



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

Material Change Inspection Report

Aurora Eccles School

April 2023

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			
Chair of proprietors	Mr Mark Costello			
Proprietor	The Aurora Group			
Age range	11 to 19			
Number of pupils on roll	181			
	Seniors	181	Sixth form	0
Date of inspection	20 April 2023			

1. Introduction

Characteristics of the school

- 1.1 Aurora Eccles School is a co-educational day special needs 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. There is a primary department, registered as a separate independent school, the Aurora White House School, on an adjacent section of the site. Almost all pupils are funded by their local authority, and all are identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) 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 an autistic spectrum condition. Seven pupils have English as an additional language. In most years a small number of pupils aged 16-19 years stay on in Year 11 to complete examination courses. The previous inspection was a focused compliance and educational quality inspection in September 2021.

Purpose of the inspection

- 1.2 This was an announced material change inspection at the request of the Department for Education (DfE) to assess the school's proposal to increase its numbers from 180 to 216 over the next few years. Nearly all pupils are funded by local authorities and the increase reflects their demand for more places. The inspection focused on the school's compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 (ISSRs).

Regulations which were the focus of the inspection	Team judgements
Part 3, paragraph 7 (safeguarding)	Met
Part 3, paragraphs 11 (health and safety) and 12 (fire)	Met
Part 3, paragraph 13 (first aid)	Met
Part 3, paragraph 14 (supervision of pupils)	Met
Part 3, paragraph 16 (risk assessment)	Met
Part 4, paragraphs 18 to 21 (suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors)	Met
Part 5, paragraphs 23 to 29 (premises and accommodation)	Met
Part 6, paragraph 32(1)(c) (provision of information)	Met
Part 7, paragraph 33 (manner in which complaints are to be handled)	Met
Part 8, paragraph 34 (leadership and management)	Met

2. Inspection findings

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – safeguarding [ISSR Part 3, paragraph 7]

Safeguarding policy

- 2.1 The school meets the requirements.
- 2.2 The school has an appropriate policy for safeguarding which provides suitable arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school.

Safeguarding implementation

- 2.3 The school meets the standard.
- 2.4 Implementation of all aspects of the school's safeguarding procedures is effective in providing appropriate support to ensure the welfare of pupils, including with regard to their additional needs.
- 2.5 Safeguarding procedures are implemented to safeguard children at risk and those in particular need. Staff show effective understanding of their responsibilities, including with regard to child-on-child abuse and any such abuse linked to those with protected characteristics, including SEND. Staff show appropriate awareness of the staff code of conduct, whistleblowing policy and safeguarding procedures and are confident to use them. They have a suitable knowledge of the thresholds for reporting issues. Communication protocols recognise the individual needs of all pupils and include at least daily information about individual safeguarding issues. Staff are well informed about individual behaviours that put pupils at risk. A large proportion of staff are trained to DSL level, and a member of the school's safeguarding team is always available when pupils are on site. These arrangements are likely to be sufficient to meet the needs of the envisaged increase in pupil numbers. Staff understand that they can make a direct referral to children's services if necessary. They take appropriate action when needed.
- 2.6 The safeguarding policy includes suitable definitions of abuse and has been reviewed effectively in line with the latest statutory guidance. It provides appropriate guidance regarding possible abuse by one or more pupils against another pupil, including linking such abuse to bullying. The proprietorial group and school regularly review the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements, and annually commission external independent audits. Full reviews take place after any significant event. Discussions with staff, pupils and an inspection of safeguarding records confirm that pupils receive suitable help to address risks and such help prevents issues escalating, and the school's strong relationship with external professionals. The DSLs act on and refer to appropriate agencies the early signs of risk or need and monitor any potential for radicalisation. They ensure the school listens to the views of individual pupils as required by *Keeping Children Safe in Education*. This, too, is confirmed in written evidence from safeguarding records. All behavioural issues and allegations of bullying are treated as potential safeguarding concerns and addressed effectively. In almost all cases effective communication is maintained with parents and if errors occur they are swiftly rectified and procedures reviewed. Staff have recently received training in handling difficult or sensitive telephone calls with parents and carers and in recording these conversations accurately. Pupils receive guidance on staying safe and show understanding of what they have been taught, including in relation to e-safety. Monitoring and filtering of technology is effective. The physical and mental health of all pupils involved in any incident are given a high priority.
- 2.7 The safeguarding policy gives contact details for required local safeguarding partners. Suitable recruitment procedures for staff are outlined within the safeguarding policy and detailed in a separate recruitment policy. The training for those with specific safeguarding responsibilities is in line with local requirements and statutory advice and is up to date. Training in safeguarding for teaching and non-

teaching staff is of sufficient quality and frequency, and content focuses on particular skills needed to support the pupils' needs.

- 2.8 Suitable arrangements for handling allegations against staff, senior leaders or the governors, and potential misconduct, are included in safeguarding procedures; they include seeking immediate advice from the local authority designated safeguarding officer (LADO). Records show that such procedures are followed effectively, and the school follows up actions promptly. The school understands its role in reporting any person to relevant regulatory bodies if circumstances require it.
- 2.9 Members of the proprietorial group are trained appropriately in safeguarding. The site principal has appropriate expertise and maintains a close working contact with the head and DSLs.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – health and safety [ISSR Part 3, paragraph 11]

- 2.10 The school meets the standard.
- 2.11 The proprietor ensures that relevant health and safety laws are complied with by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written health and safety policy. Records show that testing of electrical, water and other utilities is regularly undertaken. Staff are effectively trained in health and safety and deal promptly and appropriately with accidents if they occur, including through the reporting of serious accidents. Systematic records ensure trends regarding health and safety issues are identified and steps taken to mitigate these. Health and safety considerations have been integrated in the planning for an extended building. The arrangements are likely to be sufficient to meet the needs of the envisaged increase in pupil numbers.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – fire safety [ISSR Part 3, paragraph 12]

- 2.12 The school meets the standard.
- 2.13 The school has a fire risk (prevention) policy which includes the elimination or reduction of risks from dangerous substances. A fire risk assessment of all buildings has been undertaken by a suitably qualified person. Fire procedures are understood by, and training provided for, staff. Termly fire drills are carried out and recorded. The arrangements are likely to be sufficient to meet the needs of the envisaged increase in pupil numbers.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – first aid [ISSR Part 3, paragraph 13]

- 2.14 The school meets the standard.
- 2.15 Senior leaders ensure that the school's first aid policy is effectively implemented and administered in a timely and competent manner. There are suitable additional policies which are relevant to the context of the school. Senior leaders ensure that the physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing of pupils are promoted effectively. Pupils confirm that they receive immediate medical or mental health attention if they require it. The arrangements are likely to be sufficient to meet the needs of the envisaged increase in pupil numbers.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – supervision of pupils [ISSR Part 3, paragraph 14]

- 2.16 The school meets the standard.
- 2.17 Pupils are properly supervised by qualified and trained staff. Supervision arrangements reflect the different risks to pupils and ensure that those supervising have cognisance of the needs of individuals. Levels of supervision are regularly reviewed. The arrangements are likely to be sufficient to meet the needs of the envisaged increase in pupil numbers.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – risk assessment [ISSR Part 3, paragraph 16]

- 2.18 The school meets the standard.
- 2.19 The risk assessment policy clearly describes the lines of responsibility and the approaches to be taken to identify and mitigate risk. There are appropriate assessments of risk for in-school activities, school visits, and for the needs of individual pupils both while in school and in the surrounding area, and appropriate action is taken to mitigate risks identified. Supervision is heightened at the start and end of the school day, and handover procedures are followed rigorously. There are clear protocols in the event of pupils going missing. Risk assessment approaches link tightly with those to safeguarding. Pupils each have personalised risk assessments that are linked to their behaviour support plans and that reflect their needs. The arrangements are likely to be sufficient to meet the needs of the envisaged increase in pupil numbers.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors [ISSR Part 4, paragraphs 18–21]

- 2.20 The school meets the standards.
- 2.21 All the required checks on staff, governors, and supply staff are carried out and completed before they take up their posts. Contractors send the school up-to-date information on checks they have undertaken on their employees, and the school makes appropriate further checks on arrival. The arrangements are likely to be sufficient to meet the needs of the envisaged increase in pupil numbers.
- 2.22 The school maintains correctly an accurate single central register of appointments which includes the dates on which all checks have been completed.

Premises and accommodation [ISSR Part 5, paragraphs 23 to 29]

- 2.23 The school meets the standards.
- 2.24 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; and water provision is adequate. Suitable outdoor space is provided for physical education and outdoor play, and the school is in the process of expanding and improving its off-site facilities. The provision, including a planned new extension, is likely to be sufficient to meet the needs of the envisaged increase in pupil numbers.

Provision of information [ISSR Part 6, paragraph 32(1)(c)]

- 2.25 The school meets the requirements for providing information relating to safeguarding to parents. Particulars of the arrangements for safeguarding are published on the school's website.

Manner in which complaints are handled [ISSR Part 7, paragraph 33]

- 2.26 The school meets the standard.
- 2.27 The school's complaints procedure is available on the school website. It provides for concerns and complaints to be considered on an informal basis; the establishment of a formal procedure for a complaint to be made in writing; provision for a hearing before a panel which includes an independent member and allows for parent to be accompanied; provision for the panel to make findings and recommendations; and for a confidential record to be kept of findings. Records of complaints show that the school follows its own procedures appropriately. Whether or not complaints have been

upheld, the school undertakes a detailed review to identify any lessons to be learned from them and implements any consequent recommendations effectively.

Quality of leadership and management [ISSR Part 8, paragraph 34]

2.28 The school meets the standard.

2.29 Appropriate procedures are implemented which allow the senior leaders and the proprietor to manage safeguarding and welfare arrangements and monitor compliance with standards and other statutory advice, including those concerned with safeguarding, staff recruitment and health and safety. In this way the leadership and management fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently. The strategic and operational planning for the proposed increase in numbers includes provision of extra safeguarding and other roles, and hence actively promotes the wellbeing of pupils.

3. Recommendation with regard to material change request

3.1 It is recommended that the school's request to increase its numbers to 216 be approved.

4. Summary of evidence

4.1 The inspectors held discussions with the site principal, head, senior leaders and other members of staff and met with the chief executive of the group. They visited different areas of the school and talked with groups of pupils. They scrutinised a range of documentation, records and policies.

Inspectors

Mr Stephen Cole

Reporting inspector

Mr Gerard Silverlock

Assistant reporting inspector