

Inspection of Aurora Fairway School

Westwood Road, St Ives, Cambridgeshire PE27 6RR

Inspection dates: 14 to 16 November 2023

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Outstanding**

Leadership and management **Good**

Does the school meet the independent school standards? **Yes**

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are immediately made to feel welcome and valued at this school. There is a strong sense of respect and trust between staff and pupils. Pupils appreciate the attention to detail given to their individual needs and interests. This bespoke care means most pupils, including those who have been out school for some time, soon settle and are ready to learn.

Adults see the positives in every pupil. They ensure that pupils are given opportunities and skills to be successful. Pupils enjoy having choices over their qualification pathways. They can pursue their talents and interests, whatever they may be. Staff go out of their way to help pupils reach their goals. Achievements are celebrated. Many pupils say this school is their first positive experience of education.

Pupils can be themselves here. Many make friendships for the first time. Pupils know there are safe spaces to go to if they need to regulate their emotions, so the school is calm and disagreements are rare. Dogs who are used therapeutically, such as Baxter, are a much-loved and integral part of school life. Pupils enjoy regular horse riding, swimming, golf and kick boxing lessons. The outdoor nature area and cooking are also popular. Pupils like volunteering and fundraising.

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

Leaders have designed a curriculum that ensures that pupils access a broad range of academic and vocational subjects. The content of the curriculum builds pupils' knowledge gradually. Pupils revisit their previous learning so that it becomes secure in their memory. Leaders have linked curriculum content closely to pupils' interests. Pupils who previously shunned learning now engage positively. Each pupil follows at least five qualification pathways, so they are suitably prepared for the next stage of their education or employment.

Adults know the pupils well. They make successful adaptations to activities. This individualised approach means that pupils complete the work set for them. However, sometimes the content of the activities is not exactly matched to the learning intended. This results in pupils not always receiving the depth or detail of understanding required to meet the curriculum ambition.

Many pupils, due to their previous educational experience, have significant gaps in their knowledge. The school identifies these gaps quickly and effectively. Pupils access regular daily interventions. These are delivered by skilled staff. Pupils appreciate and work hard on their catch-up tasks. However, some of the intervention work is not precisely aligned to the gaps in pupils' learning. Therefore, misconceptions and missing knowledge are not always addressed quickly enough.

Staff have prioritised a love of reading. Many pupils come to the school with a negative view of books and see reading as a chore. Through careful selection of texts that meet pupils' interests and through reading to pupils regularly, this view is

being reversed. Pupils talk enthusiastically about books they have read. Pupils enjoy reading books to the school dogs. Many pupils are fluent readers. For those that need to catch up with reading, a systematic phonics programme is in place and delivered well. However, some reading targets for those needing help are not precise enough and this slows how quickly these pupils catch up.

Underpinning pupils' ability to access the curriculum is an exceptional and multifaceted personal development programme. Pupils follow highly tailored pastoral and therapeutic sessions which are expertly delivered. All staff are fully briefed and trained on the proven regulation strategies to support pupils' resilience. In addition, there is a coherent plan to ensure that pupils gain essential life skills and careers guidance. Pupils take part weekly in a broad range of personal development opportunities that they then become more proficient in over a term. Some of these lead to external accreditations, such as in animal welfare, gardening and equine care. Pupils all access a variety of lunchtime clubs.

Pupils are taught how to be mentally and physically well. Adults do not shy away from tackling sensitive subjects to keep pupils safe. This includes pupils knowing how to have appropriate and respectful relationships. Pupils understand about discrimination and diversity. They follow their school values and know about key British values, including democracy and respect.

Pupils can manage their feelings with growing self-control. In turn, this means they are less fractious with others and so behaviour at this school is good. Bullying is rare, and if it happens, is dealt with swiftly and effectively. There are a few pupils who struggle to be at school full time. The school has agreed alternative provision for these few pupils to learn remotely. Attendance for pupils who are in school is improving yet remains closely monitored by leaders.

The proprietor body ensures that the school meets all the independent school standards, including the requirements under schedule 10 of the Equalities Act 2010. Monthly quality assurance checks by the proprietor body ensure that the building is well maintained and safe. The proprietor body holds leaders to account for educational standards and completes thorough checks on attendance, safeguarding and behaviour. Staff are highly dedicated to making a difference to pupils' lives. They value leaders' attention to their well-being. Parents and carers are pleased that their children are now keen to come to school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve? (Information for the school and proprietor)

- In some lessons, some staff do not always match the activities closely enough to the learning intended. This means pupils do not always acquire the detail of knowledge outlined in the ambitious curriculum. Leaders need to provide staff with the pedagogical knowledge required to ensure that work set for pupils exactly matches the depth of knowledge they need to understand.
- The interventions provided for individual pupils are not always precisely focused on their specific learning needs or knowledge gaps. This means pupils are not having gaps in knowledge filled as quickly or effectively as they could. Leaders need to ensure that staff know how to set specific targets for pupils and design intervention activities which will allow them to make the progress they are capable of.

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	149186
DfE registration number	873/6060
Local authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	10286487
Type of school	Other 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	42
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Beechkeys Company Limited
Chair	Sharon Pearson
Headteacher	Julie Sadler
Annual fees (day pupils)	£65,600
Telephone number	01480 772930
Website	www.theauroragroup.co.uk/services/schools/fairway-school
Email address	fairwayschool@the-aurora-group.com
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school is an independent day school owned by Beechkeys Company Limited, part of the Aurora Group. The school has oversight from the Aurora Group quality assurance and operational teams through a school governing board.
- The school opened in September 2022. This is its first standard inspection after it was registered on 9 September 2022.
- There have been no material changes to the school since its pre-registration inspection on 26 July 2022.
- All pupils who attend this school have an education, health and care plan for social, emotional and mental health needs and/or autism.
- The school does not currently employ supply staff.
- The school currently uses two unregistered alternative providers.
- There are currently three therapeutic professionals who also work at the school.

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

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- 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.
- The inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, pastoral leader, the special educational needs coordinator, subject leaders, teachers, support staff, therapists and the school business manager.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading and English, mathematics, personal, social and health education and food technology. For each deep dive, the inspectors spoke to subject leaders, visited lessons, spoke with pupils, look at pupils' workbooks and spoke with teachers and support staff.
- The inspectors also looked at a range of pupils' work from across the curriculum.
- The lead inspector held meetings with the chair of the proprietor body, who is the chief operating officer of Aurora Group. The lead inspector also met the quality assurance director and the regional operations director for the Aurora Group, who are responsible for governance of the school on behalf of the proprietor.

- To check compliance with the independent school standards, inspectors spoke to the headteacher, the school business manager, members of the proprietor board, staff and pupils. Inspectors visited lessons, observed social times and toured the school site.
- The team inspector also visited the off-site provision for horse-riding lessons and viewed risk assessments.
- The lead inspector reviewed arrangements for those pupils who have remote learning provided by an alternative provider (private tutoring).
- The lead inspector scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's own self-evaluation, the school improvement plan and governance minutes.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors reviewed the single central record, 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 inspectors considered the responses gathered through Ofsted's online survey for parents, Ofsted Parent View, which included 13 free-text comments. There were 23 responses to the staff surveys. No pupils answered the pupil survey. However, the inspectors spoke to several pupils from different year groups during the inspection, as well as a range of staff.

Inspection team

Sara Boyce, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Fiona Webb

Ofsted Inspector

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