

Inspection of Aurora Woodlands School

Woodlands, Holly Tree Close, Darwen, Lancashire BB3 2NG

Inspection dates: 15 to 17 July 2025

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
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Behaviour and attitudes	Good
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Personal development	Outstanding
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Leadership and management	Good
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Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good
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Does the school meet the independent school standards?	Yes
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What is it like to attend this school?

The school is a calm and welcoming place. Many pupils have experienced periods of unsettled education before enrolling here. They often face numerous barriers when they first arrive as a result. The school unpicks and addresses underlying reasons for these barriers with skill and determination. Pupils learn practical strategies to use if they feel overwhelmed.

Pupils respond well to the school's clear routines and high expectations. Staff support them with patience and understanding. Pupils' behaviour and attitude to school improves over time as a result. They develop positive relationships with staff and each other. Pupils view school as a place to learn and have fun.

The school is ambitious for pupils. Typically, they achieve well. Most pupils go on to access further education at colleges within their locality after completing compulsory education at the end of Year 11.

The support that the school provides for pupils to develop positive mental and physical well-being is exemplary. Pupils benefit from the exceptional range of high-quality activities on offer to them at social times, or if they need a short break from lessons to compose themselves. For example, the school's outdoor wooded area, Highgrove, is utilised well for this and other valuable learning.

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

The school's curriculum is ambitious, carefully thought out and well-organised. It ensures that pupils develop new and useful knowledge over time. It is also designed to support pupils to catch up with any key learning that they may have missed from not attending previous schools regularly.

Pupils at the school have a wide range of special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Teachers are adept at identifying and meeting these needs. Pupils benefit from high-quality support to enable them to learn in a way that makes the most of their strengths and interests. The school amply meets the requirements of schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

Teachers deliver the curriculum consistently well. They check regularly that pupils have grasped prior learning fully before moving on to something new. In most cases, teachers identify and address gaps that pupils have in their learning swiftly. For example, there is a strong focus on ensuring that all pupils have secure reading knowledge so that they can access the rest of the curriculum.

Pupils enjoy reading widely and often. As a result, they broaden their understanding of a wide range of vocabulary. Pupils at the early stages of learning to read benefit from effective support from skilled staff. Pupils become confident and competent readers. However, their written work is often difficult to read. This is because staff do not ensure that pupils develop foundational writing knowledge consistently well,

such as how to write in a legible style. Their achievement is sometimes hindered as a result.

There are times when teachers do not have some of the subject knowledge that they need. This usually happens when teachers need to support pupils in key areas of learning that are beyond their own expertise. For example, the same pupil may need support with early writing while accessing GCSE curriculums in subjects such as mathematics or physics. When this happens, pupils are not as well prepared for their next stages of learning as they could be.

Pupils are proud of their achievements in improving how well they manage their own emotions. Disruption to lesson time is rare and brief. The school supports pupils to attend regularly. Pupils value how effectively staff help them to learn to cope with adversity and to become more resilient.

The school's support for pupils' personal development is exceptional. They are prepared extremely well for life when they are older. Pupils access regular impartial careers advice and guidance. The school has selected with care experiences that broaden pupils' awareness of potential careers. Pupils embrace opportunities to develop their employability. For example, they learn how to grow food and prepare nutritious meals. Pupils take part in a wide range of high-quality work experience opportunities. These include learning how to carry out domestic tasks safely, car washing, creating a pond and wildlife area and working alongside local gardening groups.

Leaders at all levels are firmly focused on ensuring that pupils achieve as well as they can. Those with responsibility for governance, including the proprietor, are highly skilled. They have secure oversight of all aspects of the school's work. They ensure that the independent school standards (the standards) are met with diligence. For example, the school environment is expertly maintained. Classrooms and other areas of the school are inviting and attractive. This enhances pupils' mindset for being ready to learn.

The school liaises effectively with parents and carers. The website is kept up to date with policies, including the safeguarding policy, and other useful information.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- Pupils' written work is hampered by weaknesses in their knowledge of how to form clear and coherent writing. This sometimes limits their success in English and across other areas of the curriculum. The school should ensure that

foundational writing skills receive greater attention so that pupils are better equipped for success across the curriculum.

- The school does not make sure that teachers have all the curricular expertise that they need to support pupils' individual learning needs. When this happens, pupils do not achieve as well as they could. The school should ensure that teachers build the expertise that they need to prepare pupils more effectively for their next stage of education.

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	138884
DfE registration number	889/6013
Local authority	Blackburn with Darwen
Inspection number	10375135
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	10 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	64
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Beechkeys Ltd
Chair	Sharon Pearson
Principal	Sarah Gregory
Annual fees (day pupils)	£61,932
Telephone number	01254 706600
Website	www.the-aurora-group.com
Email address	wds-reception@the-aurora-group.com
Dates of previous inspection	15 to 17 March 2022

Information about this school

- The previous standard inspection took place on 15 to 17 March 2022. Since this inspection, the Department for Education (DfE) commissioned a material change inspection to increase the number of pupils the school can admit from 52 to 64. This took place on 12 December 2022.
- The school is located at Woodlands, Holly Tree Close, Darwen, Lancashire BB3 2NG.
- The school caters for pupils with a range of SEND. These include autistic spectrum condition, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, moderate learning difficulties and social, emotional and mental health difficulties.
- All pupils either have an education and health care (EHC) plan or are in the process of having one finalised.
- The school currently makes use of one unregistered alternative provision.
- At the time of the inspection, there were a small number of students in the post-16 provision at the school.

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.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic and have taken this into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the principal and members of staff.
- An inspector met with the chair of the proprietor body, and the chair of the regional governing body.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, including early reading, personal, social, emotional, health and economic education (PSHE) and art and design. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, considered the curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to staff, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also looked at samples of pupils' work in other subjects and discussed the curriculum for them with leaders.
- 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.

- During the inspection, inspectors reviewed a range of documents, including those relating to safeguarding and the standards. They also looked at records of pupils' behaviour and attendance.
- As part of their checks on the standards, the lead inspector made a tour of the school premises.
- An inspector spoke with a representative of one of the local authorities who commission places for pupils at the school.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted's online survey for staff. They also spoke with range of staff who work at the school.
- Inspectors considered parents responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey for parents and to their free text comments. An inspector also spoke with some parents of pupils on the telephone.
- There were no responses to Ofsted's online survey for pupils. However, inspectors spoke with pupils about their experiences at school throughout the inspection.

Inspection team

Claire Cropper, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Julie Bather

Ofsted Inspector

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