

School inspection report

17 to 19 September 2024

Aurora Eccles School

Quidenham

Norwich

Norfolk

NR16 2NZ

The Independent Schools Inspectorate is appointed by the Department for Education to inspect association independent schools in England. Our inspections report on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards and other applicable regulatory requirements are met, collectively referred to in this report as 'the Standards'.

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Summary of inspection findings

1. Governors and leaders have a clear and shared vision for the school. This is implemented effectively through their understanding of pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and their individual challenges. Leaders have suitable skills and knowledge. They lead and manage the school well. As a result, pupils develop the skills they need to lead independent and fulfilling adult lives. They also learn to manage their own physical, emotional and social wellbeing. Pupils achieve well academically.
2. Leaders manage pupils' individual learning needs in a systematic and supportive manner so that they are met well. The school employs a range of therapists who provide individual and group therapy sessions that are effective in meeting pupils' individual needs.
3. There is a culture of mutual respect between pupils of different ages and genders. Leaders and staff tackle occasional negative comments effectively, supporting pupils to correct their behaviour and to understand why it was wrong.
4. Careers education is well established and effective overall. All pupils have a weekly careers lesson and older pupils visit local colleges. Staff support pupils in completing applications for college and help them to practise for college interviews. However, parents are not provided with enough information about the school's careers provision. This limits how well parents are able to support their children to make informed decisions about future careers so that they achieve as well as possible after leaving school.
5. Leaders prioritise pupils' physical and mental health and wellbeing. Levels of supervision are appropriate to keep pupils safe. Staff understand and implement safeguarding procedures in line with the school's policy. The large school site is secure. Governors and leaders take a proactive and effective approach to managing risks.
6. Leaders provide a suitable curriculum which is well matched to pupils' needs and supports them to move on to the next steps of their education when they leave the school. Teaching is usually effective and pupils make good progress as a result. However, the work some pupils are given to do is not matched closely enough to their academic ability. Where this is the case, the more able pupils are not challenged sufficiently and do not achieve as well as they could.
7. The school has a suitable complaints policy which is implemented consistently. Where formal complaints are received, they are managed effectively through a three-stage process with clear timescales. Records are kept appropriately, including of any action taken and the outcomes of the complaint.
8. The school meets its duties under the Equality Act 2010 through, for example, the implementation of the school's personal, social and health education (PSHE) and relationships and sex education (RSE) schemes of work and its accessibility plan. The accessibility plan is reviewed annually to take account of the school's changing needs.

The extent to which the school meets the Standards

- Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance are met.
- Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society are met.
- Standards relating to safeguarding are met.

Recommended next steps

Leaders should ensure that:

- parents are given sufficient information about the school's careers provision, to enable them to support their children to make informed decisions about the choices available after leaving school, in order that they achieve their full potential
- teaching is well matched to pupils' academic abilities so that more-able pupils are appropriately challenged and achieve as well as possible.

Material change request

9. Inspectors considered the school's request for a change to the details of its registration to increase its capacity from 216 to 225 pupils.
10. Safeguarding practice in the school is effective and leaders are rigorous in checking the suitability of staff to work with pupils. Leaders maintain effective procedures so that health and safety and fire safety requirements continue to be met. Leaders assess and address risks effectively, including risks relating to an increase in the number of pupils.
11. Staffing and supervision are appropriate to support the increase in pupil numbers. Leaders have appropriate plans in place to ensure that the quality of education is maintained and built on if the school increases in size, such as deploying additional staff when appropriate. The environment, including toilet and first aid facilities and the dining hall, is suitable to accommodate the proposed increase in pupil numbers.
12. It is recommended that the requested material change be approved.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

13. Governors and leaders have a clear and well considered vision for the school. This is widely shared and understood by pupils, parents and staff. Leaders put understanding and providing for pupils' needs and challenges at the forefront of their work. They actively encourage all staff to support the varying needs of the pupils. Across the school, there is a strong ethos of inclusion and acceptance. Leaders promote a positive, restorative approach so that pupils learn how to correct their own behaviour and to understand why it was wrong.
14. Governors ensure that leaders demonstrate appropriate knowledge and skills and fulfil their responsibilities effectively. Leaders regularly evaluate how well the school is doing. This helps them to define a clear vision for the school's future development and to identify key targets for each year. Leaders' timely and effective actions mean that the school continues to improve.
15. The school's policies are suitable and well considered. They are up to date and follow current guidance. Leaders communicate and implement procedures and policies effectively so that pupils and staff have a clear understanding of what is expected of them.
16. Leaders prioritise pupils' physical health and emotional wellbeing. For example, the school employs a qualified nurse so that pupils' medical needs are identified and addressed appropriately. It also employs suitably qualified therapists, who provide both group and individual therapy for pupils, as appropriate. The site is secure and well maintained. It provides pupils with suitable spaces to socialise with their friends and for quiet reflection, when needed.
17. Leaders are well trained to assess and manage risks effectively. They identify a wide range of risks, including those that are not immediately obvious. Leaders take appropriate action to mitigate the risks that they identify. They regularly check whether these actions are working and whether there are further measures they should take. These actions help to ensure pupils' physical and emotional safety at school.
18. Leaders maintain an easily accessible website which provides relevant key information for parents of current and prospective pupils. All the required policies are made available either on the website or from the school's office. The school uses an online system to keep parents up to date about how well their child is doing. Parents also receive informative and detailed termly reports on their children's progress and attainment.
19. Leaders maintain effective partnerships with relevant external agencies, such as local authority children's services. They keep in regular contact with local safeguarding partners and make timely referrals when required. These strong working relationships help to ensure that pupils receive the help and support they need, when necessary.
20. Leaders respond appropriately to any concerns that are raised, through a suitable three-stage complaints procedure. They respond to complaints promptly and within the published timeframes. The school keeps an accurate record of any complaints submitted, including of any actions taken in response to these.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance

21. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

22. Governors and senior leaders have created a suitable curriculum that is designed around the individual needs of pupils, identified through their educational, health and care (EHC) plan targets. The school provides a range of different educational pathways that suit pupils' different aptitudes and abilities. In Years 7 to 9, pupils' academic curriculum closely mirrors the national curriculum. From the end of Year 9, pupils follow a pathway that allows them to achieve pre-entry level, entry level, functional skills or GCSE awards, as appropriate. ASDAN short courses are also offered to some pupils. Pupils achieve a range of suitable qualifications by the time they leave the school.
23. Leaders support pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) through specialist teaching. This support enables pupils to become more fluent in English in order to access the full curriculum. As a result, pupils who speak EAL achieve as well as other pupils.
24. Leaders systematically monitor the quality of teaching and the progress pupils make through an online data tracking platform. This enables leaders to adjust and modify the curriculum provision for each pupil, according to their strengths.
25. Teachers have a detailed understanding of individual pupils' needs. This enables them to plan learning effectively and in a way which builds pupils' confidence. The pace of learning is suitably adapted so that pupils are able to complete tasks to the best of their ability. Classes are deliberately small, with teaching assistants providing effective support for pupils.
26. A small amount of teaching is less effective because tasks are not matched well enough to pupils' academic abilities. At times, the most able pupils are not stretched and challenged sufficiently and they are given work to do that is too easy. Although they make good progress overall, they do not achieve as well as they could.
27. Classrooms are calm and orderly places, where pupils can learn without being distracted. Pupils listen to and follow teachers' instructions well. Leaders and staff make adaptations for individual pupils so that their needs are met well. For example, some pupils are given alternative seats to sit on while others use fidget aids to help them focus and concentrate. This helps pupils to achieve well.
28. Staff promote speaking, listening, literacy and numeracy skills in lessons, wherever possible. Teachers regularly work with individual pupils to identify gaps in their learning in these key areas. They use this information to set specific targets for pupils and to plan the right support to help pupils to achieve them.
29. The school has a well-established and effective system for assessing pupils' learning. Assessment information is used to adapt and develop schemes of work across the curriculum for all year groups to better meet pupils' needs. Pupils are regularly given time at the beginning of lessons to respond to the feedback given to them by their teachers. This allows pupils to review their work, identify strengths and weaknesses, and set goals for improvement. This helps them to make good progress.
30. The school has a comprehensive extra-curricular programme. Pupils engage well in a variety of activities ranging from archery to swimming and from climbing on the climbing wall to making a sensory bag in the art club. Pupils achieve well in these areas because staff provide a positive environment and give pupils the support they need to learn effectively.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation

31. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 3: Pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing

32. Leaders and staff are fully focused on supporting pupils' physical, mental and emotional health and do so effectively. A great deal of pastoral support is available. When a pupil becomes unsettled, for whatever reason, immediate help is at hand. Pupils value and respect the staff and appreciate that staff have their best interests at heart. Pupils develop strong, trusting relationships with the staff that work with them. The school is a respectful place where pupils feel safe to express themselves. The strong mutual respect between staff and pupils supports pupils to be encouraging and approving of each other.
33. The physical education (PE) curriculum is appropriate and well developed. It is delivered by suitably qualified staff who understand pupils' needs well. Pupils experience a broad range of physical activities, including games and sports. They develop their skills in these areas, as well as developing teamwork skills and resilience.
34. Leaders have put appropriate measures in place to prevent bullying. They are proud to have recently won an award to celebrate their work in this area. On the rare occasions that situations arise between pupils, staff intervene in such a way that both pupils move on in a positive and constructive way. Pupils learn to accept and celebrate other people's differences and uniqueness. They appreciate that they are also unique and that this school particularly suits them and brings out the best in them.
35. Positive behaviour is promoted well throughout the school. Leaders have introduced a points system that is having a positive impact on encouraging pupils to do their best and aim high. All behavioural incidents are recorded on an online platform. Leaders use this information effectively to identify potential issues. They take action promptly to prevent problems from developing. No incident is considered in isolation. Rather, leaders and staff address issues and incidents with appropriate understanding of pupils' social, emotional and mental health needs. Staff receive regular training to help them to understand and support pupils' needs in this area.
36. Health and safety arrangements are robust and effective. Online platforms are used to check that actions are taken at the right time and nothing is forgotten. Accidents are reported thoroughly and promptly. Leaders take suitable preventative action to prevent further accidents, where appropriate.
37. The school has a well-equipped medical room and robust procedures for dealing with medication. Pupils know what to do when they or someone else is injured. There are a large number of trained staff who are always available to help when needed. First aid training is monitored and up to date.
38. School leaders ensure that the system for registration and monitoring attendance is thorough and well maintained. It is reviewed weekly by leaders, who take appropriate action in response to any issues they find. Any absences are quickly accounted for and leaders report concerns to the local authority, as appropriate.
39. Leaders have established a comprehensive personal development programme, which includes RSE and PSHE. RSE follows a well-planned structure and adheres to statutory guidance. Older pupils take part in discussions about sexual health and relationships, which they find helpful. The PSHE curriculum is similarly detailed and well considered. It supports pupils to develop their relationships

with others beyond school. Pupils learn about the differences between people, including race, religion and sexual orientation. Pupils develop a strong understanding of the need to respect all groups of people, regardless of their personal characteristics, and to celebrate the diversity in society.

40. Pupils are supervised appropriately throughout the school day. There are always plenty of staff available, both during lessons and in less structured parts of the day. This helps to keep pupils safe and provide them with the support they need.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing

- 41. All the relevant Standards are met.**

Section 4: Pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society

42. Leaders' strong focus on helping pupils to improve their social skills is very effective. Pupils are encouraged and supported to work in harmony with one another. Pupils become more confident and better able to socialise with other people during their time at the school. Some pupils take part in school committees such as eco club, pride committee or the school council and suggest ideas that would benefit others.
43. A very high proportion of pupils participate in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme (DofE). Pupils help the school community and local communities when completing the service sections of the award. They also work in harmony together when completing adventurous activities such as a climbing wall. Pupils develop an appreciation for the natural world during their time at the school, such as an awareness of a more sustainable production chain for locally sourced produce. For example, in cookery pupils learn about the impact on the environment when ingredients used in lessons have been imported from far away.
44. Pupils are prepared well for their adult lives. Pupils throughout the school have regular 'life skills' lessons covering a wide range of important aspects of life beyond school. For example, pupils are taken on trips to local supermarkets to help them to become increasingly autonomous when shopping. Former pupils are also invited back to the school to speak to current pupils about their experiences.
45. Fundamental British values, such as tolerance and the rule of law, are promoted well both through the curriculum, such as in religious education, and other aspects of the school's work. Pupils appreciate the need for a system of rules to be in place which everyone follows. Pupils learn to distinguish right from wrong. A carefully chosen set of values, such as honesty and respect, form the basis of the school's curriculum and are widely understood by staff and pupils.
46. The school's careers provision has been carefully considered. It is appropriate and meets pupils' needs well on the whole. All year groups have a weekly 'career of the week' where they learn about different jobs. Career of the week includes roles such as a nursery worker, engineer, shop worker and other suitably aspirational jobs. Pupils in Year 10 engage in work experience. The school works with an external company that provides suitable placements for pupils. Some pupils have individual work experience while others take part in a group placement with a local charity, doing practical activities to support it.
47. Full details about the careers programme are not currently shared with parents. This means that parents do not have the information they need to support their children in making informed decisions about their future careers and to help them fulfil their potential.
48. Pupils are provided with effective economic education, particularly through mathematics and PSHE. They are taught explicitly about how to manage their own finances and they develop strong understanding in this area. For example, pupils learn about loans and credit cards and the importance of saving up for the things they want to buy.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society

49. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

50. Pupils feel safe in their school. The secure perimeter fence helps pupils to feel confident to enjoy the extensive site. Pupils can identify trusted adults that they can speak to if they have a concern or worry. Safeguarding posters are clearly displayed around the site, reminding pupils of who to speak to if any concerns arise.
51. Staff take great care of pupils and nothing is too much trouble. When trips out of school are organised, thorough planning takes place so that pupils are best prepared for the change in routine. The school site is very calm and serene, in part because pupils feel so safe and secure at the school.
52. All staff receive suitable safeguarding training, including about the Prevent Duty. They understand how to report, record and address any safeguarding concerns that might arise. Staff understand the importance of effective safeguarding and they are aware of their responsibilities under the staff code of conduct.
53. Staff are alert to possible signs of abuse and neglect. They report their concerns promptly using the school's procedures. Leaders make timely referrals to children's services and the local authority designated officer when appropriate.
54. Recruitment processes are robust. School leaders ensure that all required pre-appointment checks are completed before new staff take up their posts. The checks are recorded accurately in the single central record of appointments. Governors maintain effective oversight of the single central record and conduct monthly quality assurance checks.
55. The safeguarding policy reflects the most recent statutory guidance and is effectively implemented. It is available to staff, parents and pupils on the school website and contains all the necessary contact details.
56. Pupils are taught about a range of ways to keep themselves safe, including when online. They learn ways to protect themselves and how to report any issues or concerns to a trusted adult to enable them to be supported. The school's online filtering and monitoring system is effective and prevents pupils from accessing harmful content.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

- 57. All the relevant Standards are met.**

School details

School	Aurora Eccles School
Department for Education number	962/6041
Address	Aurora Eccles School Quidenham Norwich Norfolk NR16 2NZ
Phone number	01953 887217
Email address	ecclesschool@the-aurora-group.com
Website	www.theauroragroup.co.uk/services/schools/eccles-school
Proprietor	The Aurora Group
Chair	Mrs Sharon Pearson
Headteacher	Mr Chris MacKinnon
Age range	11 to 19
Number of pupils	209
Date of previous inspection	20 April 2023

Information about the school

58. Aurora Eccles School is a co-educational day for pupils who have SEND in Quidenham, Norfolk. In 2017, the school was acquired by the Aurora Group and members of the group's central team provide the governance of the school.
59. The school has identified all pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). All pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. Pupils' additional needs include moderate learning difficulties, communication and interaction difficulties, and social, emotional and mental health needs. A large proportion of pupils have an autistic spectrum condition.
60. English is an additional language for five pupils.
61. The school states that its aims are to enable pupils to achieve the best possible outcomes in their individual learning, independence, personal growth and development. It seeks to support pupils in improving their social, communication and interaction skills alongside their academic studies and to prepare them to make appropriate choices in life.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

17 to 19 September 2024

62. A team of three inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

63. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration periods and assemblies
- observation of a sample of extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection
- discussions with the chair and other governors
- discussions with the headteacher, school leaders, managers and other members of staff
- discussions with pupils
- visits to the therapy spaces and facilities for physical education
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

64. The inspection team considered the views of pupils, members of staff and parents who responded to ISI's pre-inspection surveys.

How are association independent schools in England inspected?

- The Department for Education is the regulator for independent schools in England.
- ISI is approved by the Secretary of State for Education to inspect independent schools in England, which are members of associations in membership of the Independent Schools Council.
- ISI inspections report to the Department for Education on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards, the EYFS statutory framework requirements, the National Minimum Standards for boarding schools and any other relevant standards are met.
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