

Aurora Rowan School

Dysons Wood, Tokers Green End, Kidmore End, Reading RG4 9EY

Inspection date

9 October 2024

Overall outcome

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

Residential provision outcome

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

Main inspection findings

Part 1. Quality of education provided

Paragraphs 2(1) to 2(2)(b), 2(2)(d) to 2(2)(e)(iii), 2(2)(g) to 2A(1)(b), 2A(1)(d) to 2A(2), 3 and 4

- Aurora Rowan School is being set up to cater for pupils with a diagnosis of autism and severe learning difficulties. Leaders expect that many of their pupils will have substantial gaps in their education. The school's curriculum has been designed with the flexibility to respond to pupils' learning needs and build towards the outcomes set out in their education, health and care (EHC) plans.
- Leaders are ambitious for what pupils will learn. They have put in place a broad curriculum which includes academic subjects while prioritising pupils' communication skills and personal development. Leaders have a secure understanding of the expertise teachers will need to deliver this curriculum successfully. They have taken this into account when recruiting staff and developing their induction and training programmes.
- Leaders have put in place a robust approach to assessment to enable teachers to build an understanding of pupils' progress and identify any gaps. This information will be used to adapt the curriculum and amend the targets that pupils are working towards.
- Personal, social, health and economic education will form an integral part of pupils' curriculum. If this programme is delivered as intended, pupils will develop an understanding of fundamental British values and life in modern Britain. There will be an emphasis on preparing pupils for adulthood and fostering independence. For example, pupils will learn how to prepare simple meals, manage money and use public transport.

- There is a suitable policy on relationships and sex education. The policy explains what will be taught and makes clear to parents and carers the entitlement to withdraw their children from non-statutory aspects of this curriculum.
- Leaders have developed a careers curriculum specifically to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). They have sourced a specialist service to provide pupils with careers advice and guidance. This organisation will also support the school to establish relationships with employers and provide work experience opportunities.
- The school is likely to meet this part of the independent school standards.

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

Paragraphs 5 to 5(d)(iii)

- Leaders have considered pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development when preparing to open this school. They plan to offer a wide range of opportunities for pupils to develop their communication skills and become more confident in interacting socially with each other. Pupils will be encouraged to treat others with respect, and leaders expect staff to model this consistently. There are plans to teach pupils about different cultures in school. Planned activities include visits to places of worship and opportunities to learn about a range of religious festivals.
- The school will provide pupils with opportunities to develop their talents and interests through a programme of lunchtime clubs. The exact activities will be developed based on pupils' needs and preferences, but are likely to include a variety of physical activities that also provide opportunities for social interaction.
- The school is likely to meet this part of the independent school standards.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Paragraphs 7 to 7 (b) and 32(1)(c)

- Leaders have made suitable arrangements for safeguarding pupils. They have drawn on the support and expertise in the school group as well their own expertise as experienced special school leaders.
- The majority of staff required to open the school are already in post. They have all received necessary safeguarding training as part of their induction. Leaders have started to check for gaps in safeguarding knowledge and put additional training in place as required. The school's designated safeguarding lead is appropriately trained and knowledgeable about local authority safeguarding arrangements and current statutory guidance.

Paragraphs 8 to 16(b)

- Leaders intend to focus on encouraging and rewarding positive behaviours. Many of the pupils who attend the school are likely to be pre-verbal, and leaders recognise that behaviour is an important form of communication. Staff will be trained to recognise the signs that a pupil is finding something difficult and then adapt the environment to meet their needs. Leaders are clear that there should be high expectations of all pupils. A core part of the school's curriculum is about improving pupils' ability to sustain their focus and engage with learning.

- The school has appropriate policies covering first aid, health and safety and risk assessment. A range of risk assessments have been created which will be added to, as necessary. The proprietor body has a schedule of regular checks, which includes making sure that the school complies with all relevant health and safety regulations.
- There are registers in place for admissions and attendance to be used once the school begins to accept pupils.
- The school has carried out a fire safety audit and taken appropriate actions to ensure that the site is compliant with the relevant regulations. There is a schedule in place for regular fire drills and alarm tests. The proprietor body intends to commission another external fire safety audit once the school is operational.
- The school is likely to meet this part of the independent school standards.

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

Paragraphs 18(2) to 18(3), 19(2) to 19(3), 20(6) to 20(6)(c), 21(1) to 21(3)(b), 21(5) to 21(6)

- Leaders are knowledgeable about safer recruitment. There is a thorough procedure in place to ensure that all necessary pre-employment checks are carried out on new staff. Details of these checks are included in the school's single central record.
- Leaders understand the checks that the school must carry out if it becomes necessary to use supply staff in the future.
- The school is likely to meet this part of the independent school standards.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

Paragraphs 23(1) to 23(1)(c), 24(1) to 24(1)(b), 24(2), 25 to 29(1)(b) and 30

- The school is arranged across a spacious site, which is sufficient for the proposed pupil numbers. Classrooms, breakout areas and therapeutic spaces are maintained to a very high standard throughout.
- There is ample outdoor space to enable children to play games and exercise. The school also owns local fields and forest land, which are not currently suitable for use by pupils. Currently these areas are fenced off, but there are plans to make these environments safe in the future so that they can be used for outdoor learning and recreation.
- Access to drinking water is provided and clearly labelled in the school. Warm water is regulated and checked regularly to ensure that it does not pose a scalding risk.
- The school is situated in a semi-rural location. There is suitable outdoor lighting to ensure safe movement between buildings. Leaders have considered the challenges of pupils arriving in multiple taxis and accommodated for this through a staggered start to the school day.
- There is an adequate provision of toilets for pupils, which are individual and lockable. Toilets contain a sink with warm running water. There is an accessible toilet which also provides room for changing and showering as required.

- The school's medical room is an appropriate space to care for any pupils who are unwell or injured. It contains lockable storage for medicines as well as a bed and sink.
- The school is likely to meet this part of the independent school standards.

Part 6. Provision of information

Paragraphs 32(1) to 32(1)(b), 32(1)(d) to 32(2)(b), 32(2)(b)(ii) to 32(4)(c)

- The school has a published website. All necessary information and policies are available here as required by the independent school standards. Some of these policies have been recently updated as the school is preparing to open if approved.
- Parents will be invited to the school regularly for visits and workshops where additional information will be provided. There will be regular meetings with parents to discuss pupils' progress at the school. In addition to these opportunities, the school will provide termly written reports.
- The school is likely to meet this part of the independent school standards.

Part 7. Manner in which complaints are handled

Paragraphs 33–33(k)

- The school's complaints policy makes it clear how parents can raise concerns and lodge formal complaints. It provides information about how these can be escalated if they are unresolved. This policy is published on the school's website.
- The school is likely to meet this part of the independent school standards.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Paragraphs 34(1) to 34(1)(c)

- The proprietor body has put in place a system of governance which enables them to maintain oversight of the school. Governors will use a combination of visits and standardised reports to check that the school is performing well and continues to meet the requirements of the independent school standards. The school's chair of governors is also the regional director and reports directly into the proprietor body.
- Leaders have extensive experience of running a school for pupils with severe learning difficulties and autism. They have a very secure working knowledge of the independent school standards and how to ensure that these are met.
- The school is likely to meet this part of the independent school standards.

Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010

- Leaders are knowledgeable about their responsibilities regarding equalities. They have produced an appropriate accessibility plan which is published on the school's website.

Residential provision

The likely effectiveness of leaders and managers in ensuring that the national minimum standards are likely to be met

- The leadership and management arrangements across the residential provision are likely to be effective in overseeing the development of that provision. This is because

there are clear arrangements in place to govern, oversee and monitor the residential service.

- The pastoral lead is experienced and suitability qualified. They will have oversight of the well-being team within the school and the residential provision.
- The governing body has appointed a representative to visit the residential provision each half term. Residential pupils are likely to be encouraged and supported to contact and communicate with this representative outside of these visits should they need or want to.
- Leaders and managers have demonstrated a strong focus on enabling the residential provision to be a communication-rich environment that is likely to allow pupils to communicate openly.
- The residential environment is of a high quality. It provides ample space for residential pupils to enjoy their experience. Laundry and main kitchen facilities are in place, and there is secure understanding of how residential pupils will be supported to access these areas.
- Leaders and managers have demonstrated how residential pupils are likely to access a wide range of activities in the school premises and the local community.
- Pupils' bedrooms are of a high standard and leaders and managers have plans for further decoration to be carried out in accordance with pupils' likes, interests and preferences.
- Leaders and managers do not intend to use the residential provision until the school has been operational for some time. Consequently, there is no staff team for the residential provision. The admission of residential pupils is likely to be balanced with the development and readiness of the staff team. Only pupils who are already on roll at the school will be considered for a placement at the residential provision.
- There is a thorough procedure in place to ensure that all necessary pre-employment checks are carried out for new school staff. The same procedures are intended to be followed when recruiting residential staff.

Compliance with regulatory requirements and national minimum standards for residential special schools

The school is likely to meet the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards'), the national minimum standards for residential special schools and associated requirements.

Proposed school details

Unique reference number	151119
Social care unique reference number	2817707
DfE registration number	870/6019
Inspection number	10362754

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.

The inspection of residential provision was carried out under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

Type of school	Other independent special school
School status	Independent residential special school
Proprietor	Beechkeys Limited
Chair	Sharon Pearson
Headteacher	Lesley Walkden
Annual fees (day pupils)	£95,000
Annual fees (boarders)	£144,943
Telephone number	01189 073322
Website	www.theauroragroup.co.uk
Email address	rowanschool@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	5–19	5–19
Number of pupils on the school roll	Not applicable	30	30

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	30
Number of part-time pupils	Not applicable	0
Number of boarders on roll	Not applicable	3
Number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities	Not applicable	30
Of which, number of pupils with an education, health and care plan	Not applicable	30
Of which, number of pupils paid for by a local authority with an education, health and care plan	Not applicable	30

Staff

	School's current position	School's proposal
Number of full-time equivalent teaching staff	Not applicable	5
Number of part-time teaching staff	Not applicable	0
Number of staff in the welfare provision	Not applicable	20

Information about this proposed school

- Aurora Rowan school is situated in a semi-rural setting in Toker's Green, Reading. The school intends to provide full-time education for up to 30 pupils between the ages of five and 19. All pupils will have an EHC plan and their places will be funded by a local authority.
- Pupils attending the school will have severe learning difficulties and a diagnosis of autism.
- The proposed school will not have any particular religious character.
- The school does not intend to use any alternative provision.
- The school's chair of governors is also employed by the proprietor body as a regional director.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was commissioned by the Department for Education. The purpose of this inspection was to check whether the proposed school is likely to meet the independent school standards and national minimum standards for residential special schools if registered. This was the school's first pre-registration inspection.
- The lead inspector telephoned the school's headteacher two working days before the inspection to discuss the proposed school and the details of the inspection.
- During the inspection, inspectors met with the school's headteacher and the operations director. The operations director is also the chair of the proprietor body. Inspectors evaluated the suitability of the school premises and scrutinised a range of policies and documents. Inspectors spoke with leaders about a range of matters relating to the independent school standards.

Inspection team

Chris Ellison, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Kelly Marchmont

Social Care Regulatory Inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Raising concerns and making a complaint about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-ofsted. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Parent View

You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk, or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: www.gov.uk/ofsted.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2024