

Inspection of Aurora Hanley School

Cambrian Way, off Eaves Lane, Bucknall, Stoke on Trent, Staffordshire ST2 8PQ

Inspection dates: 18 to 20 October 2022

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

The quality of education

Outstanding

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Sixth-form provision

Outstanding

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Outstanding

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are delighted to come to this school where they feel safe and valued. They thoroughly enjoy the calm atmosphere of the small, welcoming classrooms. Pupils are extremely well cared for. Staff value the uniqueness of every person in school, whether they are pupils, other members of staff or leaders.

Adults are highly trained and know exactly how to support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Pupils say that incidents of bullying are extremely rare. Staff sort things out if this occurs.

Pupils are taught excellent manners and behave exceptionally well. The mutual respect between pupils and staff shines through. Pupils thrive during the frequent opportunities to widen their horizons with new experiences in different places. Staff have extremely high aspirations for pupils. They help them to reach their potential.

Pupils can relax, exercise and learn in the outdoor area around the school buildings. The gardening area is well used for growing plants and vegetables that are cooked by pupils and staff. An enormous pumpkin, grown in this garden recently, provided both delicious cake and soup. Art lessons are highly popular. Pupils have produced a wealth of exciting paintings, drawings and sculptures.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders have established a highly successful school. Staff are exceptionally well qualified. Teachers strive consistently to ensure that pupils, including those in the sixth form, develop the resilience to succeed. As a result, they make excellent progress both academically and personally.

The school has a highly ambitious curriculum. Teachers consistently plan new learning with expertise. Pupils' learning builds well on what they have learned before. Teachers have fun ways of helping pupils to know and remember more, and to learn new vocabulary in lessons. Leaders provide exceptional support for pupils with SEND. They support teachers to plan for everyone's particular needs. Teachers use information from pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans to inform their planning and delivery of the curriculum. Pupils' learning plans are reviewed regularly to ensure they benefit from the most effective support.

The work of the school's clinical team is a significant strength of the school. On pupils' arrival in school, and at the end of each key stage, staff conduct in-depth assessments with the help of parents and carers. Leaders set ambitious personal targets for pupils' communication, socialisation and daily living skills. Teachers review and re-set targets regularly. This helps to ensure pupils reach their targets and are successful in all aspects of school life.

Leaders ensure that reading has a high profile. Phonics is extremely well taught, brisk and enjoyable. Pupils read every day. Teachers read regularly to their classes. Sixth formers new to the school say that, since they came to Aurora Hanley, they find themselves picking up books much more often.

The personal development of pupils is greatly enhanced by the huge variety of opportunities offered. During 'Feel Good Friday,' pupils, including those in the sixth form, choose from a selection of six-week programmes. For example, they can choose between raft building, a pond eco-project, film making, a music project or horse riding. Teachers plan activities carefully for each individual so that they gradually become more confident and gain independence. Pupils, who at first would not talk to anyone or go outside, speak to a variety of different groups and visit many different places.

Pupils have come from previous schools and settings where their attendance has been poor. At Aurora Hanley, their attendance is excellent and their work improves immensely. They catch up quickly to become ready for the next stage in their learning.

Pupils learn about the importance of equality between people. Students in the sixth form show a great depth of understanding in this area. This is because they have excellent opportunities for lengthy discussion in lessons. The school council enables pupils to learn about democracy. Teachers ensure that pupils understand what it means to represent the views of others. Pupils begin to understand about difference when they learn about other religions and about other cultures. Older students can talk knowledgeably, for example, about LGBT+ issues and racial prejudice.

Leaders have put in place a highly effective careers education. In the sixth form, students value the opportunity of work experience. This is carefully planned and risk assessed. Pupils have experienced, for example, working in a café, a charity shop or working in a museum. Students enjoy volunteering in eco-projects, charity shops and street-food projects. Students study GCSEs, functional skills or BTEC courses in the sixth form, as well as a variety of short courses. Previous students have left to go on to college, to do A levels, or to start an apprenticeship.

Leaders have ensured that all the independent school standards are met. They provide highly effective professional development for all staff. This strong emphasis on continual improvement to the curriculum and teaching ensures the equality of education remains very strong. Staff feel highly valued as a team. They enjoy working in a school where leaders care about their workload and their personal well-being.

Leaders collaborate in a highly effective way with other agencies and with parents. Parents say it is a very special school. Leaders have set in place a valuable programme of relationships, health and sex education. They discussed it with parents before setting it in place to allay any concerns.

The Aurora Group governors have a range of expertise and are exceptionally well informed. They challenge leaders about all aspects of the school's performance but are also extremely supportive. The school complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff receive regular training in keeping pupils safe. Leaders ensure that they identify pupils who need early help or are at risk from harm. They pursue their concerns rigorously when asking for help from other agencies. Staff know how to report concerns about pupils. They do so promptly and diligently, logging all concerns.

The safeguarding policy includes the most recent statutory guidance and is displayed on the school's website. Leaders make all the necessary checks to ensure that staff are safe to work with pupils. Pupils are knowledgeable about how to keep themselves safe. This includes when they are online.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

School details

Unique reference number	143839
DfE registration number	860/6044
Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	10238159
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	78
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	8
Number of part-time pupils	None
Proprietor	Aurora Group
Chair for the proprietor	Mark Costello
Chair of Governors	Pam Eyre
Headteacher	Tracy Whitehurst
Annual fees (day pupils)	£62,000
Telephone number	01782 973737
Website	www.theauroragroup.co.uk/sen-special-needs-schools/independent-education-staffordshire
Email address	hanleyschool@the-aurora-group.com
Date of previous inspection	19 to 21 June 2018

Information about this school

- The Aurora Hanley School is part of the Aurora Group. It is an independent special school for pupils with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and related conditions.
- The school has one main two-storey building used for secondary pupils and four bungalows, one of which is used for the administration hub, while the other three bungalows house primary pupils and some key stage 3 pupils.
- The school has grassed areas for play outside and a kitchen garden and an indoor quadrangle that can be used for games. Physical education is taught off site at local sports facilities.
- All pupils have an EHC plan. They are placed at the school by six local authorities and typically come from mainstream schools or academies. Some pupils have been out of school for a significant period of time.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

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

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with all school leaders: the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the business leader and two assistant headteachers.
- The lead inspector met virtually with the chief executive officer of the proprietor body. She also met with the chair of the governing body and two other governors.
- The lead inspector met with parents and carers at the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, art and personal, social, health and economic education as part of this inspection. For each deep dive, inspectors met with curriculum leaders and other teachers of these subjects. They talked to pupils and visited lessons accompanied by leaders. They also looked at pupils' work.

- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents. These included: school policies, safeguarding records, curriculum plans, pupils' attendance and behaviour records, health and safety records and the single central record.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in a range of different classes and at different times of the day. They talked to pupils informally about bullying, behaviour and welfare.
- The lead inspector carried out a tour of the premises to check compliance with the independent school standards.
- Inspectors considered responses to the online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View. This included free-text comments. Inspectors also considered responses to Ofsted's online staff and pupil survey.

Inspection team

Mary Maybank, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Sarah Ashley

Ofsted Inspector

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