

Aurora Chaldon School

Chaldon Rise, Rockshaw Road, Merstham, Redhill RH1 3DB

Inspection date

23 July 2025

Overall outcome

The school is likely to meet all the independent school standards when it opens

Main inspection findings

Part 1. Quality of education provided

Paragraphs 2(1) to 2(2)(b), 2(2)(d) to 2(2)(e)(iii), 2(2)(g) to 4

- The proposed school seeks to provide education for pupils with a primary need of autism. Its driving mission is that pupils should be given 'every opportunity to achieve'. The school would sit as one of three 'sister' Aurora Group schools in Surrey under a single principal. Its approaches would be guided by the Aurora Group's aims to be caring, ambitious, collaborative, trusted and innovative. The school's aim is to achieve this by providing the 'highest quality education, support and care' for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).
- The school conveys clear ambition for pupils through its proposed plans. Threaded through them is a central aim of seeking to prepare pupils for their future, including by developing 'confident individuals, successful learners and responsible citizens'.
- An appropriate curriculum policy and plans are in place. These largely align with the content of the national curriculum. Although not all subjects of the national curriculum would be taught, the range of subjects meets the breadth and range required of independent schools.
- The school is clear about the SEND, and potential, of pupils it plans to admit. Leaders and staff appointed so far have relevant knowledge and experience. The school intends to tailor its provision according to pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans. Working with the on-site therapy team, the school would strive for high-quality therapeutic support in class, supplemented with targeted or specialist intervention where needed.
- Through the Aurora Group, the proposed school has access to detailed schemes of work and subject expertise across the full age range. In the first instance, the school intends to provide education for secondary-age pupils. Consequently, the thinking and plans for the curriculum at key stages 3 and 4 is more advanced. The school has already taken steps to tailor the relevant curriculum for the probable first cohort of pupils.
- The curriculum is likely to support pupils' learning and development. The school has identified what it calls the 'key performance indicators'. These show precisely the most

important knowledge and skills pupils need to acquire to progress through the school's curriculum.

- The school understands the importance of establishing firm foundations in basic skills. It has training planned to ensure staff develop expertise in supporting struggling readers of all ages. Published schemes for reading and mathematics have been carefully adapted for the school's particular context. For example, in mathematics, the school has added extra opportunities for pupils to secure critical foundational knowledge before moving to more complex work. These adaptations convey a firm understanding of pupils' likely SEND.
- The planned curriculum at key stage 3 retains the required breadth of subjects. At key stage 4, the school proposes a 'pathway' approach towards further education or employment. Pupils' particular pathways will depend on their needs and aspirations. The school intends to offer a range of GCSE, entry-level and functional skills qualifications and BTEC National Diplomas.
- The proposed post-16 provision is intended for pupils who would benefit from more time to gain qualifications, where this option is considered preferable to a college placement. The proposed curriculum intensifies the school's focus on preparations for adulthood. It includes study programmes in employment, independent living, health and community.
- Across all key stages, the curriculum includes a sharp focus on safety and well-being. This includes structured programmes for personal, social and health education (PSHE) and relationship and sex education (RSE). The intent is to retain enough flexibility in the curriculum to meet and respond dynamically to pupils' presenting needs. The school plans to prioritise staff training to ensure that they are equipped to teach sensitive topics. The school intends to use approaches tried and tested in its sister schools to consult with parents and carers around its published RSE policy and curriculum.
- The planned arrangements for providing pupils with careers education, advice and guidance are likely to meet requirements. The school intends to use the same benchmarks as maintained schools to guide its provision in this area. It has considered ways of ensuring that pupils' SEND status is not a barrier to them having a strong say in their futures.
- The school predominantly intends to employ qualified teachers wherever possible. There are also plans to support the professional development of some support staff through teacher training apprenticeships. Deployment of staff has been carefully planned to balance pupils' access to specialist teaching with the reassuring support of consistent and familiar teaching assistants. There are appropriate plans to expand the school's expertise around subject and age through targeted recruitment as the school grows.
- Arrangements for assessing and reporting pupils' progress are likely to meet requirements. This would include regularly reporting to parents about pupils' progress towards their EHC plan outcomes. The school also intends to draw on a range of standardised test materials. It has plausible systems for assessing and monitoring pupils' progress through the school's own curriculum.
- The proprietor has ensured that the independent school standards (the standards)

contained in this part are likely to be met.

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

Paragraphs 5 to 5(d)(iii)

- Specific plans for the promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development thread throughout the school's curriculum. Through its thinking and planning, the proposed school prioritises promoting pupils' voice, choice and independence for their future lives.
- The detailed PSHE curriculum incorporates the required content that pupils should be taught beyond the subject-specific curriculum. For example, it systematically breaks down teaching of fundamental British values. This is done in a way intended to help pupils develop their understanding of these concepts over time. Similarly, the curriculum includes specific content around protected characteristics.
- There is a planned programme for exploring each of the Aurora Group values. The reward system is designed to help pupils understand what these values may look like in their daily lives and behaviour. Topics for weekly assemblies are organised so that class tutors can support pupils in advance with linked activities and discussions. These sessions have been designed to help engage pupils in 'big ideas', exploring how to satisfy their curiosity about people who are different from themselves and ask questions respectfully.
- A calendar of wider activities and enrichment includes, for example, an opportunity to visit a Sikh temple as part of religious education. It also identifies opportunities for pupils to learn about national or international events such as Remembrance Day.
- The school intends to create a student council to consult with pupils and give them a voice in decisions that affect them. For example, in partnership with the school's chef, the school would encourage pupils to try new foods through 'tasting menus'.
- The proprietor has ensured that the standard in this paragraph is likely to be met.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Paragraphs 7 to 7(b)

- The school has published a suitable safeguarding policy. It takes account of up-to-date statutory legislation and guidance. This group-wide policy is supplemented with specific detail about the local safeguarding arrangements that are relevant to the proposed school.
- The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and deputies are experienced, knowledgeable and possess the required level of training. The DSL already attends local safeguarding network meetings to ensure they keep abreast of important matters in the locality. A range of suitable safeguarding training for staff is planned and booked. The proprietor has programmed in systems to check the impact of training on staff's understanding and to provide them with regular updates.
- The school has a secure understanding of the context in which it would operate and the associated potential safeguarding risks. The DSL team draws close links between

potential or identified risks, planning a suitable response for individuals and identifying proactive steps towards educating pupils about their own safety. The school understands well the additional vulnerabilities that are likely to exist for pupils who attend. It has carefully planned specific ways to encourage pupils to share any worries or concerns.

- The school has an appropriate system for keeping safeguarding records. The DSL team is already familiar with maintaining it. Procedures for dealing with allegations about adults, and keeping associated records, are similarly well known.

Paragraphs 9 to 10

- Proposed policies and arrangements around behaviour and bullying are underpinned by a clear and convincing philosophy and positive ethos. This couples empathy and understanding with high expectation, whereby the school's positive culture 'promotes and supports excellent behaviour'. The clear focus of the proposed approach is to allow all pupils the opportunity to live and learn in a 'calm, safe and supportive environment'.
- The intended culture, training and procedures around the use of any physical intervention reflects the school's stated determination that this strategy would always be a 'last resort' and 'never normalised'.
- There is an appropriate system in place to record and analyse any behaviour or bullying incidents. The proposed policy is to record all perceived bullying as bullying in the first instance. This is to ensure that all issues are properly investigated and to always trigger the next steps of support for all pupils involved.

Paragraphs 11 to 16(b)

- Other policies and arrangements for promoting the welfare, health and safety of pupils are likely to meet requirements. The health and safety policy references relevant legislation and sets out the requirements for leaders and staff at all levels. This is backed up by suitable processes and systems in school.
- Supported by detailed policies, the school takes risk assessment procedures seriously. Where it has been possible to already complete risk assessments, these are meaningful and personalised to ensure that they are fit for the intended purpose. The proprietor previously commissioned an expert to carry out a fire safety risk assessment. While the overall risk rating was 'tolerable', the report's recommendations for further improvements have been promptly actioned.
- Arrangements for keeping admissions and attendance registers are likely to meet all requirements. Supervision plans for pupils are well considered and proposed staffing levels are likely to be sufficient. There are trained first aiders among staff already recruited for the school and the associated provisions in place to administer first aid.
- All standards in this part are likely to be met.

Part 4. Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

Paragraphs 18(2) to 18(2)(e), 18(3), 19(2) to 19(2)(d)(ii), 19(3), 20(6) to 20(6)(c), 21(1) to 21(3)(b), 21(5) to 21(6)

- The school's single central record shows clearly all of the required checks of staff already appointed. The record also shows the necessary checks of members of the proprietor body and makes appropriate provision to detail checks of contractors.
- Safer recruitment procedures are robust. This includes checking that staff are medically fit to undertake the intended role. Those responsible for making or overseeing pre-employment checks are knowledgeable and vigilant. This includes a firm understanding of the requirements and processes if using agency supply staff.
- All requirements of this part are likely to be met.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

Paragraphs 23(1) to (24)(1)(b), 24(2) to 29(1)(b)

- The school's premises and accommodation have been recently renovated and extended with several purpose-built classroom blocks. Works have been finished to a high standard inside and out. Corridors and common areas are likely to allow for safe movement around the school. The proprietor has carefully considered and provided for security in the grounds and building.
- Classrooms have sufficient space for the proposed numbers. There are also specialist facilities, for example for science and food technology. The school has earmarked a suite of smaller rooms as office space, therapy and intervention rooms. There are dedicated spaces for pupils to eat and join together for assemblies.
- Separate toilets for staff and pupils exceed recommended ratios and are well placed around the premises. Each facility is in its own lockable room, including a sink with regulated hot and cold running water. Drinking-water is clearly labelled, which would supply pupils' refillable water bottles. The medical room is fit for purpose. It includes a washing facility and an ensuite toilet.
- Outdoor areas are attractively landscaped. There is enough space for recreational activity using both hard-surfaced and grassed areas. The school also has an all-weather court for physical education.
- The satellite site has previously been part of the premises of one of the sister schools. It would act as an extension to the main school, predominantly for post-16 students. The school recognises that this site does not benefit from its own external space. Current established arrangements for accessing outside space and sporting facilities in the locality would be adopted as the site is used.
- All standards in this part are likely to be met.

Part 6. Provision of information

Paragraphs 32(1) to 32(1)(d), 32(1)(f) to 32(2)(b), 32(2)(b)(ii) to 32(4)(c)

- The proposed school's website is already live. It displays all of the information that the school is required to provide, including information about the proprietor body. Where information that must be available on request is not already published, the website makes clear that the information exists and how to access it.

- The school knows the information that it must provide to each parent, the local authority or inspectors if the school is registered. Arrangements are in place to fulfil these requirements.
- It is likely that the standard in this part would be met.

Part 7. Manner in which complaints are handled

Paragraphs 33 to 33(k)

- The school's complaints policy is likely to meet requirements and is already published on the proposed school's website.
- The policy sets out appropriate arrangements for concerns to be raised both informally and formally. The formal procedures set out in the policy are likely to allow for complaints to be properly considered and escalated if parents remain unsatisfied. The policy explains how records and recommendations regarding formal complaints would be handled.
- It is likely that the requirements of this part would be met.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Paragraphs 34(1) to 34(1)(c)

- The proprietor body runs a growing number of successful independent special schools across the country. This school would be part of a network of three Aurora schools in Surrey. The intention is to capitalise on this combined resource, experience and expertise.
- The headteacher and other senior leaders have relevant experience in similar provisions to the proposed school. There is an appropriate leadership structure in place for the planned operation. The principal across the three schools would be supported at Aurora Chaldon by a head of school, two assistant headteachers, two special educational needs and disabilities coordinators and the DSL.
- The proprietor body has strategically deployed directors and staff to support its operation and oversee the work of the school. This includes formal structures and mechanisms which focus on both quality and compliance. The group operates a professional governance model as an additional layer of support and challenge. The intention is to supplement these procedures with a regular 'visible presence' by the proprietor body in the school. The principal welcomes this presence and support and reports that it works well in the established sister schools.
- The standard in this part is likely to be met.

Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010

- The proprietor and school have carefully considered accessibility to the physical environment, information and the curriculum in their plans. They are in the process of finalising a three-year accessibility plan to cover all of these areas across the school's first three years of operation should it be registered.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school is likely to meet the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Proposed school details

Unique reference number	151775
DfE registration number	936/6082
Inspection number	10398028

This inspection was carried out under section 99 of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's likely compliance with the independent school standards that are required for registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent day school
Proprietor	Beechkeys Limited
Chair	Sharon Pearson
Principal	David Thomas
Annual fees (day pupils)	£72,807
Telephone number	01372 678630
Website	www.theauroragroup.co.uk/services/schools/chaldon-school
Email address	ChaldonSchool@theauroragroup.co.uk

Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal	Inspector's recommendation
Age range of pupils	Not applicable	5 to 19	5 to 19
Number of pupils on the school roll	Not applicable	100	100

Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal
Gender of pupils	Not applicable	Mixed
Number of full-time pupils of compulsory school age	Not applicable	100

Number of part-time pupils	Not applicable	0
Number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities	Not applicable	100
Of which, number of pupils with an education, health and care plan	Not applicable	100
Of which, number of pupils paid for by a local authority with an education, health and care plan	Not applicable	100

Staff

	School's current position	School's proposal
Number of full-time equivalent teaching staff	Not applicable	17
Number of part-time teaching staff	Not applicable	0

Information about this proposed school

- Aurora Chaldon School intends to cater wholly for pupils with SEND with a primary need of autism. All pupils are likely to have an EHC plan and be funded by a local authority.
- The school's principal is also the principal of two other schools. These schools would form a network of three Aurora schools in Surrey.
- At this stage, the school is not planning to make use of any alternative provision.
- The school's main premises is set in a self-contained site on the outskirts of Merstham. The school intends to operate a satellite site approximately three miles away. Up until July 2025, this site has been used by one of the sister schools. The school anticipates that this site would predominantly accommodate post-16 students. The address of this additional premises is Aurora Caterham Education Centre, Francis Road, Caterham, Surrey, CR3 5NR.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection was commissioned by the Department for Education to determine whether the proposed school is likely to meet the standards if it is given the permission to open. This was the school's first pre-registration inspection.
- The inspector discussed and reviewed all relevant proposals and plans for the new school with the principal, other leaders and staff. He spoke with the chair of the proprietor body and its director of quality. The inspector also spoke with the chair of governors and a quality assurance adviser. He toured both premises.
- Before and during the on-site visit, the inspector scrutinised a wide range of policies, documents and records presented by the proprietor as evidence of the school's likelihood to meet the standards.

Inspection team

Clive Dunn, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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