

Inspection of Aurora Poppyfield School

Lower Road, Effingham, Surrey KT24 5JP

Inspection dates: 11 to 13 October 2022

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Not previously inspected

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

No

What is it like to attend this school?

Leaders and proprietors are ambitious. They aspire for all pupils to receive a good-quality education. However, their ambitions have not yet been realised. Weaknesses in the curriculum combined with many staffing and leadership changes mean that pupils are not getting a good deal. They are not achieving the best possible outcomes.

Many pupils arrive at the school having been absent from formal education for some time. Pupils talk about the positive difference this school has made to their lives. For some, this is the first school where they have built friendships. Staff take time to get to know pupils and build respectful relationships with them. They provide intensive support to help pupils understand and manage their emotions.

New routines and more consistent expectations have led to a reduction in incidents of poor behaviour. Bullying or unkind behaviour are not tolerated. However, behaviour is still 'fragile'. While pupils feel safe, they do not like the way that other pupils sometimes disturb their lessons.

Pupils like 'having a voice' on the student council. They appreciate being involved in making decisions about their Friday enrichment experiences. Regular swimming and physical education lessons at the local leisure centre help pupils to keep physically active.

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

Recruitment challenges and staffing difficulties led to an unstable and faltering start to this new school. During the first term that the school opened, proprietors needed to focus on pressing staffing issues and significant concerns about pupils' behaviour. Proprietors took swift action. They have stabilised the school and supported leaders to improve behaviour. However, this work has taken proprietors' and leaders' attention away from developing the curriculum and improving teaching and learning. Currently, pupils do not benefit from a strong, coherently planned curriculum and are not achieving well enough. In addition, many pupils do not attend school regularly and continue to miss out on vital learning.

Pupils experience a broad range of subjects. However, the academic curriculum in many subjects is still a 'work in progress', particularly in key stage 3. In most subjects, leaders have not yet identified or sequenced clearly enough the most important content they would like pupils to learn. They have also not given enough focus to the English curriculum, including reading and writing. Pupils who need support with basic literacy are not getting the structured help that they need.

Teaching staff are knowledgeable about pupils' primary needs, which are typically communication and interaction, and social, emotional and mental health needs. Staff are very alert and responsive to pupils' mental health needs and well-being. They work in partnership with the therapeutic team to adapt teaching approaches. Staff,

including therapists, ensure that long-term objectives in pupils' education, health and care plans feed into short-term objectives. A team of professionals, including a clinical psychologist, provides timely therapeutic support for pupils who experience anxiety and/or mental health issues.

Behaviour support plans identify clearly pupils' needs and the agreed strategies and approaches that staff need to follow. Staff understand that pupils' behaviour reflects their needs. They provide good support for pupils to help them engage with learning and regulate their behaviour. Staff help pupils to recognise and express their emotions before these 'spill over'. They are calm and respectful in their approach. Staff work hard to diffuse and de-escalate challenging behaviours. However, there are times when behaviour incidents interrupt the learning for other pupils.

Most staff are adept at adapting learning contexts to reflect pupils' interests. This helps to capture pupils' attention and provides a meaningful 'anchor' for discussions. Some staff use these discussions to identify gaps in pupils' academic learning. However, this practice is not yet consistent in all classes and assessment processes are not yet embedded.

Leaders have implemented an appropriate programme for pupils' personal, social and health education (PSHE). The PSHE curriculum provides a suitable framework that helps pupils to learn about relationships and how to keep healthy and safe. Leaders have ensured that this is aligned to the statutory guidance for relationships and sex education. However, they have not yet formally consulted parents about this programme, as set out in the statutory guidance and independent school standards.

Pupils are encouraged to contribute to decision-making in the school, including through the student council. Staff plan opportunities for pupils to learn about and reflect on important values such as tolerance, respect and equality. Social issues, such as homelessness, are also woven through the curriculum. However, pupils do not have enough opportunity to learn about other cultures and faiths to prepare them fully for life in modern Britain. This means that the school is not meeting this part of the independent school standards.

Proprietors and governors hold leaders to account well. They have put in place a 'team around the school' and are providing a high level of support and challenge. This work has strengthened leaders' capacity to improve the school. Governors are rightly focusing on ensuring that recent improvements to leadership and pupils' behaviour are sustained. They also know that strengthening the curriculum and improving attendance need to be top priorities.

Leaders are considerate of staff's workload and well-being. The daily briefings and weekly staff development meetings foster teamwork and enable staff to stay connected. Parents value the weekly calls from class teachers to let them know how things are going. Some parents are concerned and unsettled about the many staffing changes at the school. However, some also talk warmly about the positive 'sea-change' in their children in the short time they have attended the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff fulfil their safeguarding responsibilities well. They know that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. Leaders, as well as staff, are very aware of pupils' individual vulnerabilities. They follow up on any concerns and ensure that, when needed, they enlist the support of external agencies. Risk assessments are comprehensive and enable leaders to identify potential risks and take action to reduce these.

Recruitment processes and records are thorough. Proprietors and governors maintain strong oversight of safeguarding. They have well-established systems to keep this important aspect of the school's work under review.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- The curriculum for English is not coherently planned and there is insufficient focus on important elements such as reading and writing. As a result, pupils are not achieving well enough or getting the intensive support that they need in this subject. Leaders need to implement a coherent English curriculum with sufficient focus on reading and writing. Additionally, they need to provide training for staff so that they can implement the curriculum effectively and ensure that pupils get the academic support they need.
- The curriculum in many academic subjects is still in development. Leaders have not yet identified or sequenced clearly enough the most important knowledge they would like pupils to learn. As a result, staff do not have enough guidance about the specific content that pupils need to learn and remember. Leaders need to implement their plans to strengthen and refine the academic curriculum.
- Leaders have not ensured that teaching consistently takes account of pupils' previous learning. As a result, gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding are not being identified or addressed well enough, and this limits pupils' achievement. Leaders need to provide training for staff to address this.
- Many pupils do not attend school regularly, and overall attendance rates are very low. This means that some pupils continue to experience a disrupted education and are missing out on vital learning. Leaders should redouble their work to improve attendance.
- Pupils do not have enough opportunity to learn about other cultures, faiths and beliefs so that they can acquire an appreciation of and respect for their own and other cultures. This means that they are not well enough prepared for life in modern Britain. Leaders need to strengthen this aspect of the school's work.

- Leaders have not yet consulted parents about the school's relationships and sex education policy or programme. They need to implement their plans to do this as soon as possible.
- Improvements to leadership and behaviour are recent and not fully embedded. Proprietors, governors and leaders need to ensure that recent improvements to these aspects of the school's work are sustained and embedded.

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	10246072
Type of school	Independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	16
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Beechkeys Limited
Chair	Phil Jonas
Headteacher	Mark Birkbeck (Interim)
Annual fees (day pupils)	£58,596
Telephone number	01372 678 630
Website	www.theauroragroup.co.uk/sen-special-needs-schools/independent-education-surrey-education
Email address	aurorapoppyfield@the-aurora-group.com
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school was first registered by the Department for Education on 9 March 2022. This is the first standard inspection of this school.
- The school provides full-time education for pupils between the ages of 11 and 16 with special educational needs and/or disabilities. 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 have been placed at the school by Surrey local authority.
- Since the school opened, there have been many changes of staff and leaders. The former permanent headteacher left the school in September 2022. An interim headteacher took up post in October 2022. The deputy headteacher joined the school in June 2022.
- The proprietor, Beechkeys Limited, is a subsidiary of the Aurora Group.
- The four members of the governing body are senior leaders from the Aurora Group. The governing body reports to the chief executive officer. The chair of governors acts as the chair of the proprietor body.
- The school does not currently use any alternative provision.

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.

The school has failed to meet the independent school standards. These are the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics and food technology. 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 and sampled pupils' work in other subjects, including in geography and science.
- To inspect safeguarding, inspectors considered the school's policies, records and procedures for safeguarding. The lead inspector met with the designated leader for safeguarding and the deputy headteacher. Inspectors also spoke with pupils and staff.

- The lead inspector met with two members of the governing body and held a separate meeting with the chair of the proprietor body.
- Inspectors met with staff and pupils and considered their responses to Ofsted's surveys.
- There were too few responses from the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, to be considered. The lead inspector met with one parent on the second day of the inspection and held telephone discussions with some parents on the third day of the inspection.
- The lead inspector held a telephone discussion with the local authority designated officer for safeguarding.

Inspection team

Sue Cox, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Sue Bzikot

Ofsted Inspector

Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school failed to meet the following independent school standards

Part 1. Quality of education provided

- 2A(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor-
 - 2A(1)(f) consults parents of registered pupils at the school before making or revising a statement under sub-paragraph (e).

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

- 5 The standard about the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils at the school is met if the proprietor-
 - 5(b) ensures that principles are actively promoted which-
 - 5(b)(v) further tolerance and harmony between different cultural traditions by enabling pupils to acquire an appreciation of and respect for their own and other cultures.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

- 34(1) The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school-
 - 34(1)(b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently.

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