

Inspection of Aurora Poppyfield School

Lower Road, Effingham KT24 5JP

Inspection dates: 10 to 12 October 2023

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Requires improvement

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils learn to manage their special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) very well. This is because staff are well trained, patient and kind. Adults have high expectations for pupils' behaviour. They help pupils to understand and recognise their emotions. Pupils learn strategies that help them to regulate their emotions when they need to. As a result, new pupils quickly build positive relationships with staff. Pupils who have previously been absent from school for several months or years soon start attending school regularly.

Pupils typically behave well. They are helped to understand how to establish positive relationships with other pupils. Over time, pupils learn to understand how to react positively to other pupils' emotions and behaviour. This helps pupils' well-being. One parent told inspectors that their child now has friends for the first time.

Until recently, the school has not had high enough expectations of pupils' academic achievement. Some subjects are not planned or delivered well enough. As a result, pupils do not learn new knowledge securely enough. However, changes to the school are making a difference. Pupils' academic achievement is now prioritised alongside their emotional development. Pupils are starting to learn more. They say that 'it feels more like a school now'.

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

Last year, leaders rightly identified that the school's academic curriculum was not sufficiently ambitious or well organised. Consequently, the proprietor body has instigated a real shift in the organisation and culture of the school. For example, in many subjects, older pupils are now taught by teachers with specialist knowledge of the subject they are teaching. These teachers are starting to unpick pupils' misconceptions and to plan learning that is more ambitious than in the past. Last year, some pupils in Years 9 and 10 achieved functional skills qualifications. Now, raised expectations mean that some pupils are working towards GCSE qualifications.

Currently, some subjects are more developed than others. For example, in personal, social and health education (PSHE), teachers have access to well-organised curriculum plans, which take the needs of pupils with SEND into consideration. However, in some subjects, knowledge does not build over time in a logical way. Sometimes, activities are not adapted well enough to meet the needs of pupils with SEND or to help pupils to embed new knowledge. Leaders and staff are addressing this. For example, in English, mathematics and science they have ordered new resources to aid pupils in their learning. The proprietor has arranged for teachers to work together with other schools and experts to improve the quality of the curriculum.

The school has made some progress in promoting a love of reading and writing among pupils. Many pupils can talk positively about what they read and are proudly starting to get to grips with how to structure sentences and paragraphs. However,

there is not a common or thorough-enough approach to identifying and addressing pupils' gaps in phonics. At the time of the inspection, there were not enough suitable resources or activities in place to help pupils practise becoming accurate and fluent readers.

Pupils' personal development is prioritised. For example, in art, pupils make choices about the materials they use and reflect positively on the differences between the work they produce. Staff are alert to local risks to pupils' safety. There is a suitable policy for relationships and sex education, which has been devised after consultation with parents. All pupils are taught how to stay safe and how to recognise risks in the community and on the internet. Any pupil who needs extra or more specific help to understand risks quickly gets it.

Leaders have improved the 'preparation for adulthood' part of the curriculum. There are now more frequent opportunities for pupils to experience life and work outside of the school. For example, they visit the gym, a local farm and go on trips to buy things at the local shops. Careers education is improving. Pupils are encouraged to think about their futures. For example, younger pupils learn about different careers, and older pupils have started to visit local colleges in preparation for when they leave at the end of Year 11.

The proprietor body has a clear vision for the school. However, repeated and substantial changes to leadership and staffing since the school opened in March 2022 have hindered its development. For example, improvements to the curriculum, which began last year, have stalled because new leaders were not fully aware of them. This indicates that some systems and processes for overseeing the school's work, such as communication systems, have not been robust enough to withstand changes in personnel. The proprietor body reflected that its decision to significantly increase pupil numbers in September 2023 has created additional challenges as leaders establish new ways of running the school. The proprietor body has demonstrated its capacity to improve the school by providing the school with additional, temporary help from across The Aurora Group. This includes having more leaders on site to help improve the curriculum and teaching, and more frequent and direct monitoring of the effectiveness of the school's work.

Despite substantial changes to staffing and pupil numbers, leaders have quickly established a positive, purposeful atmosphere where staff feel valued for the work they do. Staff work together well and are quickly getting to grips with the improvements they know are needed to the quality of education.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- The academic curriculum in some subjects is not ambitious enough or adapted well enough to meet pupils' needs. This means that pupils do not achieve highly enough in some subjects. The school should ensure that:
 - curriculum plans identify suitably ambitious end points and sequences of learning that will allow pupils to achieve those end points
 - assessment processes enable staff to identify and address pupils' gaps in knowledge, particularly in phonics
 - staff are trained to develop and adapt activities so that pupils embed their knowledge over time
 - pupils have enough opportunity to practise and embed new learning, particularly in reading.
- Some of the proprietor body's oversight and monitoring systems have not withstood the substantial changes to leadership and staff in the school. This has slowed the pace of improvement. The proprietor body should ensure that monitoring procedures quickly identify where improvements to the school are needed and provide the help leaders and staff need to address them.

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	148930
DfE registration number	936/6056
Local authority	Surrey
Inspection number	10303419
Type of school	Special secondary school
School category	Independent day school
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	33
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Beechkeys Limited
Chair	Sharon Pearson
Headteacher	David Thomas
Annual fees (day pupils)	£66,038
Telephone number	01372 678630
Website	www.theauroragroup.co.uk/poppyfield
Email address	Poppyfieldschool@the-aurora-group.com
Dates of previous inspection	11 to 13 October 2022

Information about this school

- The school provides full-time education for pupils between the ages of 11 and 16 with SEND. Most pupils attending the school have a diagnosis of autistic spectrum disorder. Many have additional behavioural and/or communication needs.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan. Most pupils are placed at the school by Surrey local authority.
- The proprietor, Beechkeys Limited, is a subsidiary of The Aurora Group.
- Some members of the governing body are also members of the proprietor body and/or senior leaders from The Aurora Group.
- There have been many changes of staff since the school opened, including several changes in leadership. The substantive head of school and the substantive principal were both appointed in August 2023.
- At the time of the inspection, some staff were absent and some positions vacant. The proprietor has made sure that all such positions are being covered by temporary staff and staff from other schools in The Aurora Group.
- The school uses two providers of unregistered alternative provision.
- The previous standard inspection took place on 11 to 12 October 2022. A progress monitoring inspection took place on 6 June 2023.

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.

Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

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

- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspection was brought forward following the progress monitoring inspection that took place in June 2023 when the school was judged to have met previously unmet standards.
- Inspectors met with the principal, the head of school, the chair of governors, the chair of the proprietor body, and other members of staff and The Aurora Group.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in English, science, art and PSHE. For each deep dive, inspectors met with curriculum leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their

learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also considered the curriculum by talking to leaders and sampling pupils' work across other areas of the curriculum.

- To inspect safeguarding, inspectors: reviewed the single central record; considered safer recruitment procedures; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- The lead inspector met with three members of the governing body, including the chair of the proprietor body.
- The lead inspector had a tour of the school and met with the school business manager to check that the independent school standards are met.
- Inspectors met with staff, pupils and some parents, and considered the responses in the confidential staff and parent surveys.

Inspection team

Catherine Old, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Liz McIntosh

Ofsted Inspector

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