.
- The inspector scrutinised the school's evaluation of its own performance, its improvement plan, a number of key school policies and information about pupils' outcomes and the school's curriculum. He also considered a range of documentation in relation to child protection, safeguarding, behaviour and attendance. Information about staff performance and examples of reports to parents were also evaluated.
- The inspector spoke with pupils throughout the inspection to seek their views and listened to a selection of them read.
- The inspector took account of seven responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, including a number of free-text responses. He also spoke to a number of parents during the inspection, including one by telephone.
- As part of this inspection, the Department for Education commissioned Ofsted to consider the school's application to make a material change to its registration. The requested change was to increase the maximum number of pupils the school could have on roll to 40 pupils and to extend the age range from eight to 19 to seven to 19. Having taken into account a range of evidence, the material change requested was approved.

Inspection team

Jonathan Dyer, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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