

Inspection of Aurora Foxes

Inspection dates: 26 to 28 April 2023

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Provision for learners with high needs	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

Information about this provider

Aurora Foxes is an independent specialist college located in Minehead, Somerset. It provides education for students aged 16 to 25 with special educational needs and/or disabilities, many with Down's syndrome.

Students live in residential houses situated in Minehead and within a short walking distance of each other and the other college facilities. The college operates a hotel and catering truck, which are open to the public, where students gain work experience.

At the time of inspection, there were 82 students, all with education, health and care plans (EHC plans), attending the college, of whom 81 were residential. All students follow a curriculum that includes vocational, functional and independent living skills.

What is it like to be a learner with this provider?

Students thrive in an environment where respecting each other and working together are valued. Students understand the importance of having a positive attitude and good communication skills and exhibit these through their exemplary behaviours and in their attitudes to learning and work. Students are confident and articulate. They are proud to be students at the college.

Students understand the links between the way they behave, their positive attitudes and their employability. For example, students know the importance of routine and punctuality in all aspects of their studies, including classroom-based learning and work experience, and how this links to sustaining a job and earning a salary. As a result, students are punctual, take pride in their work and complete all tasks with diligence.

Students benefit from working in the hotel to put their skills and knowledge into practice. They demonstrate professional behaviours and excellent customer service skills due to the support and modelling they gain from staff.

Students feel safe because they understand many of the potential risks within the community and at work; moreover, staff ensure that they feel secure and supported. However, too many students do not have a well-developed understanding of the risks associated with extremism or radicalisation.

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

Leaders have ensured that all students study a broad curriculum, which enables them to build their knowledge, skills and behaviours for life and work effectively. They have maintained a focus on work experience, both in the college's hotel and with other local external employers. This enables students to develop their knowledge of the hospitality industry and improve their technical skills in this working environment. As a result, students develop their confidence, team working skills and resilience, and they develop a sound understanding of what it is like to work in the hospitality industry.

Leaders have worked collaboratively with employers to understand the vocational skills and academic qualifications that students need to secure and sustain jobs in the hospitality sector. Employers provide training for staff to ensure that their knowledge remains up to date. As a result, students are prepared well for work when they finish their programmes. However, leaders have not ensured that the programmes that students follow are ambitious enough for all students. Too many students study a qualification at a lower level than they are capable of. As a result, the curriculum is not challenging enough, and the progress these students make is slowed.

Teachers know the students they teach well. They have built mutually respectful and professional relationships. As such, students attend well, contribute enthusiastically, and try their best. Students confidently use the new skills they have learned by following the curriculum and are proud of what they can now do. Many students can now travel independently, manage their own budgets and are able to make informed decisions about their lives because of the learning and support they have received from staff.

Staff use communication strategies well to ensure that all students learn effectively. For example, they use sign and communication symbols across the work, home and classroom environments. This means that all students benefit from inclusive teaching and support. However, leaders have not ensured that all teachers have the expertise or training they need to teach specific subjects, such as English and mathematics. As a result, teachers do not teach these subjects effectively enough to build students' knowledge, understanding and fluency over time.

Leaders have designed the curriculum in a logical way, covering different topics throughout the academic year. The range of topics reflects well the skills and knowledge that young people need as they transition to more independent adulthood and prepare for working life. Leaders and teachers meet regularly to review these topics, making adjustments as required. However, leaders have not ensured that the content of the curriculum or teachers' planning of it is informed well enough by students' EHC plans, what students already know and can do, or by the progress that each student is making. As a result, not all teaching is focused sufficiently well on what individual students need to know and understand.

Students have a well-developed understanding of the importance of staying safe online and are confident in using the strategies they have learned to stay safe. For example, they know how to recognise if a website is secure and are aware of the dangers of catfishing and communicating online with people they do not know. Students know how to block and report sites and who to report concerns to if something does not seem right.

Therapy staff work well with teaching and support staff to help students manage their behaviour. For example, the majority of students are able to independently use strategies to recognise and regulate their own emotions. This helps them to become more resilient, confident and ready to learn.

Students enjoy an extensive offer of enrichment. For example, students are able to access a range of clubs and activities, such as drama and mindfulness. These activities help to increase students' confidence and engage their interests. As a result, students build their social skills, meet new peers and try new things.

Leaders have ensured that students follow a well-considered personal development curriculum, which helps them to develop their attitudes and skills and practise using them in their homes and communities. For example, students learn how to manage their own finances using spreadsheets, and then they calculate their budgets for

their personal shopping, which they complete with decreasing levels of support from staff. As a result, students are well prepared for life after college.

All students receive useful impartial careers advice and guidance, which is provided externally. This helps students to explore future employment opportunities within the hospitality industry. All students participate in internal work experience placements at the hotel, and many take part in external placements towards the end of their studies. Students choose placements based on their interests and skills, such as front of house or roles within the kitchen. While students can also choose from a range of different environments, such as schools, cafes and restaurants, there are limited opportunities for them to experience wider external placements and experiences outside of hospitality to broaden their understanding and employability skills.

The new leadership team is ambitious in its plans to further develop the quality of education at the college. Leaders have undertaken a range of mainly useful quality assurance activities to help them to evaluate the college's strengths and weaknesses. Leaders recognise that some of these activities need to be more impactful and have recently updated their approach to some activities, such as purposeful lesson observations. Leaders are beginning to take appropriate actions to improve the weaknesses they have identified. However, as many of these actions have only recently been taken, it is too soon to see the impact of these improvements.

Leaders have ensured that all staff have completed the required training in areas such as safeguarding, 'Prevent' duty and health and safety. They have also recently completed useful training to support the needs and behaviours of specific learners, such as how to recognise and manage emotions. However, leaders have not supported teachers and support staff sufficiently to improve their skills in teaching and supporting students to make rapid progress and reach their potential.

Governors are appropriately experienced for their roles. They use the largely useful information from college leaders to inform discussion and support leaders to improve. Governors are aware of the main strengths and weaknesses of the college but have not ensured that actions have been taken quickly enough to address these weaknesses.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have ensured that staff are well trained and know the processes for reporting concerns. Students are regularly taught about safeguarding matters. Teachers use the trends that leaders have identified to inform the curriculum, focusing, for example, on online safety.

The designated safeguarding lead and deputies are appropriately trained and experienced for these roles. They ensure that all appropriate checks are taken to

ensure that staff are safe to work with children and vulnerable adults. Students know how to report concerns, and these are followed up quickly and with appropriate support and communication.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Ensure that teachers develop and improve their pedagogical skills.
- Ensure that the curriculum builds on students' existing knowledge and skills and is ambitious for all students.
- Ensure that teachers use assessment activities more effectively to inform the content of the curriculum, the teaching strategies they use, and to better understand what students are doing well and what they still need to learn.

Provider details

Unique reference number	131892
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Website	https://www.theauroragroup.co.uk/sen-special-needs-schools/educational-training-hotel-somerset
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Mark Costello
Provider type	Independent Specialist College
Date of previous inspection	13 to 15 June 2018
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the principal, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. The inspection was carried out using the [further education and skills inspection handbook](#) and took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence to inform judgements, including visiting learning sessions, scrutinising learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

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