

Inspection of Aurora Hanley School

Cambrian Way, off Eaves Lane, Bucknall, Stoke on Trent, Staffordshire ST2 8PQ

Inspection dates: 15 to 17 July 2025

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

The quality of education

Outstanding

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Sixth-form provision

Outstanding

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Outstanding

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils flourish at this welcoming and inclusive school. This is because Aurora Hanley School places considerable emphasis on understanding each pupil and their specific needs. Adults show exceptional levels of care to the pupils. This contributes to pupils being understood and well supported to achieve. This all helps pupils to feel happy at school. As one pupil, typical of many, stated: 'This school has changed my life.'

The school has high ambitions for all pupils and students even though some have had disjointed schooling before joining. The school has designed a curriculum with significant care to ensure there is ambition for all pupils. This includes offering a range of courses leading to exam qualifications. The specific learning that pupils need to understand is clearly mapped out and revisited as needed. Pupils, including students in the sixth form, achieve very well.

Pupils behave very well at Aurora Hanley. They understand the school's expectations for how they should conduct themselves and how they should treat others. They especially appreciate the many local visits the school organises. Recent highlights include a trip to Liverpool and a residential trip. Local experiences also include going to the local shops, and a café in a local church, which sixth-form students run.

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

The school has carefully considered the key knowledge that pupils need. This is laid out in a logical order. Pupils and students have significant breadth of subjects to study, including access to certificated courses. The regular review of progress for older pupils means that appropriate changes can be made to their entry levels. In the sixth form, the curriculum is enhanced with a range of courses to further prepare students for education, training or employment when they leave.

Reading is a priority throughout the school. The school has a coherent approach to those pupils who need support. It rapidly identifies any gaps in pupils' phonic knowledge and ensures they have the support required. The school carefully tracks how pupils develop their reading fluency, and how well they engage with the texts they encounter. This all helps pupils to become confident and fluent readers.

Provision for the pupils' and students' special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is a significant strength of the provision. When they start at the school, pupils have a full assessment from the clinical team. This ensures that pupils' needs are very clearly identified. The school ensures that teachers and additional adults understand pupils' SEND and how the learning needs to be adapted for them. These adaptations are put in place with considerable levels of consistency. This support helps pupils and students to achieve exceptionally well.

Checking on pupils' progress is another significant strength. Ambitious targets from pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans are broken down into sensible steps. These are regularly reviewed against a range of measures. This means that the

school is very well informed if a pupil needs additional support to achieve well. In lessons, teachers and additional adults have considerable expertise in spotting gaps in learning or misconceptions. They rapidly ensure that pupils have the support they need to address these. This means pupils and students continue to learn the curriculum to a very high level.

Pupils show consistently high levels of perseverance and motivation in completing more challenging work. They understand they have the support they need to succeed. They show high levels of consideration towards each other. Throughout the student body, they value and celebrate difference. For example, the equalities group is proud of the work they have done on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender awareness. Pupils know that the school will take appropriate and supportive action if they struggle to meet its behaviour expectations.

Some pupils and students arrive at Aurora Hanley with very low attendance from their previous schools. The school supports them to attend more regularly and takes prompt and effective action should this not be the case. As a result, the vast majority of pupils improve their attendance considerably.

The school's provision for pupils' personal development is of exceptional quality. The school adapts the curriculum for personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education to meet their needs. For example, pupils learn how to keep themselves safe in the community and online. They also learn about healthy relationships.

The school ensures that each pupil has a range of wider experiences to enable them to flourish. This includes opportunities in 'Feelgood Friday', some of which are suggested by pupils. This develops their talents and makes them open to new experiences. Sixth-form students benefit from the community café, which they manage and run. Thanks to all this, the school fully lives out its values of 'empowering uniqueness, realising potential and building resilience'.

The school ensures that pupils have direct experience of the world of work and further study. The school organises work experience for pupils, personalised careers interviews and support to access further education at a range of providers. In this way, they are exceptionally well prepared for adulthood and their next stage of employment, education or training. The destinations they access are varied and of a high quality.

Leaders at all levels have high expectations for all aspects of the provision. This vision is fully realised. The school ensures that all staff have the training and support they need to be able to fulfil their role to a high level. Leaders engage appropriately with staff around workload and well-being. The governing body and proprietorial board have a clear understanding of the school's strengths. They offer appropriate challenge to leaders through regular reviews. These help ensure the school meets the independent school standards, and it remains compliant with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010. Parents and carers speak very highly of the school and how it engages with them about their children's education.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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	143839
DfE registration number	860/6044
Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	10391778
Type of school	Other Independent Special School
School category	Independent 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	90
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	10
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Aurora ASD Ltd
Chair	Sharon Pearson
Principal	Tracy Whitehurst
Annual fees (day pupils)	£72,404
Telephone number	01782 973737
Website	www.theauroragroup.co.uk/services/schools/hanley-schoolffordshire
Email address	hanleyschool@theauroragroup.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	18 to 20 October 2022

Information about this school

- The Aurora Hanley School is part of the Aurora Group. It is an independent special school for pupils with autism spectrum disorder and related conditions.
- The school's last independent standard inspection was in October 2022.
- The principal has oversight of this school and one other within the Aurora Group. There is also a head of school in post for this school.
- The school has one main two-storey building used for secondary pupils and four bungalows, one of which is used for the administration hub, while the other three bungalows house primary pupils and some key stage 3 pupils.
- The school has grassed areas for play outside and a kitchen garden and an indoor quadrangle that can be used for games. Physical education is also taught off site at local sports facilities.
- All pupils have an EHC plan. They are placed at the school by a number of different local authorities and typically come from mainstream schools or academies. Some pupils have been out of school for a significant period of time.
- The school does not have a religious character.
- The school does not use 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 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 evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the school's third independent school standard inspection.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record, considered 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.
- During the inspection, inspectors completed deep dives in the following subjects: English, including reading, mathematics, food technology and personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education. In these subjects, they visited lessons, looked at pupils' work, and talked with pupils and staff about how these subjects

were taught. Inspectors also looked at other subjects in less detail to check how they were planned and taught.

- Inspectors observed informal times to evaluate safeguarding and pupils' behaviour.
- During the inspection, the inspectors had formal meetings with the principal, head of school, senior leaders, subject teachers, teaching staff, the school's clinical team and pupils. They also talked informally with parents, carers, pupils and other members of staff to gather general information about school life.
- An inspector also spoke with the chair of the governing body and the chair of the proprietary board. He also reviewed governing body minutes. An inspector reviewed internal and external evaluations of the school's provision.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments and other communication received from parents. They also considered the responses to Ofsted's online survey for staff. An inspector met informally with a selection of parents and carers to gather their views about the quality of provision for their child, and communication between the school and home.

Inspection team

Andrew Madden, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Huw Bishop

Ofsted Inspector

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