

Inspection of Aureus School

Candytuft Way, Great Western Park, Didcot, Oxfordshire OX11 6FF

Inspection dates: 22 and 23 October 2024

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Previous inspection grade Requires improvement

The headteacher of this school is Kirsty Rogers. The school is part of GLF Schools trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Julian Drinkall, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Lynne O'Reilly.

What is it like to attend this school?

Aureus School has changed for the better. Leaders and staff share the same high ambitions for pupils, who understand what is expected of them. Academic standards have risen, particularly for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Adults know pupils and families well, which enables them to act in their best interests. Consequently, pupils feel safe at school, trusting staff to help them with their learning and emotional needs.

Classrooms are typically calm and purposeful. Most pupils understand the importance of working hard and behaving well. When things go awry, well-rehearsed routines help staff deal with situations calmly and proportionately, so that the impact on learning is minimised. Pupils are encouraged to learn from their mistakes, be kind to one another and face the consequences of their actions. Occasionally, behaviour outside of lessons is less respectful. In these instances, adults make every effort to ensure pupils' concerns are heard and addressed.

The school is rightly proud of its work to develop pupils as global citizens. Leaders are astutely aware of what knowledge will help pupils navigate the challenges of modern-day life. Pupils benefit from a rich range of experiences beyond the classroom that support their cultural and social development.

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

The school's improvement journey has gained momentum over the past year. Staff strive to provide pupils with the best possible education. Trustees, school standards board (SSB) members and senior leaders all understand the school's strengths and weaknesses. School leaders work closely with trust colleagues to address improvement priorities. Staff, pupils, parents and carers describe a school which is settled and growing in quality.

In 2023, standards at the end of Year 11 were too low, and behaviour and attendance were also concerning. Through a clear and focused approach, with useful support from the trust, there are now consistent routines in place that help pupils learn vital knowledge in a planned, logical way. Opportunities for pupils to connect and apply what they learn, such as through extended writing, are less evident. Nevertheless, standards have risen and pupils gain the knowledge they need to move on to further education, employment and training at the end of Year 11. For some, this represents strong progress from their low starting points. Introducing a second language in Year 7 supports the ongoing ambition for even more pupils to study the broad English Baccalaureate suite of qualifications.

Often, pupils join the school after the start of Year 7, and some much later on during key stage 4. Many speak English as an additional language or have other learning or social needs. The school takes necessary steps to identify pupils' individual starting points. Those who require extra help with spoken English or social skills access a well-planned programme of support. Where pupils do not yet read fluently enough for their age, extra help is timely and effective. Pupils with SEND benefit from extensive and precise support,

helping them to learn well and move on to appropriate post-16 destinations. In comparison, support for those pupils eligible for the pupil premium is currently less defined, and so is making less of a difference to their attendance and achievement.

A relatively high number of pupils receive their education via alternative provision. The school is diligent in checking that these arrangements are safe and suitable. The number of pupils attending alternative provision is declining over time, as in-school support improves.

Determined work has raised standards of behaviour across the school. Suspensions remain high but have reduced as pupils respond to the expectations of the new behaviour policy. Positive behaviour points far outweigh the negative ones. Attendance is also improving slowly, supported by recent changes to how it is overseen and promoted. Lateness and truancy are challenged successfully. However, there is more to do to ensure that pupils eligible for the pupil premium, in particular, come to school often enough.

Pupils receive useful information to inform decisions about their futures. Opportunities to learn about university and apprenticeship options are helping raise pupils' aspirations. More widely, pupils benefit from personal, social, health education that is planned meticulously and responsive to their needs. Attendance at the broad range of clubs, activities and extra-curricular experiences offered is high. The school monitors participation rates carefully and persistently pursues how it can remove any barriers to attendance, so that everyone benefits.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Staff do not provide pupils with sufficient opportunities to connect and demonstrate their learning. As a result, pupils do not make connections between what they know as readily as they could, which limits the standards they achieve. The school should work with staff to ensure that pupils routinely practise applying and explaining their knowledge, for example, through extended writing and other independent work.
- Some pupils who are eligible for the pupil premium do not attend school often enough or achieve as well as their peers. The school should promptly refine and enact its plans to ensure that these pupils come to school more frequently and are supported effectively, so that they achieve as well as other pupils.

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.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	140653
Local authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	10321987
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	475
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Lynne O'Reilly
CEO of the trust	Julian Drinkall
Headteacher	Kirsty Rogers
Website	www.aureusschool.org
Date of previous inspection	4 July 2023, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Aureus School is a below-average-sized secondary academy and is governed by the GLF Schools trust. The trust owns and operates 45 schools and nurseries across the south of England. There is a school standards board (SSB) that oversees aspects of the school's governance on behalf of the trust.
- The headteacher took up their post in September 2023. There have been several other changes to leadership and governance personnel since the last full graded inspection. The trust CEO took up their post in January 2024 and the chair of the SSB began their role in September 2024.
- The school experiences high levels of pupil mobility. A quarter of current pupils joined the school after the start of Year 7, and some very recently. Proportions of pupils with SEND or who speak English as an additional language are well above average. More than a third of pupils are eligible for the pupil premium.
- Currently, the school uses support from 16 alternative provisions, 13 of which are not required to be registered with Ofsted.

- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024 will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders and with staff from the trust who work routinely with the school. The lead inspector also spoke with the trust's CEO, the vice chair of trustees and the chair of the SSB.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in mathematics, science, creative arts, history and languages. This involved speaking to subject leaders, visiting lessons, talking to teachers and pupils and looking at samples of pupils' work. Some of these activities were carried out with school or trust leaders. Inspectors also gathered evidence about how pupils with additional needs are supported and how well pupils are achieving across the curriculum.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors: reviewed the single central record of recruitment checks; 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.

Inspection team

Kathryn Moles, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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