

Aurora Meldreth Manor School

Fenny Lane, Meldreth, Royston, Hertfordshire SG8 6LG

Inspection dates

8–10 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
Sixth form provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders and proprietors are ensuring that all of the independent school standards are met.
- The quality of education provision declined significantly before the Aurora Group took over. Since then, the new proprietors have made good improvements to the school's overall effectiveness.
- The new head of education is providing good leadership and management in the school.
- The senior managers within the Aurora Group do not carry out enough focused visits to inform their own view of the school's performance. However, they have rightly identified the need to appoint a deputy headteacher for the school as soon as possible.
- Teachers have a thorough knowledge of what their pupils can do and what they need to improve. They use this information well to develop pupils' learning.
- Teachers are implementing the new curriculum and curriculum assessments effectively. They track the progress pupils make in sensory activities appropriately.
- Pupils make good progress because teamwork between teachers, support assistants and therapists is strong.
- Staff do not consistently extend pupils' learning experiences and record their progress in all academic areas of learning across the sensory curriculum.
- All staff assure pupils' well-being and safety effectively.
- Pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. They are eager to come to school because they enjoy learning.
- Good guidance and support prepares students over 16 well for leaving the school.

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 the quality of teaching and raise achievement by ensuring that teachers and learning support assistants:
 - use every opportunity to extend pupils' experiences in all areas of learning during sensory activities
 - systematically record the small steps of progress pupils make in experiencing each academic area of learning across the sensory curriculum.
- Strengthen leadership and management by ensuring that the proprietors:
 - implement the plans to appoint a deputy headteacher as a matter of urgency
 - take steps to inform their own view of the school's effectiveness, including making focused visits, to determine how well the independent school standards are likely to be met as the numbers of pupils increase.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The school has been through a turbulent period since the previous inspection as the owners moved out and the Aurora Group took over the proprietorship. The new proprietors thoroughly audited the quality of provision from the outset. In doing so, they found out that the effectiveness of the school had rapidly declined.
- Staff turnover was high and several changes of headteacher resulted in a deterioration in standards. The proprietors subsequently took swift and effective action to address these concerns. Because of this action, the quality of provision is improving and overall effectiveness is now good. Leaders and managers have good capacity for ongoing improvement.
- The proprietors have taken improvements forward rapidly by ensuring that the independent school standards are met.
- The new head of education has further strengthened the school's provision by improving the quality of teaching, the curriculum and assessment, so building on the rapid improvements to pupils' education when the Aurora Group took over.
- Self-evaluation is accurate and is based on the head of education's and the principal's own monitoring. This has an appropriate focus on the impact of teaching and the curriculum on pupils' learning and well-being.
- The head of education and principal are ensuring that the Equalities Act is implemented effectively. A suitable three-year plan is in place to continue to improve pupils' access to the curriculum over time. Leaders promote equality of opportunity well. All pupils have a highly individualised curriculum, based on their prior learning, to ensure full and equal access. Staff deal with any potential incidents of bullying, racism or harassment effectively. Consequently, there are no recorded incidents of these in recent years.
- Leadership of teaching is good. Effective arrangements for managing teachers' performance are improving overall practice. The head of education has an accurate view of teaching and learning. This is because she visits classrooms and compares the outcomes of these visits to the rate of pupils' progress over time and the work they have completed. Teachers' strengths are acknowledged. Any areas for development are supported through mentoring and training. This has led to further improvements and pupils' good progress.
- The head of education has strengthened the breadth of the curriculum and the assessment processes. The newly revised curriculum is based on five key elements of the sensory curriculum: communication, cognition, physical development, environmental control technology, and personal, social and emotional well-being. Pupils have opportunities to experience all areas of learning through this model.
- There are good opportunities for enrichment, such as regular offsite visits and trips. Enterprise activities include preparing and serving Meldreth Manor apple juice and making and selling greetings cards. These activities enable post-16 students to develop skills of self-awareness and communication with others.

Governance

- The proprietors have provided strong support for the school in appointing the new principal and head of education to raise standards further. They have made sure that the website has all the required information for parents, carers and other stakeholders. They have recently reviewed policies to make sure that these are up to date.
- Although the proprietors visit the school site, their visits are not sufficiently focused to form their own view of the school's performance. They rely mainly on the reports they receive from the head of education and the principal.
- They have not yet appointed a deputy headteacher to build further leadership capacity. They rightly recognise that there is an urgent need to do this before pupil numbers increase.
- The proprietors ensure that legal requirements for safeguarding are met and training is up to date. They check the provision for the welfare of pupils rigorously, including making checks on the suitability of staff to work with pupils and ensuring that the single central records meets requirements.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Welfare provision is strong. All staff work closely together, and with parents and carers, to ensure that pupils are safe. Medical staff and therapists have good links with teachers and learning support assistants, throughout the day, to provide good-quality care for pupils' personal needs. They ensure that pupils' dignity is maintained at all times. Staff are vigilant in checking pupils' safety. Leaders and governors ensure that staff do their utmost to keep pupils safe from harm.
- The designated senior lead ensures that all staff are well trained in safeguarding and child protection matters. The school refers any concerns immediately to the designated lead for safeguarding. Risk assessments are thorough. Each pupil has an individual risk assessment for every school activity. These are updated regularly and checked appropriately by leaders and governors.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Visits to lessons, checks on pupils' work and the school's information about pupils' progress over time clearly demonstrate that teaching, learning and assessment are good.
- Teachers have a very thorough knowledge of each pupil's sensory needs and their prior learning. They pass this information on to learning support assistants who, together with teachers and therapists, use it well to plan individual programmes for pupils.
- Teachers also use the information from the initial assessments on entry to the school to set sensory targets and determine strategies for communication, developing thinking, physical development and independence.
- They work together as a strong team, with learning support assistants, therapists and health professionals, to ensure that pupils achieve their individual education plan targets, which are based on their sensory targets. While staff record the progress pupils make

towards their targets in the five broad areas of the sensory curriculum, they do not systematically record the small steps they make in experiencing each academic area of learning promoted across the sensory curriculum.

- The teaching of basic skills is good. All staff place a strong emphasis on developing communication and pupils' literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum. They use well-chosen resources to do this. For example, through song, pupils greet each other and say hello. They listen and wait for the count of one, two, three before responding and they identify simple sequences of different colours.
- Teachers use simple questioning and provide pupils with well-chosen resources, such as switches, to respond with. As a result, pupils listen carefully and make every effort to respond when prompted.
- Staff sometimes miss opportunities to promote learning in some areas across the sensory curriculum. For example, during their visit to a garden centre, pupils saw plants of many different colours, some of which were arranged artistically. The staff present did not make best use of the chance to promote pupils' creative development in this setting.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils make good progress in their personal development because staff pay good attention to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness in all activities and in day-to-day life in school. Planned activities include visiting shops and garden centres and opportunities to meet different people. Pupils learn to communicate while developing their thinking and independence skills through the curriculum.
- They learn the importance of tolerance, respect for individual differences and feeling happy. Pupils sometimes show a sense of awe and wonder, as seen in their positive exclamations when, for example, they entered the colour tent. As they progress through school they become more confident. They learn to take turns and listen carefully. They show respect to all staff and to each other. Pupils learn to appreciate cultural differences through experiencing different forms of art and music, such as African music.
- Pupils stay safe because staff are vigilant, providing high levels of supervision and care. Good welfare provision, through effective teamwork with health professionals and therapists, enables pupils to feel safe and secure.
- Staff prepare the oldest students well for adult life, so they feel confident when leaving the school.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils' behaviour is good in lessons and around the school because all staff manage behaviour well and are very positive in their approaches to securing good standards. There were no incidents of disruption of any kind seen during the inspection. Pupils were respectful and considerate towards others, taking turns and listening carefully.

- Records show there are no exclusions and the incidents of poor behaviour are few.
- Pupils develop an awareness of different types of bullying through sensory experiences. Parents and staff say there is no bullying and there are no recorded incidents of bullying or prejudice-based behaviour of any kind.
- Pupils enjoy learning and want to learn. Parents say how much their children enjoy coming to school. Attendance is good and limited only by the deteriorating health conditions of a few pupils. Many pupils achieve 100% attendance.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils enter the school within the lowest attainment levels in the national 'P' level scales. Staff identify and record the very small steps of progress pupils make in communication, cognition, physical development and independence.
- Accurate assessments of the sensory curriculum, learning journals, visual records and photographic evidence show that pupils make consistently good progress. They make rapid and secure gains, relative to their very low starting points in communication, physical development, thinking and independence.
- Pupils do well because staff plan well-conceived individual learning programmes and implement these effectively in lessons. As a result, all pupils access learning at their personal level of ability, making rapid and secure gains in skills relative to their very low starting points.
- The school's assessment and pupils' work show that children in local authority care are making at least the same progress as other pupils across the school.
- Post-16 students develop communication and independence skills further when they move on to the next stage in their education.
- The progress of a few pupils is limited due to degenerative conditions or hospital treatment.

Sixth form provision

Good

- Good leadership ensures that students receive good advice and support so that they are well prepared for the next stage of their lives.
- Good teaching and strong teamwork with health professionals and therapists ensure good progress in communication and independence.
- Students also make good progress in their awareness, and through interaction with others, because good support is provided for their needs.
- They make good progress in enterprise skills, such as making and serving apple juice and making and selling cards for special occasions. This helps them to learn to become more independent.
- Staff use assessment information well to plan individual programmes for students. There is an appropriately strong emphasis on communication and independence.
- Parents are confident about their children's well-being when they leave the school and are pleased to be involved in the transition. Staff work closely with external agencies to

ensure that transitions are smooth. All students transfer to an appropriate placement, including specialist colleges, supported living and the local skills centre, on leaving the school.

- As noted in the provision for younger pupils, occasionally sixth-form students' progress in each area of learning is not recorded across the sensory curriculum.

School details

Unique reference number	110920
DfE registration number	873/6008
Inspection number	10020932

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	6 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	15
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	5
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	The Aurora Group
Chair	Stephen Bradshaw
Head of education	Janis Rogers
Annual fees (day pupils)	£62,000
Telephone number	01763 268000
Website	www.the-aurora-group.com/meldrethmanor
Email address	meldreth.manor@the-aurora-group.com
Date of previous inspection	17–19 September 2013

Information about this school

- The school was last inspected as Meldreth Manor School, under the proprietorship of SCOPE in September 2013. The Aurora Group Limited took over the proprietorship of Meldreth Manor School which was vacated by Scope in April 2015. The school then changed its name to Aurora Meldreth Manor School.
- The school caters for up to 50 pupils with profound and complex learning disabilities. All

pupils are referred with an education, health and care plan for a variety of conditions: many have cerebral palsy with associated conditions such as sensory impairment; others present with a range of syndromes, including autistic spectrum disorder, and speech, language and communication needs. Some have life-threatening medical conditions. They all require very high levels of personal support with their physical, medical and learning needs. Consequently, they receive a minimum of one-to-one adult support in lessons.

- There are currently 15 pupils on roll. Most pupils are looked after by their local authority.
- There have been seven changes of head of education and a high turnover of staff since the last inspection. A new principal and a new head of education have recently been appointed.
- The school aims to empower young people to grow in their own and inspiring way.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector visited parts of five lessons and activities jointly with the head of education or principal.
- The inspector examined samples of pupils' work and the information about the progress pupils make over time. This included the destinations of students aged 19 years.
- The inspector held discussions with the head of education, the principal, two members of the Aurora Group Limited, the parents of two pupils, three therapists and two teachers.
- The inspector took account of the 10 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including five free-text responses. The inspector also took account of six questionnaire returns from staff.
- The inspector looked at the school premises and accommodation, looked at the school's website and scrutinised a wide range of documents. These included: the schools self-evaluation and school improvement plans; policies and procedures for safeguarding; the curriculum policy and schemes of work; the information provided to parents and carers; and records of behaviour and attendance.

Inspection team

Declan McCarthy, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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