

Aurora Hanley School

Cambrian Way, Eaves Lane, Stoke-on-Trent ST2 8PQ

Inspection dates

19–21 June 2018

Overall effectiveness	Outstanding
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Outstanding
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- Leaders and governors have ensured that all of the independent school standards are met. They have developed a highly effective curriculum and high-quality teaching and learning. Pupils' progress is outstanding as a result.
- Teaching has a consistently positive impact on progress because teachers assess pupils' progress in such high levels of detail. As a result, they plan activities which meet pupils' wide range of needs effectively. However, leaders do not yet use the new assessment system to its full effect.
- Leaders have established a calm school environment which meets pupils' special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, very well.
- Pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare are outstanding. Incidents of poor behaviour are diminishing quickly as pupils gain confidence and self-esteem.
- The governing body supports leaders well, offering challenge and support as appropriate. They have a lot of 'hands-on' involvement with the school.
- Pupils make very strong progress from their starting points. Though the school has been open for a short time, progress is rapid.
- Many pupils have not been in formal schooling for some time or have had very poor attendance in the past. Their attendance is now excellent.

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 leaders' systematic monitoring of pupils' academic progress, by:
 - fully implementing the newly established progress monitoring system
 - ensuring that all information, both current and historical, is entered into this system.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- Leaders have made sure that all of the independent school standards are met.
- Transition into school is carefully managed. For example, leaders keep the school open at some points in the holidays for pupils to 'keep in touch'. They plan transitions in detail with pupils' specific needs in mind. They communicate this carefully with staff and parents and carers so that all adults work together. As a result of this, pupils' attendance is high, their engagement in learning is good and they quickly settle into the school environment.
- The school has an in-house clinical team. They work closely with education leaders to identify pupils' needs, plan for their education and to work on helping pupils make progress with their social and emotional development. This clinical team is supplemented by speech and language, and occupational therapy. Alongside outstanding teaching, this means that pupils in the school, many of whom have been out of formal schooling for some time, are thriving.
- Leaders for SEN make sure that staff have all of the information they need to meet pupils' needs. Education, health and care (EHC) plans are updated in a timely way, and each pupil has an individual support plan. Staff have swift access to helpful information about pupils' different conditions and needs so that they can meet them effectively.
- Parents are highly positive about the school's impact. All would recommend the school to another parent, and many express their delight in seeing the positive behaviours that the school develops. Typical comments were: 'My child is much more confident at school and at home too; seeing the difference makes it all worthwhile' and, 'To see my child so happy about going to school is amazing!'
- There is a well-designed induction programme in place for staff. This means that staff who join the school, some of whom have not worked in a school like this before, have all of the training that they need to be successful professionals. Leaders track the induction training well so that they have a full picture of who has completed which unit. Staff value the professional development that leaders provide.
- Staff enjoy working at the school. They say that now pupils have settled in, it is a safe and calm place to work. Many say that it is the best job they have ever done, and one member of staff commented: 'I feel privileged to work in an environment where pupils are at the heart of everything we do.' This dedication is seen across the school where staff consistently model the excellent behaviours they expect of pupils.
- Reports to parents are simple to follow but detailed enough to give a vivid flavour of pupils' progress. Leaders also make sure that parents are kept in touch with all aspects of their work with pupils. Parents commented that this is a strength of the school.
- The curriculum is varied and meets pupils' needs. Younger pupils follow the national curriculum. Pupils at key stage 3 follow a traditional curriculum with a range of vocational aspects.

- Leaders are aspirational for pupils. They acknowledge that many of their pupils are capable of academic qualifications and this is their aim. At key stage 4, GCSE courses in English, mathematics and science are complemented by a personal, health, social and economic education course, religious education, vocational courses and physical education. Pupils also study a humanities course, food technology, English literature, gymnastics awards and horticulture.
- Over time, pupils are developing the resilience to work off the school site. This is an important part of their development. There are ample opportunities for this, and pupils very much enjoy the off-site activities which include multi-school cricket competitions, visits to the local leisure centre, trampolining and badminton.
- Leaders' self-evaluation is accurate and their action planning valid and pertinent. It shows that leaders understand where the school is currently and can make the changes needed to make it even better.
- Teachers track pupils' progress very carefully and leaders have a broad overview of this. Leaders have recently introduced a new system so that they have a more coherent grasp on all pupils' progress in each subject. This is in preparation for the school's growth in size. It is too early to see the impact of this newly introduced system because not all of the required information has been entered into this system. Leaders' self-evaluation acknowledges that this is an area for improvement.

Governance

- The school governing body are consultants who work across the schools in the company. Each has a specific role in school improvement and holding leaders to account. Governance is effective because:
 - the regional director, also a governor, works closely with leaders to hold them to account
 - the regional director makes sure that all governors are fully aware of how the school is developing
 - a range of audit systems are in place to identify weaknesses and these weaknesses are swiftly addressed.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The school publishes a safeguarding policy on its website. The policy reflects all current guidance.
- Leaders understand pupils' specific vulnerabilities and manage these appropriately through the curriculum as well as in response to any concerns that arise.
- All of the systems for behaviour, safeguarding and mental health work effectively together because leaders have designed them well. As a result, staff deal swiftly and effectively with patterns of behaviour which might raise safeguarding concerns.
- Leaders keep appropriate case files and liaise well with external agencies to keep pupils safe. All staff understand their role in keeping pupils safe and leaders have established a caring and vigilant culture.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- Teaching across the school is consistent in the way in which it successfully meets pupils' wide range of needs. Most of the pupils in the school have either been out of school for some time or have had very weak attendance in the past. Many have arrived at the school recently. Teachers take every opportunity to identify pupils' misconceptions and work with them to fill gaps in their understanding left by, sometimes, years with no formal schooling. Pupils say that they appreciate the clear way in which teachers explain things, and their patience. Teachers' assessments of pupils' needs are detailed and help them plan effective, purposeful learning.
- Teachers limit the extent to which pupils' SEN become barriers to their learning. They do this by maintaining very calm, disciplined classrooms and communicating clearly and respectfully with pupils according to their individual needs. As a result, pupils are able to work diligently, produce work of a high standard and make swift progress from their starting points.
- Across the school, teachers have consistently high expectations of pupils. They make sure that they are challenged appropriately. They identify pupils who are capable of high attainment and give them work that stretches them. They find where the gaps in pupils' knowledge are and plan effectively to fill them. As a result, many pupils achieve at levels that in the past they did not think possible.
- As a result of the successful communication of teachers' subject knowledge, pupils who are taking GCSE courses are making rapid progress. Teachers use subject-specific vocabulary frequently and explain difficult concepts with ease so that pupils' understanding is enhanced.
- Pupils are commonly highly engaged in learning as a result of teachers' effective planning. For example, primary-aged pupils take part in a very wide range of activities using high-quality resources. They undertake tactile science experiments, make things and explore stories using artefacts. Teachers keep meticulous records of how much support pupils need in each task so that their progress is accurately judged.
- Teaching assistants work seamlessly together with teachers. They communicate well with each other, responding to pupils' needs as they arise. At the times when pupils work outside the classroom, teaching assistants ensure that they have the work and quality support they need to continue learning.
- Where pupils require sensory support, speech and language or occupational therapy, they receive this support quickly. It is purposeful and meets pupils' needs effectively while focusing carefully on well-formed learning goals. In sensory sessions, practitioners model the correct use of language, promote physical development and assess pupils over time so that they make excellent progress.
- In classrooms, teachers make sure that the physical environment enables pupils to learn. Screens to help pupils maintain focus have been made with pupils. Care has been taken to make sure that these screens do not isolate them from the rest of the class. Classroom resources such as display are vibrant and interesting. Teachers value pupils' work highly and take every opportunity to identify when they make progress.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Most pupils' personal development since joining the school has been exceptional. This is because the school meets their needs well, allowing them to show what they are good at and who they are. Many pupils now have a deeper understanding of their conditions and are more able to manage themselves well.
- Leaders track pupils' emotional and social development very carefully. Their tracking shows that most pupils are making very strong progress in this area.
- Pupils feel safe in school. They get on well with one another and feel increasingly confident to use their voice. Pupils spoke confidently with the inspector about their personal development over the last school year and say that bullying is rare and well addressed should it happen.
- Parents recognise the positive changes in pupils' personal development, with one parent saying, 'This last year has been incredible. My child is calmer, happier and settled, enjoys coming to school and talks about it at home; we could not be happier with the change this school has made to our child.' This comment is representative of other parents' views.
- Leaders take many opportunities to develop pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural understanding. This includes work on understanding feelings, impact on others and community-building activities. There is a student council which helps pupils make a genuine and positive contribution to the school. Displays show clearly how pupils can interact positively, play together and enjoy one another's company. Staff provide many social activities which pupils enjoy and form a key part of their social learning.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Leaders utilise the on-site clinical team in meeting pupils' SEN, including behavioural needs. Teachers have an understanding of which behaviours are associated with pupils' special educational needs and which are choices pupils make. As a result, poor behaviour is identified quickly and addressed appropriately.
- The school is calm both in lessons and in social times. The number of exclusions is very low, and, as pupils' needs are being met over the longer term, incidents of poor behaviour are diminishing. Leaders track pupils' behaviour very carefully, identify patterns of concern and involve the education and clinical team in finding solutions when pupils' behaviour changes.
- The school tackles any incident of prejudicial behaviour carefully. They keep records of incidents and respond with teaching where pupils need to develop their understanding of their impact on other people.
- Pupils' attendance is extremely high. For most pupils it is well above what it has been in the past.

- The inspector saw many examples of pupils being kind to one another and being very well mannered. These manners are expected at all times and now come naturally to many pupils. Pupils are respectful to teachers and other staff as a result of staff modelling respectful voices, respectful language and a genuine care for one another.

Outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

- As a result of a well-managed environment and pupils' social, emotional and special educational needs being well met, pupils in all classes and key stages are making strong progress academically. Teachers have a clear view of their starting points and make sure that increasingly challenging work accelerates progress further. From their starting points, pupils' progress is outstanding.
- Where pupils are very able, they are achieving at an appropriate level. For example, some pupils at key stage 3 are particularly talented in English. These pupils have begun GCSE work and are making strong progress in this: something that they are rightly proud of. Their understanding of texts is well-developed and they are beginning to grapple with complex technical terminology.
- Pupils who are in key stage 4 are making strong progress towards achieving their GCSEs. Where they have been behind where they should have been, because of missed work in the past, their knowledge is growing quickly. As a result of them knowing more, they are making increasingly complex links and are able to take on more challenging tasks.
- Where pupils need to develop their motor skills to make better progress, they are doing this well, over time. In the primary phase, pupils are becoming increasingly independent and able to focus for longer periods of time. This means that they are developing a wide knowledge across all of the curricular areas.
- Some pupils undertake horticulture courses. These pupils' knowledge of plant names and needs is developing well and they are increasingly independent in managing the school's new garden. They are rightly proud of their developing sensory garden, vegetable patch and herb garden.

School details

Unique reference number	143839
DfE registration number	860/6044
Inspection number	10045268

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
Number of pupils on the school roll	20
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Aurora ASD Ltd
Chair	Kathryn Rudd
Headteacher	Tracy Whitehurst
Annual fees (day pupils)	£55,000
Telephone number	020 36170170
Website	www.the-aurora-group.com/hanley
Email address	enquiries@the-aurora-group.com
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Aurora School Hanley is a part of the Aurora Group. It is an independent school for pupils with autism spectrum disorder (ASD).
- The school building has a small field, garden, dining area, classrooms and practical rooms. There is also a quadrangle which is used for physical education.
- All pupils have an EHC plan or a statement of special educational needs.
- Pupils come from a range of localities both close to the school and much further afield.

- There are currently no pupils in Years 12 or 13, though the school is registered to cater for these pupils.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first standard inspection of the school, following its registration on the 11 July 2017.
- The inspector held meetings with the headteacher, her senior team and the regional director of Aurora. A telephone call was held with governors. He also met with teachers and the clinical psychologist team.
- The inspector visited lessons, scrutinised pupils' work over time and spoke to pupils about their learning. Pupils' behaviour was observed inside and outside of lessons.
- The views of parents were considered through emails to the school, a meeting with some parents and the 14 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire.
- The views of pupils were considered through conversations with pupils and the school's collection of their comments. Staff views were evaluated through the 18 responses to a questionnaire.
- A range of documents was scrutinised including those on safeguarding, behaviour, attendance, curriculum and pupils' progress.

Inspection team

Dan Owen, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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