

Aurora Poppyfield School

Lower Road, Effingham KT24 5JP

Inspection date

3 February 2022

Overall outcome

The school is likely to meet all the independent school standards when it opens

Main inspection findings

Part 1. Quality of education provided

Paragraphs 2(1)–2(2)(b), 2(2)(d)–2(2)(e)(iii), 2(2)(h)–2A(1), 2A(1)(b)–4

- Leaders have high aspirations for what they hope prospective pupils will achieve through being at the school. This is reflected in a written curriculum policy which shows leaders' clear understanding of pupils' likely academic, social and emotional needs.
- The planned curriculum incorporates the range of educational experiences identified in the independent school standards. Leaders have given careful thought to how the curriculum will be delivered, harnessing pupils' interests through a flexible approach to the topics and experiences they will have. Medium-term plans map out suitable learning aims across a range of subjects. Where appropriate, pupils will work towards accredited qualifications, such as GCSE or functional skills.
- Leaders are mindful that pupils will join the school with a vast range of prior knowledge and confidence. They have considered how staff will identify what pupils have already learned and what they need to learn next. Information and targets from pupils' education, health and care plans (EHC plan) will be central to this. Staff recruited so far have suitable expertise to be able to tailor the planned curriculum appropriately for their pupils.
- Leaders anticipate that some pupils will be in the early stages of learning to read when they join the school. They have made plans for how these pupils will be supported, including through access to a suitable phonics programme. Thought has also been given to how pupils with other communication needs will be helped to access the curriculum, such as through the use of sign language, pictures and online tools.
- Curriculum plans include appropriate provision for pupils' personal, social and health education (PSHE). The school's policy and intended practice around relationships and sex education (RSE) are fit for purpose, taking account of pupils' special educational needs. Leaders have ensured that the RSE policy is published to parents and plan to consult with parents about it as part of pupils' induction into the school.

- Leaders are securely focused on preparing pupils for adulthood. Careers information, advice and guidance are central to this aim. Plans are in place for pupils to access ongoing information and support about their options for the future. Leaders have begun to explore links with local sixth-form providers and are considering pupils' routes into employment.
- Leaders have appropriate arrangements in place for checking how well pupils are learning. These are centred around pupils' EHC plan targets, helping to keep work focused on pupils' identified priorities. Leaders are keen to capture and celebrate pupils' progress in the broadest sense, including through visual records such as photographs.
- This part of the independent school standards is likely to be met if the school is permitted to open.

Part 2. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Paragraph 5–5(d)(iii)

- Pupils' social development is a core strand that threads through the planned curriculum. Leaders' awareness of pupils' likely needs in this regard is clear and convincing, as a critical part of preparing pupils for adulthood. Central to this work is helping pupils learn how to form positive, safe and effective relationships with others. This theme is integrated into learning and experiences incorporated into curriculum planning.
- Leaders recognise that pupils are likely to find it difficult to make meaning from what they encounter in their daily lives. This has the potential to put them at increased risk of harm. The planned curriculum focuses on helping pupils to understand themselves and to make sense of the world around them. Through exploring their own views and beliefs, pupils will be actively taught to appreciate those of others.
- Leaders are keen to share and celebrate the cultural diversity that exists both within and beyond the school. Pupils will learn about cultures other than their own, through exploring aspects such as food, music and dress. Adults plan to model tolerance and respect through their actions in school, showing pupils how to make positive choices. Leaders intend to use opportunities to celebrate differences, for example through marking autism awareness day. Opportunities to work with the Royal British Legion, who are based on their own part of the school site, are also being explored, to help pupils to learn about service and sacrifice.
- Early plans are emerging about how pupils will engage with and contribute to their local community. The headteacher has made initial links with local primary and secondary schools, and with the church situated next door. There are plans for pupils to participate in fundraising activities and to support elderly or vulnerable members of the local community.
- The school is likely to meet this part of the independent school standards if granted permission to open.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Paragraph 7–7(b)

- The school's written policy for safeguarding and child protection is published on the website. It is fit for purpose, meeting requirements laid out in current statutory guidance. It indicates that leaders understand their safeguarding duties and have suitable plans in place to fulfil them.
- The headteacher will take the role of designated safeguarding lead. She is suitably knowledgeable about what this role involves and has undertaken relevant training. She has appropriate plans in place to ensure that all staff receive training as part of their induction. This looks set to ensure that they understand the potential risks to pupils and what to do if a concern arises.
- Leaders are alert to the potential risks to pupils, including around online safety and sharing information or images. They realise that some pupils may need extra help in understanding some of these risks. Curriculum plans provide ongoing opportunities for pupils to learn about how to make sensible choices that help keep them safe. The focus on developing relationships is intended to ensure that pupils will feel confident to tell an adult about any worries they have that potentially put them at risk.
- Appropriate plans are in place to identify and help pupils who may be at risk of harm. Arrangements for record-keeping are suitable. These look likely to help leaders promptly identify where they may need to act to keep a pupil safe.

Paragraphs 9 and 10

- Promoting positive behaviours is a key part of the school's ethos and curriculum. This is reflected in the school's written behaviour and anti-bullying policies. Expectations for pupils and staff are clearly laid out, along with how positive choices will be celebrated and rewarded. Sanctions are fit for purpose and designed to help pupils make more positive choices in the future.
- Leaders recognise that pupils may need extra help in understanding the concept of bullying. Leaders have plans in place to provide this, including through the PSHE curriculum. They intend to use scenarios to help pupils understand what bullying is and to be able to reflect on their own behaviour.

Paragraphs 11, 12, 13 and 16

- Arrangements are in place to ensure that the school complies with relevant health and safety requirements. These are supported by policy and practice which are tried and tested in other Aurora Group schools. As such, roles, responsibilities and routines are well defined and appropriate.
- A fire risk assessment has recently been carried out, providing assurance that fire safety arrangements are suitable. Appropriate firefighting equipment and fire evacuation procedures are in place. Leaders intend to carry out routine checks on equipment and alarms and hold regular fire drills.
- Leaders are alert to potential risks to children, including those linked to their special educational needs. They have carried out a detailed risk assessment of the school site, in line with the written risk assessment policy. They have suitable plans in place

for ensuring that other relevant risk assessments, such as for individual pupils and specific activities, are carried out in a timely way.

- Arrangements for providing first aid are fit for purpose. The headteacher and assistant headteacher have recently completed relevant training. There are plans for other staff to be trained as they take up their posts. In the event that staff need to administer medication to pupils, they will receive extra training to enable them to do this.

Paragraph 14

- Leaders have thought carefully about how to supervise pupils during the day. They have plans to ensure that sufficient staff are in place to do this successfully. Due consideration has been given to how pupils will arrive and leave the site safely, and to how breaktimes and lunchtimes will be managed.

Paragraph 15

- Leaders are aware of the information required about each pupil on the admissions register. They will collect this as part of a carefully planned introduction to the school.
- Pupils will be registered twice each day. Appropriate routines are in place for recording and monitoring pupils' attendance, and for taking prompt action if a pupil does not come to school.
- The requirements for this part of the independent school standards are likely to be met.

Part 4. Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

Paragraphs 18(2)–18(2)(e), 18(3), 19(2)–19(2)(d), 19(3), 20(6)–20(6)(c), 21(1)–21(7)(b)

- Leaders know what checks they are required to carry out on adults employed by or working at the school. These include checks about medical fitness and relating to safeguarding. They have completed these checks for staff who have already been employed. Relevant members of the proprietor body, including those on the governing board, have also undergone the necessary checks.
- A single central record of recruitment checks is in place. This gives a clear record of the checks that have been carried out, in accordance with requirements. Staff already employed and relevant members of the Aurora Group are included on the record. Staff employed by the Aurora Group support the school in carrying out relevant checks. Appropriate information is shared with the school in the form of staff's personnel records.
- The school is likely to meet this part of the independent school standards.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

Paragraphs 23(1)–23(1)(c), 24(1)–24(1)(b), 24(2), 25–29(1)(b)

- The school will operate from a single site. A building formerly used by the Royal British Legion has been adapted and refurbished in order to make it fit for this purpose.
- Leaders have given careful thought to managing access to the site, which will be shared with representatives from the Royal British Legion. The school will have sole occupancy of their part of the building. Any visitors to the site will be required to

phone ahead and to sign in on arrival. The site has appropriate outside lighting to make it safe for pupils and adults in the evenings.

- The building comprises seven classrooms, a food room, plus several smaller office and therapy spaces. Rooms are light, bright and of a suitable size for the intended number of pupils. Specialist spaces, such as the food and science rooms, are well appointed, with appropriate storage for hazardous materials. Some rooms have sinks to provide access to drinking water, which is suitably labelled. Leaders anticipate pupils having their own water bottles, which they can fill from the supplies in classrooms or the food room.
- There are suitable toilets in place for boys and girls. These include hand-washing facilities. At the time of this visit, there was no hot water in the boys' toilets, but this was in hand to be addressed. There is a separate accessible toilet in the main reception area.
- The medical room is fit for purpose. There is access to running water in the room and the toilet facilities nearby. A bed for pupils to rest on and a cabinet for storing controlled medicines are in the process of being installed.
- Pupils will have access to a suitable outside space for recreation. Currently, there is a playground with a wide path leading to it. The headteacher has plans to create a sensory seating area in this space in due course.
- Pupils will use the local leisure centre for physical education sessions. The headteacher has already made provisional plans for pupils to use swimming and sports facilities. Pupils will use the changing facilities at the leisure centre. There is also a shower on the school site for pupils who wish to use it.
- This part of the independent school standards is likely to be met.

Part 6. Provision of information

Paragraph 32(1)–32(1)(d), 32(1)(f)–32(2)(b), 32(2)(b(ii))–32(4)(c)

- The school has a website that has already been populated with relevant documents and information. It provides a bright and accessible source of information for prospective pupils and their families. Required policies, such as for safeguarding, behaviour and complaints, are easy to find and are up to date. Relevant leaders and governors are clearly identified and their contact details are given in case of need.
- Leaders intend to adopt the approach used in other schools for reporting annually and in writing to parents about pupils' learning and progress. They are aware of the requirement to provide relevant local authorities with an annual account of how each pupils' funding has been spent.
- The school is likely to meet this part of the independent school standards if granted permission to open.

Part 7. Manner in which complaints are handled

Paragraph 33

- Leaders have adopted the Aurora Group's policy for handling complaints. This policy is clear, comprehensive and fit for purpose. It clearly identifies a staged approach for complainants to take in the event of having a concern.

- Leaders have appropriate plans to keep records of any complaints received by the school. Monitoring of complaints and arising actions will be part of routine checks carried out by the proprietor body.
- This part of the independent school standards looks likely to be met.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Paragraph 34(1)–34(1)(c)

- The headteacher and proprietor body representatives bring suitable knowledge and expertise to their roles. They are working with a common sense of purpose to establish an appropriate provision for the pupils they hope to attract to the school. Their understanding of pupils' likely needs is convincing and drives their determined work.
- There is a governing body in place made up of staff from the Aurora Group. Personnel have an appropriate and broad range of experience and expertise. This places them well to be able to support and challenge the school as it develops. The headteacher, assistant headteacher and governors have all completed relevant training, including in relation to their safeguarding duties.
- Routines are already in place to keep the proprietor body informed about standards in the school. For instance, there are requirements for the headteacher to report to the Aurora Group about a range of aspects of school life, including safeguarding, staffing, educational standards and health and safety. Plans are in place for relevant Aurora Group staff to carry out monitoring visits to the school.
- The school is likely to meet this part of the independent school standards.

Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010

- An accessibility plan is published on the school website. It fulfils leaders' duties under the Equality Act 2010. Leaders plan to review this plan within the next few months once the school is up and running. An audit tool contained within the plan looks likely to help leaders check that their plan remains fit for purpose as the school evolves.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

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

Proposed school details

Unique reference number	148930
DfE registration number	936/6056
Inspection number	10217970

This inspection was carried out under section 99 of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's likely compliance with the independent school standards that are required for registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Other independent special school
School status	Independent special school
Proprietor	Beechkeys Limited
Chair	Mark Costello
Headteacher	Suzanne Everitt
Annual fees (day pupils)	£54,000 to £57,000
Telephone number	01372 678 630
Website	www.theauroragroup.co.uk/sen-special-needs-schools/independent-education-surrey-education/
Email address	aurorapoppyfield@the-aurora-group.com
Date of previous standard inspection	Not previously inspected

Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal	Inspector's recommendation
Age range of pupils	Not applicable	11 to 16	11 to 16
Number of pupils on the school roll	Not applicable	40	40

Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal
Gender of pupils	Not applicable	Mixed

Number of full-time pupils of compulsory school age	Not applicable	40
Number of part-time pupils	Not applicable	0
Number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities	Not applicable	40
Of which, number of pupils with an education, health and care plan	Not applicable	40
Of which, number of pupils paid for by a local authority with an education, health and care plan	Not applicable	40

Staff

	School's current position	School's proposal
Number of full-time equivalent teaching staff	Not applicable	7
Number of part-time teaching staff	Not applicable	0
Number of staff in the welfare provision	Not applicable	18

Information about this proposed school

- Aurora Poppyfield proposes opening as an independent special school. It will serve pupils aged 11 to 16 who have been diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. They may also have additional behavioural and/or communication needs. Pupils are likely to have been absent from formal education for a period of time before they come to Poppyfield.
- The school is to be based in part of a building owned by the Royal British Legion. The school will have sole occupancy of their part of the building. Any visitors to the other part of the site will not have access to the school premises. The school will operate from a single site. The premises comprise classrooms, toilet facilities and a secure outside space. Pupils will access off-site physical education facilities at a local leisure centre.

- The school does not intend to have a particular religious character. Its aim is to re-engage pupils with education, helping them to prepare successfully for adulthood, future learning and/or employment.
- Poppyfield will be one of a number of schools owned and run by Beechkeys Limited. This company is part of the Aurora Group, which owns and runs a number of schools and children's homes for children with complex special educational needs. Governance will be via a governing body which is made principally from Aurora Group staff. This group will report directly to the chief executive officer, who represents the chair of the proprietor body.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was commissioned by the Department for Education in response to the proprietor's application to open an independent school. This inspection considered all parts of the independent school standards.
- The inspector met with the headteacher and chair of governors. She reviewed documents provided by the school and those available on the school's website. She toured the school site and checked the school's central record of recruitment checks. She spoke with the chief executive officer of Beechkeys, who represents the chair of the proprietor body.

Inspection team

Kathryn Moles, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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