

Inspection of Aurora Meldreth Manor School

Fenny Lane, Meldreth, Royston, Hertfordshire SG8 6LG

Inspection dates: 8 to 10 October 2024

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Good

Sixth-form provision

Requires improvement

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Being a pupil at this school means joining a friendly community that values happiness and safety. Pupils enjoy a calm environment and access to beautiful grounds, including a sensory garden and outdoor gym equipment. They feel secure because staff are caring. The school prioritises well-being with activities like hydrotherapy and sensory play, which boost pupils' happiness and sense of security.

Behaviour is typically positive, with a strong focus on understanding and managing emotions. Lunchtimes are peaceful, allowing pupils to enjoy meals together. They participate in activities that build social skills and teamwork, such as inter-school sports festivals to showcase their talents. When challenges arise, pupils receive support to make positive choices, fostering a supportive and inclusive culture.

The school aspires to have high expectations for pupils, including students in the sixth form. However, these are not fully realised. Pupils make progress in practical life skills and physical development, using equipment like standing frames and specialist seating to engage in lessons. For too many pupils, opportunities to practise and build on what they know are limited. For example, the current approach to phonics delays progress for those able to develop reading skills.

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

The school's curriculum is designed to meet the diverse needs of its pupils, but its delivery is inconsistent across classes, including in the sixth form. In some lessons, clear explanations and instructions help pupils build on what they know and maintain calm behaviour. In others, this is less evident, leading to confusion and disengagement. While leaders, especially those recently appointed, recognise these inconsistencies, efforts to address them are still at an early stage.

The school takes a comprehensive approach to identifying and supporting pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. This includes tailored learning programmes and input from a multi-disciplinary team. Regular checks, involving parents and external agencies, help track progress and adjust pupils' support. Therapeutic input, such as speech and language therapy, is of high quality and supports communication and self-regulation. However, these strategies are not always applied consistently in lessons. For example, there are times when fulfilling a pupil's immediate needs takes precedence over encouraging independent communication, limiting opportunities for pupils to use their communication methods.

The integration of the phonics programme varies. Some pupils do not receive the regular practice needed to improve their reading skills. While notable progress is seen in certain areas, greater consistency across classes is required. Staff training on phonics is ongoing, but further support is needed to ensure that reading instruction is effective for all pupils learning to read.

Behaviour across the school is typically positive. Most pupils show good self-control and can maintain focus in lessons. The school uses a range of strategies, such as positive reinforcement and clear expectations, to promote positive behaviour. There are occasional moments where behaviour management could be refined, but established systems are in place to guide improvements.

Attendance is well managed, with strong rates compared to similar schools. The school works closely with parents and carers to address concerns, ensuring that pupils are supported to attend regularly.

Pupils' personal development is well supported. Participation in activities such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award fosters skills like teamwork, responsibility, and community engagement. Weekly assemblies introduce a range of religions and celebrations, promoting an appreciation for diverse cultures. Cultural days and school trips to gardens and museums further enhance pupils' global awareness and personal growth. Outdoor learning helps pupils build a connection to the environment.

The school places a strong emphasis on preparing pupils for adulthood through its careers education, which includes various activities and programmes. Older pupils engage in work experience at a local farm, helping to build practical skills. However, the school recognises the need to expand its partnerships with other community organisations to offer a wider range of opportunities. Strengthening links with colleges and education providers is also a priority, ensuring that pupils are well supported in making successful transitions to the next stage of their education or career.

The school's approach to staff professional development is evolving. Since the start of the school year, changes in training provision have shown promising results. For example, a focus on higher expectations for pupils' engagement has contributed to more pupils sustaining focus during activities. Further training is planned, including how to deploy additional adults in classrooms more effectively. The school has leadership in place that accurately evaluates its needs and can implement actions for improvement, positioning the school well for further progress.

The school engages thoughtfully with parents and the community, through events such as fireworks displays and a Christmas bazaar. Regular communication via online learning platforms and home communication books keeps parents informed and involved in their children's education. Staff benefit from daily briefings. These help keep them connected and reduce stress, as well as offering opportunities for support to maintain their well-being.

The school complies with the independent school standards, ensuring that all statutory requirements are met. The proprietor body regularly reviews policies and procedures, particularly those relating to pupils' welfare, health, and safety.

The school complies with Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010, making reasonable adjustments to support pupils with disabilities. The accessibility plan outlines

measures to improve access to the curriculum, physical environment, and information for all pupils.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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

- Pupils are not consistently provided with opportunities to use their communication strategies to express their wants, needs, and ideas. This limits their ability to develop essential communication skills, which are crucial for building independence. The school should create more structured opportunities for pupils to practise communication throughout the day and train staff to support and encourage this.
- Staff often lack clarity regarding the purpose of activities, leading to missed opportunities for pupils to secure and extend foundational knowledge, such as in early reading. The school should ensure that the curriculum and assessment framework are clear and well structured, so that all activities are intentionally designed to reinforce key concepts and meaningfully contribute to pupils' progress.
- The current systems for monitoring how staff deliver the curriculum have not effectively embedded consistent high-quality practices. As a result, pupils experience variable teaching and support. The school should enhance its efforts to develop structured systems for ongoing monitoring and provide targeted training for leaders, improving their ability to implement these strategies effectively.

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	110920
DfE registration number	873/6008
Local authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	10341996
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent day school
Age range of pupils	6 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	49
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	13
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Aurora Meldreth Limited
Chair	Sharon Pearson
Headteacher	Narges Gonzalez
Annual fees (day pupils)	£88,270
Telephone number	01763 268000
Website	www.theauroragroup.co.uk/meldrethmanorschool
Email address	meldreth.manor@the-aurora-group.com
Dates of previous inspection	16 to 18 November 2021

Information about this school

- The school serves up to 50 pupils, many of whom have profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD) and need extensive support with most aspects of daily life. Some pupils have specific learning difficulties, such as those associated with autism, and there are also pupils with life-limiting conditions. All pupils have an EHC plan.
- The school is linked to a children's home which accommodates children with PMLD. It is separately registered with and inspected by Ofsted. There is also a residential home for young adults with PMLD aged 18 to 30. It is separately registered and inspected by the Care Quality Commission. The children's home and residential home are owned by Aurora Care and Education Opco Limited. A principal manages the school, children's home and residential home, with some staff working across the three settings.
- The headteacher had been in post for five weeks at the point of inspection. For some of the summer term, The Aurora Group put in place interim support for the school while there was no substantive headteacher.
- The school does not make use of 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 inspectors only inspected the education provision at this school.
- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors held meetings with leaders, including the chair of the proprietor body, operations director, quality assurance director, principal, headteacher, assistant headteacher and special educational needs coordinator. Two headteachers from other schools within The Aurora Group were also involved in the meetings, one of whom is the link governor for this school. The lead inspector also met with representatives from four local authorities that commission placements at the school and its linked children's home: Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire, Hertfordshire, and Medway.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: communication and interaction, early reading, mathematics, physical development and physical education, 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 alongside their

EHC plan. When inspectors spoke to pupils about their learning, leaders or staff were present to ensure pupils felt comfortable and to assist with communication.

- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, 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.
- To inspect compliance with the independent school standards, inspectors reviewed documentation, including policies and plans, and the lead inspector had a tour of the site with the principal and the headteacher.
- Inspectors reviewed the 27 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and 28 responses to Ofsted's pupil survey. Inspectors studied the 18 responses, including 12 free-text responses, to Ofsted Parent View. An inspector also telephoned a sample of parents to gather their thoughts and opinions about the school.

Inspection team

Daniel Short, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Nerrissa Bear

His Majesty's Inspector

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