

Inspection of Aurora Woodlands School

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

Inspection dates: 15 to 17 March 2022

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	Good
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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?

This is a happy and welcoming place for pupils. Those who come to this school have often experienced many barriers to their earlier learning. They see this school as a chance for a fresh start. Pupils get on well with each other. They enjoy the friendships that they develop. Anyone new to the school quickly feels at home. Pupils feel that they belong at the school.

Leaders want the very best for pupils. Pupils try hard to live up to these high expectations. They concentrate well in lessons. They also feel confident to ask for help if there is something they do not understand. This helps them to keep moving forward with their learning.

Pupils understand the school rules and follow them. They learn to manage their own behaviour well. The relationships between staff and pupils are positive and respectful. Pupils know that bullying is not tolerated. They trust adults to put a stop to it if ever it occurs.

Pupils feel safe in school. They know that adults care about them and will listen to any worries they have. Pupils love the school's therapy dog, Margot. Spending time with her helps many pupils to feel calm if they are ever upset.

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

Pupils at the school have a range of special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders have designed a broad, ambitious and interesting curriculum, which meets pupils' diverse range of needs. Pupils are supported well, so they all access the same curriculum.

Leaders have decided what they want pupils to know and remember by the time they leave the school. The curriculums for most subjects show the important knowledge that pupils need to learn and when they need to learn it. This clear design provides teachers with the information they need to build pupils' learning securely. In a small number of subjects, the curriculum is not as clearly organised. Pupils' learning is less secure in these subjects.

Reading has a high priority in the school. Many pupils join the school having missed long periods of education. Some pupils have had limited opportunities to practise reading during that time. Leaders make sure that pupils have regular reading practice in school. Pupils read a wide range of texts in different subjects. Pupils at an early stage of reading are provided with support to help them catch up. Across the school, pupils develop a love of reading.

Teachers carry out a range of checks to make sure that pupils understand their learning. Staff provide support where necessary to help pupils to understand new learning more clearly. In most subjects, leaders have a clear picture of how the curriculum helps pupils to secure their knowledge over time, across all year groups.

In a small number of subjects, leaders are less clear about how the curriculum supports younger pupils to achieve well. This makes it difficult for teachers to ensure that these pupils are well prepared for future learning.

Pupils develop positive attitudes to school. These attitudes are reflected in their regular attendance. Pupils said that coming to this school has made an improvement to their behaviour as well as to their learning. They appreciate the clear rules for behaviour that leaders provide. There is very little disruption to learning in lessons.

The school is a welcoming place for pupils. Leaders and staff have expertise in a wide range of SEND. They work well together with parents, carers and other professionals to ensure pupils receive the support that they need. This ensures that pupils achieve well.

There are opportunities for pupils to take responsibility in school, for example, by becoming student leaders. They learn to consider the needs of others through participation in fund-raising activities and charitable events. They learn about difference and diversity in the wider world as well as in their own community. These experiences help pupils to become well-rounded young people.

Pupils have access to an all-weather playground, where they can keep fit and active. They enjoy visiting the school's attractive woodland area for outdoor learning. Classrooms are bright and well resourced. The premises are spacious and are kept in good condition.

Pupils receive independent careers advice and guidance. They enjoy the opportunities provided to experience work and learning in a range of settings. For example, some pupils learn construction skills at a local college. Others engage in training as car mechanics. Pupils understand how their learning in school prepares them for their future working lives.

The proprietor body ensures that leaders are held to account and that statutory obligations are met. This helps leaders to meet the independent school standards (the standards) consistently. For example, leaders have ensured that the school is compliant with health and safety requirements. The school's accessibility plan also complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

Leaders are considerate of staff's well-being and workload in the decisions they make about the school. Staff value the support that they receive from leaders to carry out their roles in school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders provide staff with a range of training in safeguarding matters. Staff are, therefore, able to recognise any signs of abuse and neglect. They know how to report any concerns that they have about the welfare of pupils.

Leaders work effectively with a range of professionals, such as local authority safeguarding services, family support workers and health professionals. These strong working relationships enable leaders to make sure that pupils and their families get help if they need it.

Leaders have ensured that the safeguarding policy reflects the latest government requirement and is published on the school's website.

Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe, including when they use the internet and social media.

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

- In a small number of subjects, the curriculum does not contain clear information about what pupils need to learn, or the order in which they should learn it. This prevents pupils from building up important knowledge securely. Leaders must ensure that in all subjects, the curriculum provides teachers with the information required, so that pupils can build more easily on their prior learning.
- Some subject leaders do not have a clear understanding of how the curriculum in their subject should be organised for younger pupils. This prevents subject leaders from making sure that the curriculum prepares these pupils well for future learning. Leaders must ensure that all subject leaders develop a clearer understanding of the curriculum for younger pupils. This will help these pupils to be better prepared for the next stage in their learning.

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	138884
DfE registration number	889/6013
Local authority	Blackburn with Darwen
Inspection number	10203833
Type of school	Other Independent Special School
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	10 to 19
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	47
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	The Aurora Group
Chair	Sharon Pearson
Headteacher	Sarah Gregory
Annual fees (day pupils)	£53706
Telephone number	01254 706600
Website	www.the-aurora-group.com
Email address	wds-reception@the-aurora-group.com
Date of previous inspection	3–5 October 2017

Information about this school

- Since the last inspection a new headteacher has been appointed.
- Leaders make use of five alternative providers.
- All the pupils have social, emotional and mental health needs and all have an education, health and care plan.

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.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspectors met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, other senior leaders and subject leaders.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, personal, social, health and economic education and food technology. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders to discuss the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also spoke to leaders about the curriculums in some other subjects.
- The inspectors spoke to pupils about school life and met with leaders and pupils to discuss provision for pupils' personal development and pupils' behaviour. The inspectors looked at documentation associated with these areas.
- The inspectors reviewed a range of documentation about safeguarding. The inspectors also spoke with staff to understand how they keep pupils safe and reviewed the school's record of checks undertaken on newly appointed staff.
- The inspectors spoke with school leaders, viewed parts of the school premises and looked at a range of documentation to check for compliance with the independent school standards.

Inspection team

Mavis Smith, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Phill Walmsley

Ofsted Inspector

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