

Aurora



2025 Parent & Carer Handbook

Welcome to Aurora

At The Aurora Group, we believe in giving people the opportunities they need to create and lead fulfilling, independent lives.

Established in 2015, we are now one of the UK's largest providers of education, care and support services for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities. Each of our schools, colleges and residential homes retains its own unique identity while embracing and embodying our group's core values:

- We are caring. We understand that your experience in mainstream care and education may have been a difficult one. We take seriously our responsibility for the children and young people in our care, and are committed to making your time with us as positive and fulfilling as possible.
- We are ambitious. We have high expectations of all our children and young people, regardless of what barriers they may have faced in the past. We encourage them to expect more for themselves, while challenging employers and communities to understand and value their diverse needs and attributes.
- We are collaborative. Everything we do, we do in partnership with you. We actively seek and listen to feedback from students, parents and staff, to find out what's working well, what we can do better, and how we can further develop all our services to benefit the people we work with.
- We are trusted. Our business is funded by ethical investors. They understand that sustainable growth is possible only when we hold ourselves to the highest standards, by delivering consistently top-quality services to every single person we work with.
- We are innovative. We begin planning for each young person's future the minute they walk through our doors. We tailor our approach to their unique needs, and are constantly looking for new opportunities to help them explore, enhance and employ their own skills, talents and abilities.

We're with you every step of the way

Here at The Aurora Group, we know that choosing a school or college is one of the most important decisions that you will ever make for your child. We also know that when your child has additional needs, the process of finding and applying for a placement can be incredibly daunting.

Whatever stage you're at in your journey, we can help.

This handbook has been designed to give you an overview of the process of obtaining a placement at one of our schools or colleges, from the very earliest moments of your search to the day that you and your child join us as part of the Aurora family.

Along the way, we work in partnership with you and your local authority to give your child the best possible chance of being offered a place in the service that will best meet their needs.

You are not alone. Our regional Placement Managers are always available to speak to you and guide you through the process – you can find relevant contact details for your region, along with details of other external sources of support, at the end of this guide.

“ The effect this school has had on my son is about the nurturing and understanding and knowing him as a person – his future is looking incredibly bright. ”



Getting Started

To obtain a placement at a specialist SEN service, your child is required to have an education, health and care plan (EHCP).

What is an EHCP?

An EHCP is offered to children and young people aged up to 25, who need more support than is available from mainstream providers. It identifies specific educational, health and social needs, and sets out the additional support that must be provided to meet those needs.

How do I get an EHCP?

To get an EHCP, a request for a needs assessment must be made directly to your relevant local authority.

As a parent or carer, you can make the request yourself – or if your child is over 16, they can request their own EHCP. A request can also be made by a member of staff at your child's school/college/nursery, or by a health professional such as a doctor or a health visitor.

How long will it take?

Obtaining an EHCP for your child can be a long process, with even successful applications usually taking around 20 weeks. If you are required to go through an appeal process – for example, if your application is unsuccessful and you choose to take your case to a tribunal – it can take considerably longer.



Identifying your child's needs



After you submit a request for an EHCP, your local authority will decide within six weeks if they are going to carry out a needs assessment. They are legally required to do so if they believe that a) your child has (or may have) special educational needs; and b) they may require special educational provision through an EHCP.

What does a needs assessment involve?

During a needs assessment, your local authority will gather advice and information regarding your child's needs, identify the provision required to meet those needs, and determine the outcomes against which progress will be measured. Both you and your child should be given the opportunity to provide meaningful input during this stage of the process.

If the local authority decides to proceed, they will send you a draft EHCP for review within 16 weeks of your original request. You will be required to return the draft with any comments or changes, along with details of your child's preferred school/college, within 15 days of receipt.

If your local authority decides that your child does not need an EHCP following your child's needs assessment, you will be notified within 16 weeks of your original request. You have a right to appeal this decision at any point within the following two months.

Choosing the right provider

If your local authority decides to proceed following your child's needs assessment, you will be asked to name your preferred school/college. Your local authority will then consult with your preferred school/college, as well as some other local providers, to determine whether they can meet your child's needs. It is recommended that you visit all the providers that the local authority is considering, so that you can understand what each of them offers.

If your local authority thinks another school/college can provide the support and would be more appropriate for your child, they may decide to name that school/college rather than your preferred option. This decision will be made by your local authority panel.

The provider decided upon by the panel will be named in your child's finalised EHCP, which will be issued within 20 weeks of your original request.

Can I appeal a decision?

You have a right to appeal if you do not agree with the named school/college in your child's EHCP. Your local authority will send you a letter confirming their decision and notifying you of your right to appeal. It is important that you keep this letter as you will need it to lodge your appeal – this must be done within two months of receiving the letter.

In cases where an agreement cannot be reached with the local authority, your appeal will be considered by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal (SENDIST). Visit www.gov.uk/appeal-ehc-plan-decision for more details.



Right placement, first time

The Sonnet's "[Reaching my potential](#)" report demonstrates how, on average, the value to society of meeting the needs of learners with complex SEND (as profiled in the report*) is **at least £380,000**. So the sometimes increased cost of placing in independent special schools and colleges is far outweighed by the value of the improved outcomes to learners, their families and other stakeholders in society.

Emerging from this, there are a number of key findings that are highlighted in the '[Reaching my potential report: at a glance](#)':

- Better outcomes for learners with SEND often relate to effective support much earlier on in their learning journey
- Each learner with SEND has a unique combination of needs, strengths and potential. Provision that meets needs should be tailored to each individual learner in terms of the provision they receive and the setting in which it is delivered
- The integrated and holistic approach to education alongside mental and physical therapies in many special schools adds significant value. This also has the added benefit of reducing demand for similar services from public resources such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and the NHS

How can we use the report?

Practitioners...

...can use it to demonstrate their value and to inform their provision.

Parents...

...can use it to understand what provision may help their child with SEND.

Commissioners...

...of services for learners with SEND can use it to inform and justify commissioning decisions – brokering and strategic.

Policy makers...

...should consider its findings when considering future policy changes.

Key Links

The full "Reaching my potential" report:

<https://www.sonnetimpact.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Reaching-my-potential-The-value-of-SEND-provision-demonstrated-through-learners-stories.pdf>

'Reaching my potential report: at a glance':

<https://www.sonnetimpact.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Report-at-a-glance-Reaching-my-potential-The-value-of-SEND-provision-demonstrated-through-learners-stories.pdf>

Right placement, first time

The value of the right placement at the right time.

The report used a variety of life journey examples.

Tim
Needs: Has autism and communication challenges
Potential if needs are met: Qualifications, paid work and improved relationships with his family
Value created when his needs are met: £744k

Ade
Needs: Has a combination of autism, anxiety and physical needs
Potential if needs are met: Developing key life-skills and volunteering regularly
Value created when his needs are met: £554k

Sarah
Needs: SEMH, experience of abuse and is a looked-after child
Potential if needs are met: Forming and maintaining positive relationships, qualifications and paid employment
Value created when her needs are met: £246k

Olivia
Needs: Has cerebral palsy and has communication challenges
Potential if needs are met: Can communicate more easily, and direct her care and can move into supported living
Value created when her needs are met: £59k

Charlie
Needs: Sensory impairment, learning and communication difficulties
Potential if needs are met: Confidence to build friendships, gains qualifications and paid employment
Value created when her needs are met: £303k

Abichal
Needs: SEMH needs related to trauma and dyslexia
Potential if needs are met: Challenging behaviour reduces and mother able to return to work

Frank
Needs: Has degenerative nervous system disorder & faces mental health challenges
Potential if needs are met: Able to express his needs, which reduces his anxiety, on-site therapy improves the quality of day-to-day life

Fred
Needs: Has profound speech, language and communication needs and is behind his age-group academically
Potential if needs are met: Develops communication and other key skills & able to contribute to community life by volunteering

	Value of improved outcomes	Additional cost of provision	Value added to society
Tim	+£914,000	-£170,000	+£744,000
Ade	+£251,000	+£303,000	+£554,000
Sarah	+£392,000	-£146,000	+£246,000
Olivia	+£568,000	-£508,000	+£59,000
Charlie	+£499,000	-£196,000	+£303,000
AVERAGE	+£525,000	-£143,000	+£381,000

Overall finding



£380k
value per child with SEND with needs met

Special educational provision that works gives learners hope for the future: that they can achieve and fulfil their potential. In doing so they may be less dependent on their families and public services, and they may be able to contribute to society. If learners do achieve their potential this is worth on average at least **£380k** over the lifetime of the eight learners whose stories we tell in this research.

Getting Support

There is plenty of support available to guide you through the often complex process of requesting an EHCP, participating in a needs assessment and securing the most appropriate provision for your child.

Our regional Placement Managers are always available to speak to you and guide you through the process – they can each be contacted directly at:

Trudy Baker

Placements Manager: South West

📞 07722 152969

✉️ trudy.baker@the-aurora-group.com

Wendy McAndrew

Placements Manager: South East & North East

📞 07464 496836

✉️ Wendy.McAndrew@the-aurora-group.com

Megan Cartwright - NW

Placements Manager: North West

📞 07484 475101

✉️ Megan.Cartwright@the-aurora-group.com

Support, information and advice – including during the appeals process – is also available from the following external organisations:

- IPSEA (Independent Provider of Special Education Advice) offers free and independent legally based information, advice and support to help get the right education for children and young people with all kinds of special educational needs and disabilities. www.ipsea.org.uk
- SOS!SEN is a national charity aiming to empower parents and carers of children with special educational needs to tackle the difficulties they face when battling for their children's rights. www.sossen.org.uk
- The Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information Advice and Support Services (SENDIASS) offers information, advice and support for parents and carers of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities. There is a SENDIASS for each local authority. Contact your local SENDIASS or Information Advice Support (IAS) Service for more information.
- Special Needs Jungle is a parent-led source of information and support for parents and carers of children and young people aged 0-25. www.specialneedsjungle.com
- Scope is the disability equality charity for England and Wales, offering practical information and emotional support. www.scope.org.uk
- Legal aid can help meet the costs of legal advice, mediation and representation in a court or tribunal. Check if you qualify for legal aid at www.gov.uk/check-legal-aid.

Our Services



“ I know for most parents communication is key, I have never been disappointed or concerned that I don't know what's going on with my child at school. ”



“ Thank you so much for the journey you are taking us on, the difference it is making to our child's life takes my breath away. ”



“ We are so glad we found this school. We know everything he does each day and the staff give him a varied program which he loves attending and taking part in. ”

Keyes Barn School

Brooklands School

Woodlands School

Ivy Lane School

Summerfields School

Hanley School

Cedars School

Wilden View School

Sevenside School

Hedgeway School

Foxes

Beeches School

Boveridge College

COMING SOON Ryefields School

Eccles School

White House School

Meldreth Manor School & Children's Home

Orchard Manor Residential Home

Fairway School

Rowan School

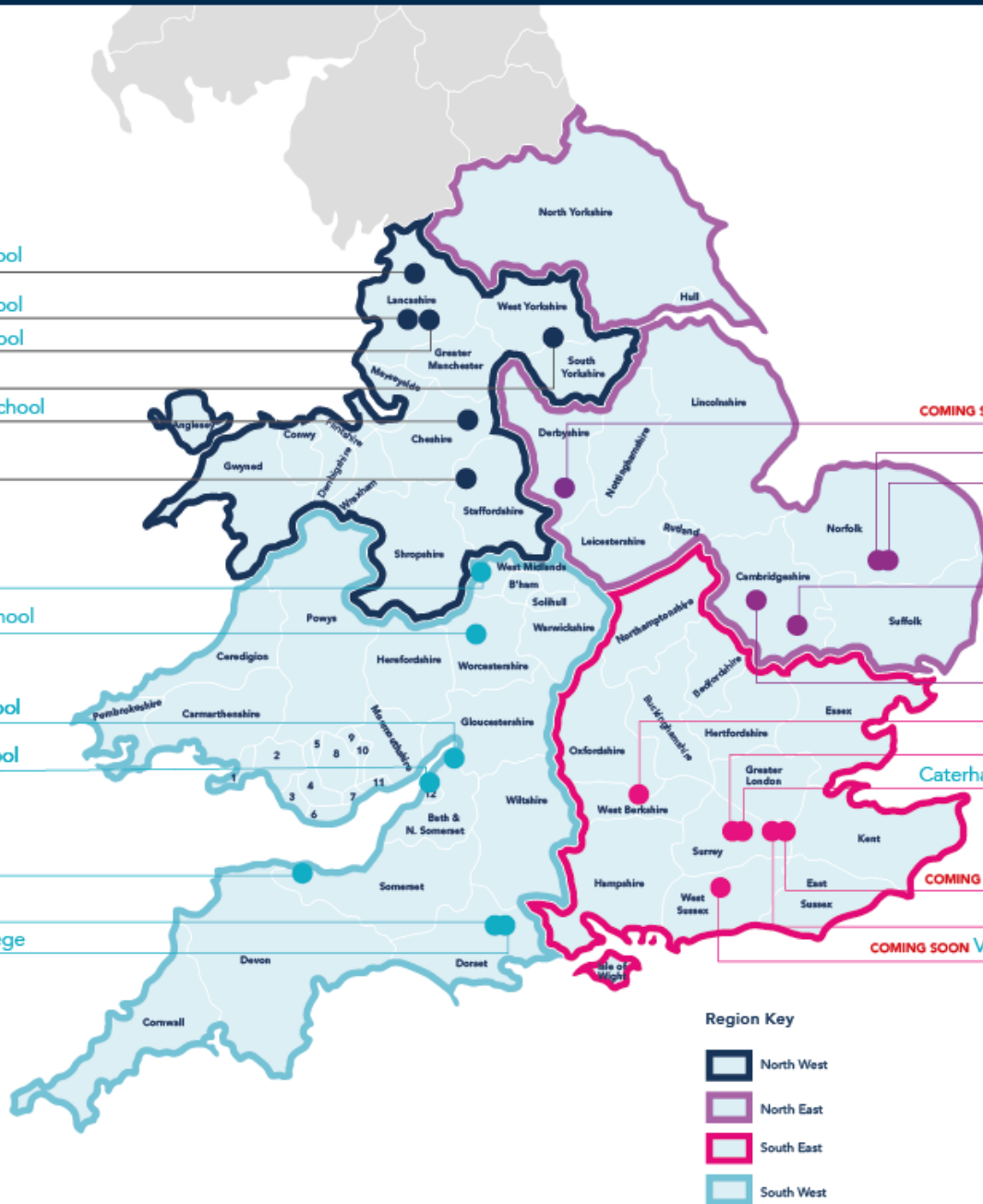
Redehall School

Caterham Education Centre

COMING SOON Chaldon School

Poppyfield School

COMING SOON Vincent House School



Caring


Ambitious


Collaborative

Trusted

Innovative

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