

Inspection of Aurora Meldreth Manor School

Fenny Lane, Meldreth, Royston, Hertfordshire SG8 6LG

Inspection dates: 16 to 18 November 2021

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Sixth-form provision **Good**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards? **Yes**

What is it like to attend this school?

Aurora Meldreth Manor is a warm and welcoming school. Leaders and staff know all the pupils very well. Staff like and value pupils as individuals. They are calm and positive in the way they talk to pupils. This helps to give the school its calm and positive atmosphere.

The school has extensive and attractive grounds. Pupils make great use of the outside spaces, for their learning and for recreation. Pupils enjoy the forest schools area, the musical sensory garden and the outdoor play equipment, which is adapted to meet everyone's needs. They also enjoy visits to places of interest nearby and further afield. Pupils regularly take part in community activities in the nearby village.

Leaders and staff are determined that the school will be as good as it can possibly be. They ensure that each pupil has a curriculum that meets their individual needs. Leaders and staff are ambitious for pupils. They do not allow pupils' complex and often profound learning difficulties to be an unpassable barrier to learning.

Pupils are kept safe at school. Pupils have staff with them all the time, including during both learning time and breaktimes. This ensures that pupils are given the support they need to manage their own behaviour.

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

Leaders have a very clear vision for the school. They are resolute that the school will provide the best possible care and education for every pupil. The newly formed senior leadership team is already having a clear impact on moving the school forward. The proprietor has ensured that governance arrangements are strong.

Each pupil at the school has a bespoke curriculum designed to meet their individual needs. Each curriculum provides learning opportunities across a broad range of subject areas. The starting point for each curriculum is the pupil's education, health and care (EHC) plan. This ensures that programmes of study are focused on the things each pupil needs. Teaching staff work closely with the organisation's therapists to plan each pupil's schemes of work. For example, speech and language therapists assess pupils' needs, provide strategies and coach teaching staff in the use of these programmes.

The communication curriculum is strong. Staff use a wide range of methods and approaches to suit individual pupil's needs. For example, tactile signing is used with pupils with the most profound learning and sensory disabilities. This combination of touch and speech helps pupils to understand and interact with the world around them. A sign given on a pupil's shoulder might indicate that it is time to be hoisted, for instance. This means that pupils who have a visual impairment, as well as a profound learning disability, are able to anticipate what is going to happen to them next.

Other pupils use communication books. These books are put together by speech and language therapists after careful assessment. They contain the symbols and pictures that are most relevant and meaningful for the individual pupil. Some pupils are at the earliest stages of understanding that the pictures have meaning. Others know and understand a range of symbols. Teaching staff are committed to ensuring that all pupils, regardless of their disability, should have 'a voice'.

A similar approach is taken with every other aspect of the curriculum, including sex and relationships education. In physical development, for instance, teaching staff work closely with physiotherapists to plan the right programme to meet each pupil's needs. The school is very well resourced. For example, the school has a hydrotherapy pool which is used as part of the curriculum for some pupils with physical disabilities. The school has extensive grounds with a range of pathways that pupils walk and ride wheeled vehicles on.

Teaching staff are skilled at working with the challenges that some pupils' behaviours present. Each pupil has a very detailed behaviour support plan that forms a key part of their curriculum. Teaching staff follow these closely. They adapt the way they deliver the curriculum, to meet behavioural needs. For example, teaching staff follow the mantra that they 'bring the learning to the learner'. If a pupil is struggling to remain in the classroom and needs to be outside, they simply carry on with the learning outdoors. They have found that this helps to ensure that the school has a calm and quiet feel, and that the curriculum is delivered well.

The nature of pupils' special educational needs and disabilities means that progress is measured in tiny steps. In many cases, very little change is evident over long periods of time. Teaching staff are resilient, patient and observant. They remain focused on what each pupil is aiming for, no matter how long it takes.

The teaching teams work very well together and ensure that the quality of education is strong. However, some of the school's staffing is made up of care staff from the children's home. The rotas for which care staff will work in which classroom change twice daily, morning and afternoon. This leads to inconsistencies. It also means that teachers' workloads are increased. Teachers constantly have to provide induction information for, and ensure programmes are understood fully by, the different staff who join them for each session. It also makes it more difficult for teachers to plan ahead fully, because they do not know in advance which care staff they will have with them.

The school's safeguarding policy is up to date, meets requirements and is available on the school's website.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders recognise the school's particular safeguarding risks very well. They have put effective measures in place to guard against them. Staff have regular safeguarding training. This gives them the up-to-date knowledge of current guidance they need.

Staff are vigilant. They notice the very small signs, such as tiny changes in a pupil's behaviour, that could indicate that something is wrong. They report their concerns quickly. Leaders take prompt and appropriate action in response to these concerns.

Leaders have put strong arrangements in place to ensure that the right people are employed to work at the school. The school's single central record of pre-appointment checks meets current requirements.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- The school's staffing is too inconsistent. Although class teachers and teaching assistants remain the same, the care staff change daily, with different staff for both the morning and afternoon sessions. This adds to teachers' workloads and increases stress. It also means that teaching and behaviour programmes are not delivered optimally, because of inconsistencies in staffing. Leaders and the proprietor should take action to ensure that there is consistent staffing in all classes so that teachers' workload is reduced, and the curriculum and behaviour programmes are delivered exceptionally well.

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.

If you are the provider and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

School details

Unique reference number	110920
DfE registration number	873/6008
Local authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	10203488
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	34
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	8
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	The Aurora Group
Chair	Phil Jonas
Headteacher	Nadine McFadden
Annual fees (day pupils)	£66,000
Telephone number	01763 268 000
Website	www.the-aurora-group.com
Email address	meldreth.manor@the-aurora-group.com
Dates of previous inspection	8 to 10 November 2017

Information about this school

- The school was previously known as Meldreth Manor School, and it was owned by the charity Scope. The Aurora Group Limited took over proprietorship of the school in April 2015. It has been known as Aurora Meldreth Manor School since that time.
- The school caters for up to 50 pupils with profound and complex learning disabilities. Many pupils have cerebral palsy and sensory impairments. Pupils present with a range of other conditions and syndromes. Some pupils have degenerative conditions, some of which are life-limiting. Many pupils have autism spectrum disorder. All pupils require very high levels of personal support. All pupils have an EHC plan.
- The headteacher joined the school in January 2019. There had been eight changes of headteacher between April 2015 and the current headteacher's appointment.
- An assistant headteacher was recruited from within the existing school staff. She took up her post in September 2021. A special educational needs coordinator joined the school in April 2021.
- The school is part of a campus that also includes a children's home and residential provision for adults with SEND aged between 19 and 25 years. Both residential provisions are separately registered, the children's home with Ofsted and the adult provision with the Care Quality Commission. The Aurora Group is the proprietor for all three registrations. Most pupils live in the on-site children's home.
- The school does not use 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.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation.

- Inspectors met with the headteacher, assistant headteacher, the special educational needs coordinator and the site principal. They also met with leaders from The Aurora Group, representing the proprietor and governance, and with

school staff. The lead inspector spoke with one parent by telephone and another in person.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: communication, physical development, expressive arts and personal, social and health education. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers and pupils and looked at examples of pupils' work.
- In order to check the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors checked the single central record of pre-appointment checks, looked at records of child protection concerns, and spoke with staff.
- Inspectors took into account 22 responses to Ofsted's survey for staff. Inspectors also noted the seven free-text comments made by parents. There were too few responses to Ofsted Parent View for results to be available.

Inspection team

Wendy Varney, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

John Mitcheson

Her Majesty's Inspector

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