



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

Regulatory Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Reports

Aurora Eccles School

September 2021

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School's Details

School	Aurora Eccles School
DfE number	962/6041
Address	Aurora Eccles School Quidenham Norwich Norfolk NR16 2NZ
Telephone number	01953 887217
Email address	eccleschool@the-aurora-group.com
Headteacher	Mr Chris MacKinnon
Proprietor	The Aurora Group
Age range	11 to 19
Number of pupils on roll	158
Inspection dates	28 September to 1 October 2021

1. Background Information

About the school

- 1.1 Aurora Eccles School is an independent, co-educational day special school founded in 1945. In 2017, the school was bought by the Aurora Group and members of the group's central team provide the governance of the school. This year the primary department was registered as a separate independent school, the Aurora White House School, on an adjacent section of site.
- 1.2 During the period March to August 2020, the whole school remained open only for children of key workers and vulnerable pupils.
- 1.3 During this period of closure the school provided remote learning materials for all pupils.
- 1.4 In the interests of infection control during the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic, inspection evidence was gathered partly remotely and partly on-site to reduce contact within the school setting.
- 1.5 In line with the direction given by the Department for Education (DfE) at the time, no evaluation has been made of the nature or effectiveness of any provision made during the period March to August 2020, including its impact on pupils' learning, achievement or personal development. Any concerns relating to pupils' welfare during this period which directly relate to measures implemented by the school have been considered.
- 1.6 During the lockdown period of January to March 2021, all pupils other than the children of key workers and vulnerable pupils received remote learning provision at home.
- 1.7 In 2020 and 2021, public examinations were not held. For pupils who would have been expected to take these examinations, centre-assessed grades and teacher grades were awarded.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.8 The school aims to enable pupils to achieve the best possible outcomes in their individual learning, independence, personal growth and development. It seeks to support pupils in improving their social, communication and interaction skills alongside their academic studies and to prepare them to make appropriate choices in life.

About the pupils

- 1.9 Pupils come from a wide range of backgrounds living within a fifty-mile radius of the school across Norfolk and Suffolk, with a very small number from other local authorities. Almost all pupils are funded by their local authority, and are identified as having special educational needs necessitating an education, health and care (EHC) plan. Pupils' abilities are wide ranging. Their additional needs include moderate learning difficulties, communication and interaction difficulties, and social, emotional and mental health needs. A large majority of pupils have autistic spectrum condition. Two pupils have English as an additional language and are supported as needed within the classroom. Each year a small number of pupils aged 16 to 19 years stay on in Year 11 to complete examination courses.

2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection

Preface

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is approved by the Secretary of State to inspect schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and report on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. Additionally, inspections report on the school's accessibility plan under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996. Inspections also comment on the progress made to meet any compliance action points set out in the school's most recent statutory inspection.

ISI inspections are also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

This is a REGULATORY COMPLIANCE INSPECTION which was combined with an inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY. The COMPLIANCE inspection reports only on the school's compliance with the standards. The standards represent minimum requirements and judgements are given either as **met** or as **not met**. All schools are required to meet all the standards applicable to them. Where the minimum requirements are not met, this is clearly indicated in the relevant section of the report and the school is required to take the actions specified.

Inspections do not include matters that are outside of the regulatory framework described above, such as: an exhaustive health and safety audit; compliance with data protection requirements; an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features; contractual arrangements with parents; an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures.

Inspectors may be aware of individual safeguarding concerns, allegations and complaints as part of the inspection process. Such matters will not usually be referred to specifically in published reports in this document but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements.

Links to the standards and requirements can be found here: [The Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#).

COVID-19: Inspection judgements do not cover the period March to August 2020 inclusive.

Key findings

- 2.1 The school meets the standards in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 and associated requirements and no further action is required as a result of this inspection.**

PART 1 – Quality of education provided

- 2.2 The school's own framework for assessment confirms that teaching enables pupils to make good progress in the context of Part 1 paragraph 3(a).
- 2.3 Pupils take GCSE and other examinations in their final year at the school. The small numbers involved prevent reliable comparison with national averages, but inspection evidence confirms that teaching enables pupils to make good progress in the context of Part1 paragraph 3(a).
- 2.4 The curriculum is documented, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work for the pupils and covers the required breadth of material. The teaching enables pupils to make good progress, encompasses effective behaviour management and is supported by suitable resources. A suitable framework for the assessment of pupils' performance is in place.
- 2.5 Pupils receive relationships and sex education except in so far as they are lawfully excused. The school has consulted parents and published a written statement of its policy which has regard to the relevant statutory guidance.
- 2.6 The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs 1–4] are met.**

PART 2 – Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

- 2.7 Principles and values are actively promoted which facilitate the personal development of pupils as responsible, tolerant, law-abiding citizens.
- 2.8 The standard relating to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development [paragraph 5] is met.**

PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 2.9 Arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils by means that pay due regard to current statutory guidance; good behaviour is promoted; bullying is prevented so far as reasonably practicable; health and safety requirements are met, including those relating to fire safety; provision is made for first aid. Pupils are properly supervised; admission and attendance registers are maintained, as required, and there is a strategic approach to risk assessment. A disability access plan is in place.
- 2.10 The standards relating to welfare, health and safety [paragraphs 6–16], the requirement of Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010, and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996 are met.**

PART 4 – Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

- 2.11 The school makes appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors, and a register is kept as required.
- 2.12 The standards relating to the suitability of those in contact with pupils at the school [paragraphs 17–21] are met.**

PART 5 – Premises of and accommodation at schools

2.13 Suitable toilet and changing facilities, and showering facilities where required by the standard, and appropriate accommodation for pupils' medical and therapy needs are provided. The premises are maintained to a standard commensurate with health and safety; acoustics and lighting are appropriate; water provision is adequate. Suitable outdoor space is provided for physical education and outdoor play.

2.14 The standards relating to the premises and accommodation [paragraphs 22–31] are met.

PART 6 – Provision of information

2.15 A range of information is published, provided or made available to parents, inspectors and the Department for Education. This includes details about the proprietor, the ethos of the school and the curriculum, and of the school's arrangements for admission, behaviour and exclusions, bullying, health and safety, first aid, details of the complaints procedure, and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year, and the provision for any with education, health and care plans or English as an additional language. It also includes particulars of the school's academic performance during the preceding school year, inspection reports and (for parents only) a report at least annually of their own child's progress. The safeguarding policy is posted on the school's website.

2.16 The standard relating to the provision of information [paragraph 32] is met.

PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled

2.17 Parental complaints, if any, are handled effectively through a three-stage process, (informal, formal and a hearing before a panel of three, one of whom is independent of the school). Each stage has clear time scales, and at the third stage the panel can make findings and recommendations which are communicated to the complainant. Records are kept appropriately, including of any action taken, whether or not a complaint is successful.

2.18 The standard relating to the handling of complaints [paragraph 33] is met.

PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools

2.19 The proprietor ensures that the leadership and management demonstrate good skills and knowledge, and fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so that the other standards are consistently met, and they actively promote the well-being of the pupils.

2.20 The standard relating to leadership and management of the school [paragraph 34] is met.

3. Educational Quality Inspection

Preface

The **EDUCATIONAL QUALITY** inspection reports on the quality of the school's work. It focuses on the two key outcomes:

- The achievement of the pupils, including their academic development, and
- The personal development of the pupils.

The headline judgements apply one of the ISI descriptors 'excellent', 'good', 'sound' or 'unsatisfactory'.

Key findings

3.1 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is good.

- Pupils quickly develop positive attitudes to learning, taking pride in their achievements.
- Pupils develop effective communication skills which underpin good learning and progress.
- Pupils' success in foundation level or GCSE courses prepares them well for future school or college life.
- For older pupils, the school's restrictions on the teaching of information communication technology (ICT) and the limited availability of computers reduces their ability to use computers to further their learning.

3.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is good.

- Pupils who have had negative experiences in other schools settle well and take all the opportunities provided to make personal progress becoming calm, focused and tolerant of others.
- Pupils develop good moral understanding supported by classroom and school rules.
- Pupils learn to interact and work well with others through their practical work on social development.
- Pupils who may have been isolated in their previous lives develop friendships as a result of their positive experiences together in school.

Recommendation

3.3 The school is advised to make the following improvement:

- Ensure that all pupils have suitable access to ICT and are taught ICT skills appropriately so that they are better prepared for their future in education or work.

The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements

3.4 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is good.

3.5 The overall achievement of the pupils is good and fulfils the school's aims to enable pupils to progress in their individual learning and development. Pupils are well prepared with the communication and other skills they will need to make positive choices in life after school. Pupils admitted to the school have learning difficulties, have often found it hard to thrive in their previous schools, and in some cases have been out of school for long periods. Pupils settle quickly into the school, many describing it as a calm and happy place. They explained that they feel secure and ready to learn as a result of the small classes, high staff to pupil ratios, individualised planning and readily available resources; the

inspection found that pupils quickly start to make good progress and develop confidence in their learning, agreeing with them regarding these advantages offered by the school. Pupils' progress in literacy is particularly strong following their admission to the school. Pupils are able to achieve well in relation to their individual starting points because teaching is sensitive to their different learning and emotional needs. Pupils' success is supported by a programme of both formal and informal assessment which teachers use to inform meticulous planning of day-to-day work to meet the individual needs of each pupil. The overall ability profile of pupils varies year on year. In the last three years all pupils have achieved a range of qualifications appropriate for their abilities. Results at GCSE show that pupils are achieving well for their abilities. Pupils' academic success means that they are able to move on to their chosen school, college or training.

- 3.6 Pupils develop competent skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing through the individually planned tasks and careful attention of teachers and assistants in the classroom, supported by targeted intervention by therapists. Pupils support each other well. For example when reading out loud, which some find very difficult, when playing board games, or successfully making presentations of their work to their classmates. Pupils of all ages enjoy and achieve well in mathematics, using their numeracy skills very effectively in other areas of the curriculum such as science, art and PE.
- 3.7 It is school policy for pupils to have restricted access to computers in order that they develop their verbal communication skills further. Pupils' use of ICT is also limited by the small number of computers available. Some computer learning is integrated into pupils' activities. For example the stepped reading programme that is used daily by pupils with literacy difficulties, providing them with immediate feedback at each step of their learning, and the use of an eye tracker which enables them to read more effectively. Pupils said they enjoy the ICT work that is available. For example in creative and multimedia lessons, when they successfully use software to design posters and to create computer generated animation and games. However, although pupils displayed good ICT skills in these regards, for older pupils particularly, the insufficient teaching of ICT and limited availability of computers restricts their ability to use computers, including for research, to further their learning. The school acknowledges it needs to further develop the use of ICT, and has a suitable programme in place to address this.
- 3.8 Pupils develop good study skills which they apply well in their daily lessons. Pupils demonstrate good independence in their learning, facilitated by precise planning by teachers and the carefully resourced classrooms. Year 8 pupils demonstrated excellent ability to plan their own exercise programme when they were invited to compile a programme of activities in order to improve both strength and fitness. In a Year 11 biology lesson pupils showed good recall and background knowledge of plant cells from previous lessons and were able to identify examples and their locations on a world map. Year 11 Pupils further develop their specific study skills through the preparation for a college programme which includes a bridging course, assessed by Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) offering a wide range of topics and areas of study and last year the Year 11 pupils all successfully passed entry level. Pupils are well supported in their transition by the relationships the school has with local colleges. For example, a pupil had been learning the skills needed to come to school on his own to prepare him to go to college, and the school works in conjunction with local colleges to meet pupils' specific needs.
- 3.9 Each pupil has a background story about their previous difficulties and school issues, which have been heightened by the pandemic. Pupils respond very positively to teaching and support which is matched to their needs and some good examples were seen of pupils taking initiative and leadership of their learning. In a Year 9 physics lesson pupils carefully recorded the measurements they needed enabling them to move to the next part of the lesson, coping well with the extension activities set. Pupils develop good organisational skills and punctuality through strategies such as posters in classrooms showing the structure of the day on a lesson-by-lesson basis, with pictograms used for timetables. Pupils respond very positively to the calm atmosphere created by teachers, they settle down and

concentrate, work hard and are able to use their mood guides to show how they are feeling, helping them to keep on track or ask for help.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 3.10 The quality of the pupils' personal development is good.
- 3.11 Pupils make good progress with their communication, physical skills and emotional responses as a result of carefully devised and delivered therapy provision in conjunction with teaching programmes. For example, pupils understand their own levels of concentration and respond positively to desktop reminders regarding how they are feeling, and to large wall displays about the way their emotional state can affect their learning. Pupils manage their individual physical and emotional challenges well, supported by speech and language and occupational therapists, working in close liaison with teachers, at regular points during the day, who also ensure that helpful techniques and routines can be followed through at home.
- 3.12 Self-esteem and confidence amongst pupils grows as they progress through the school. Pupils talked confidently about their plans for the future despite some of them having been long-term school refusers. They described how they are supported by staff to overcome initial shyness at being back in school. Pupils relate positively with their teachers, teaching assistants and therapists and this enables them to present in an assured manner within a school culture that provides a balance of security and fresh challenge. In this context of trust, pupils are able to confidently explore personal issues. For example when older girls felt able to discuss puberty and body image with each other and with staff during a social education lesson. The school's leaders and governors provide a clear stance regarding the school's empathic ethos and this is reflected in staff's caring attitude toward pupils and in the positive role models they provide.
- 3.13 Pupils reported good improvement in self-understanding as a result of joining the school, saying they are well supported in improving their self-esteem and self-confidence, often from low starting points. Pupils are confident that they can share any concerns with staff. Pupils also appreciate the support they receive from other pupils, and as they grow older some pupils have become buddies to new starters at the school. Pupils successfully learn to make decisions in many lessons where planning includes choices of all sorts. For example in a cookery lesson, Year 7 pupils carefully selected which pizza topping they were going to use. Pupils appreciate having a voice in the school council which has just started to meet in person again; decisions are made affecting their daily routines at school such as changes to the timing of school lunch to enable all pupils to have adequate time to eat and enjoy their leisure time with each other. Social skills and competences are all supported by the Certificate of Personal Effectiveness (CoPE) scheme and by the activities of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme; in the past pupils were successful at both Bronze and Silver level, and many are taking part again this year.
- 3.14 Pupils have some awareness of non-material aspects of life but generally find it hard to grasp abstract concepts and ideas that are not immediately relevant to their lives. Many spoke very positively of the relief of finding themselves in a school with wide outdoor areas and buildings, quiet adults and an atmosphere of calm: one pupil, leaving after a taster day, expressed his feelings by saying 'this school smells happy'. Pupils feel that the school is a place where they can focus on learning. Year 8 pupils watched a short programme about world pollution in their tutor period followed by a lively discussion centring on the ways in which they could be responsible for their impact on the planet, showing a knowledge of the forthcoming global summit and the impact of the voice of a young activist. The pupils expressed clear views and showed very responsible attitudes in their awareness of the world.
- 3.15 Pupils have a good awareness of right from wrong which is nurtured from the moment they come into the school. From Year 7, they work on classroom rules and understanding how their own behaviour affects others, which is important as many pupils find their own behaviour difficult to control. In the context of their own needs many pupils show an awareness of others and offer support and help, both

in lessons and activities. Many pupils find working with others difficult, and teachers plan opportunities very carefully. Collaboration is nurtured through games, activities in lessons, in the outdoor learning which takes place in the woodland area, and in activities such as the communication café where individuals and teams of pupils prepare and serve refreshments to others. These strategies are successful. For example pupils were enjoying working together on a belaying exercise on the climbing wall for The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, where they were depending on one another's contribution. Effective collaboration and cooperation was a key feature of a successful practical lesson for Year 10 in the craft design and technology (CDT) workshop where pupils were making individually designed clocks.

- 3.16 Pupils make a positive contribution to the school community by undertaking tasks such as litter picking and organizing recycling as part of their work for The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. Each class has a patch of the school garden and pupils take great pride in the vegetable and flowers they have grown. Pupils successfully run events such as the school fair and the bike repair shop to raise funds for charities or school events and projects. Recently, pupils helped to develop a pupil-friendly version of the school's anti-bullying policy and designed posters which are displayed around school which make the message clear to all. Pupils' good quality exhibited art work positively enhances the school's environment. Pupils spoke proudly about their successes. For example the fete Year 11 ran to fund their prom and the pamper bags they had made for residents in care homes for the elderly.
- 3.17 In discussion pupils were generally unaware of diversity within their school and the wider community they have experienced. They spoke respectfully of other backgrounds and traditions, with some pupils recognising 'difference' and that not everyone is the same. Sometimes pupils do not understand the differences between cultures and may make comments which could be inappropriate, but they do not mean to cause offence and offence is seldom taken. Pupils are generally tolerant of each other, so on the rare occasion when an incident does occur issues are quickly resolved by talking with the pupils concerned and using mediation.
- 3.18 The pupils show a good understanding of keeping themselves safe, including on the internet, largely through the work done in Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) lessons and they are confident staff will act on any concerns pupils share with them. The PSHE programme has been very effectively taught by form tutors who know their pupils extremely well, and as a result many pupils were able to show an understanding of healthy eating and the importance of keeping themselves active. These subjects are integrated into a range of other lessons, including cookery, where a group of pupils talked about the nutritional value of vegetables and then selected those they wished to put in their omelettes. On the CoPE programme, older pupils are currently working on communication skills, which will be followed by health and fitness and independent living, supporting the earlier work in PSHE. Last year all the pupils gained certificates showing their competence in these areas in their preparation for life after school.

4. Inspection Evidence

4.1 The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff and with the chair of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended form meetings. Inspectors visited the learning support and educational resource areas. The responses of parents, staff and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mrs Gwen Caddock	Reporting inspector
Mrs Fiona McGill	Accompanying Inspector
Mr Julius Sidwell	Compliance team inspector (Deputy head, HMC school)
Mrs Kate Corbin	Team inspector (Deputy head, HMC school)
Mr Ian Vallance	Team inspector (Deputy head, SofH and ISA school)