

Inspection of Aurora Cedars School

39 Compton Road West, Compton, Wolverhampton, West Midlands WV3 9DW

Inspection dates: 9 to 11 April 2024

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

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

What is it like to attend this school?

Aurora Cedars School is characterised by the warm and trusting relationships between pupils and adults. Staff have carefully created an environment in which pupils are respected, listened to and valued. As a result, pupils feel safe and soon begin to flourish.

Pupils joining the school often have had difficult previous experiences and disruption to their education. The school takes time to get to know its pupils and uses the individualised transition period to make sure that it understands exactly what pupils do well and what support they may need. As a result, by the time they attend full time, pupils get the right help from staff, alongside high-quality therapeutic support.

The school has begun to adapt its curriculum to better match the needs of pupils. However, in some subjects, curriculum planning and implementation do not match the high ambitions of leaders. As a result, some pupils do not always achieve as well as they could.

The school puts pupils' best interests at the heart of what it does. It has developed a strong personal development curriculum that makes sure that pupils are prepared well for their next steps. One pupil summed up the views of many by saying, 'I didn't have a future before I came here, now I have been given the skills and the tools to make a future for myself.'

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

The school has thought hard about how to make sure that pupils can learn well. The academic curriculum is complemented by a comprehensive wider curriculum offer. This includes many opportunities for pupils to learn about how to manage their own needs. The skilful collaboration between the school and the clinical team makes sure that pupils receive the right therapeutic support in class. For example, younger pupils enjoy 'ready, steady, OT' to help them develop the physical skills they need to access learning as well as meet their sensory needs.

Pupils study a broad curriculum. In some subjects, learning is sequenced well, which enables teachers to know what they should teach and when. However, in some others, the curriculum is not as well developed so teachers are not always sure what important information they need pupils to know and remember.

Pupils are encouraged to read widely. The school has recently put in place a suitable phonics programme for pupils at the earliest stages of reading. However, a few older pupils have gaps in their phonics knowledge and this is not always picked up well enough through the school's diagnostic testing. This prevents these pupils from doing as well as they could.

Pupils joining the school often have low attendance. Leaders work closely with pupils and their families to make sure that any barriers to attendance are identified and

overcome. Because the school knows its pupils so well, nearly all pupils soon begin to attend very well.

Pupils follow an 'active citizens' curriculum. Each week, pupils go on trips and visits to places of interest or engage in activities that are carefully designed to meet their needs. For example, pupils are challenged to take the bus, go to a local café or try high rope activities. Careers education is carefully planned so that pupils are well informed about what they can do after school. This deliberate planning of the wider curriculum is a strength of the school.

The proprietor works effectively with school leaders to make sure that the independent school standards are met and that the school complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010. The proprietor has supported school leaders well in establishing the school. The proprietor and those responsible for governance in the school conduct regular quality assurance. The findings of this work, though, are not always as sharply focused as they could be. This means that some improvements are not made quickly enough.

Staff are, rightly, very proud to work at the school. They say that leaders support them well and that they receive excellent support to develop their expertise and skills. This has helped to create a positive school culture where staff and pupils feel recognised and appreciated.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- Some areas of the curriculum are not yet fully developed. As a result, teachers are not always clear about the important knowledge that pupils need to know and remember in order to achieve well. The school should develop the subject expertise of all teachers so that they can deliver the curriculum effectively.
- Systems and processes to identify gaps in phonics knowledge on entry are not well established. As a result, some pupils do not receive the support they need to learn to read well. The school should continue to develop systems and processes to identify and support pupils at the early stages of reading so that all pupils can read fluently.
- Some of the areas for development in the quality of education have not been identified and addressed quickly enough. As a result, some pupils do not achieve as well as they could. The proprietor should make sure that leaders at all levels identify and act on any potential issues to make sure that the curriculum is ambitious and meets the needs of all 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.

School details

Unique reference number	149579
DfE registration number	336/6011
Local authority	Wolverhampton
Inspection number	10322619
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	5 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	41
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Beechkeys Limited
Chair	Kim Welsh
Headteacher	Zoe Free
Annual fees (day pupils)	£61,000
Telephone number	01902 544666
Website	www.theauroragroup.co.uk
Email address	zoe.free@the-aurora-group.com

Information about this school

- The school opened in June 2023.
- The school is registered for pupils aged five to 19 years.
- The school currently does not have any students in the sixth form.
- All the pupils at the school have education, health and care plans.
- The school caters for pupils with autism and social, emotional and mental health needs.
- The school uses no alternative provisions.

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.

Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in 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: early reading, English, mathematics and personal, social and health education. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, 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 looked at curriculum plans and looked at pupils' books in other subjects.
- Inspectors spoke with leaders about other areas of the school's work.
- The lead inspector met with the chair of governors and members of the proprietor body, including the chief finance officer.
- 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.

Inspection team

Claire Price, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Susan Hickerton

Ofsted Inspector

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