

Liberty Academy Trust

Admissions Policy

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1. Introduction

Liberty Academy Trust Thames Valley School is a publicly funded special school providing educational day places for autistic pupils aged 4-16. The school works in partnership with local authorities and parents and carers/carers to assess the suitability of pupils for a place at a school.

All pupils must have an Education, Health and Care plan (EHCP) that refers to a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder / Autism.

Autism is a spectrum condition which requires a continuum of provision. The school caters for pupils whose academic levels on admission indicate that they are either currently capable of working towards the age related expected standard National Curriculum or may in the future be able to work towards age related expectations.

The school provides an education for pupils who require autism specific provision which is tailored to meet their social, sensory and communication needs, as well as providing support to enable them to manage levels of anxiety. These pupils are those identified as requiring a modified yet structured national curriculum content, with support from specialist staff within a specialist environment. This support includes a structured environment and high levels of targeted intervention and differentiation throughout the school day.

2. Aim of this policy

To ensure there are robust and transparent systems in place to support a fair and consistent approach to admissions.

3. Typical Profile of admissions

All applications for places will be in accordance with the Liberty Academy Trust funding agreement, the Special educational needs and disability code of practice 2015 and the School Admissions Code 2021. The school is required by its funding agreement to comply with these codes, and with the law relating to admissions as set out in the [School Standards and Framework Act 1998](#).

The school is designated for pupils with a diagnosis of autism and its provision is designed accordingly as follows:

- 3.1 All schools within Liberty Academy Trust are designated as autism specific. They accept local authority referrals on behalf of pupils who have a diagnosis of Autism.
- 3.2 It is necessary for pupils to have an existing or proposed Education, Health and Care plan (EHC) which makes clear reference to a diagnosis of autism (but not with a learning disability). In addition to an autism spectrum diagnosis, the EHC plan may include similar presenting features such as language, sensory, behaviour or communication difficulties.

- 3.3 Our pupils work at stage rather than age and will follow curriculum pathways that are suitable to their ability level.
- 3.4 Wherever possible pupils will work towards broadly age-related levels of attainment, and we anticipate that they will gain a range of qualifications, including functional skills, and GCSEs/Level 2 courses. More information about curriculum pathways can be found on the school website.
- 3.5 Pupils may also have additional needs, for example obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Pupils may also have associated needs in the areas of emotional, social and communication and interaction development and/or psychological or mental health difficulties. In addition, pupils may have sensory, or physical/motor difficulties.
- 3.6 We strongly encourage places for pupils who have a diagnosis of autism and who are 'Children Looked After' (CLA) by their Local Authority. We prioritise these children in our application of over subscription criteria.
- 3.7 Where possible, an identified and agreed number of pupil placements will be available within each key stage. This is to facilitate age-appropriate peer groups, progression and organisation of timetable.
- 3.8 Our schools are unable to offer places to families who wish to privately fund the placement.
- 3.9 There is compatibility between pupils. The school will carefully consider (through the referral process) the vulnerability that is likely to be felt by any pupil within the school. If a pupil admission is deemed to have a potentially negative impact, for reasons of safety and wellbeing, a placement may not be suitable.
- 3.10 There is a specified Admissions Priority Area (APA) for each school that is usually within 30 miles or 45 minutes travel time for Primary pupils and up to 1 hour for Secondary pupil (based on Google maps) from the school. However, where it is in the best interests of the pupil, consideration will be given to pupils living further away, subject to suitability and impact on an individual's welfare. This will be determined on a need led individual basis.

4. Published Admissions Number (PAN)

Thames Valley School has a planned admission number of insert 54.

5. Fair Access Protocol

We participate in Reading Borough Council's Fair Access Protocol. This helps ensure that all children, including those who are unplaced and vulnerable, or having difficulty in securing a school place in-year, get access to a school place as quickly as possible.

6. Admissions Procedure

Places will be allocated to pupils in accordance with the procedure set out below. Parents and carers and carers are welcome to arrange to visit the school and to request information about the school (including the admission process). Parents and carers should inform their Local Authority of their preference for a place at the school and may ask their Local Authority to name the school in their pupil's EHC Plan. On some occasions, Local Authority professionals who are involved in a pupil's placement or who have a significant professional interest in their wellbeing, may recommend that the school may meet their needs and inform parents and carers. The school can only proceed to the admissions stage with Local Authority support. We therefore encourage parents and carers to engage in a dialogue with their Local Authority to express a preference for the school.

Pupil with an EHC plan where the local authority intends to name the school.

1. Where the local authority intends to name the school in an EHC plan, the school will consider the proposal and will consent to being named, except where admitting the pupil would be incompatible with the provision of efficient education for other pupil, and where no reasonable steps can be made to secure compatibility.
2. In deciding whether a pupil's inclusion would be incompatible with the efficient education of existing pupils, the school will have regard to the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice 2015.
3. If the school determines that admitting the pupil would be incompatible with the provision of efficient education, it will, within 15 days of the local authority's notice, notify the Local Authority that it does not agree that the school should be named in the EHC Plan. The school will set out the facts and matters it relies upon in support of its contention that admitting that pupil would be incompatible with efficiently educating other pupil; and the school cannot take reasonable steps to secure compatibility.
4. Where the school considers that it should not have been named in the EHC Plan, the School may ask the Secretary of State to determine that the Local Authority has acted unreasonably in naming it and to make an order directing the Local Authority to amend the pupil's EHC Plan by removing the name of the school.

Pupil without an EHC plan

1. The school may admit a pupil to the school if:
 - a. He/she is admitted for the purposes of an assessment of his educational needs with agreement with the Local Authority, the pupil's parents and carers and any person whose advice is to be sought in accordance with regulation 7 of the Education (Special Educational Needs) (England) (Consolidation) (Regulations) 2001;
 - b. He/she remains admitted following an assessment of his educational needs;

- c. He/she is admitted following a change in his/her circumstances, with the agreement of the local authority, the school and the pupil's parents and carers.
2. If a pupil without an EHC Plan has been admitted to the school for the purpose of an assessment (in accordance with paragraph 1(a) above, the school will allow the pupil to remain at the school until the expiry of ten school days after the Local Authority serve a notice that they do not propose to make an EHC Plan, or until an EHC Plan is made.

The school will always provide the Local Authority with views to help with the decision-making process. In order to do this, the school can undertake further assessments of prospective pupils to establish whether the school can meet their needs. At the request of the Local Authority (and having received appropriate paperwork), the school assessment team will observe/assess the pupil at their home or current school.

Where possible, the school will meet parents and carers and analyse reports from previous school placements in order to understand how best to meet the pupil's needs. It is expected that recent (within 6 months prior to referral initiation) and relevant (based upon current pupil placement situation and individual and identified need) professional reports will be provided by those working directly with the pupil, or by the Local Authority lead. Where reports are not available and/or further information is required, the school will arrange a more detailed assessment route and report findings to confirm for admission.

Please note that applications will be considered in light of available places within that year group. Following an assessment by the school of the potential impact of admission, applications will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Where the school's agreed and preferred maximum number of pupils in any one-year group or key stage is exceeded we will not accept further admissions for that year group.

Please see Appendix 1 for further details of the assessment process

7. Criteria for Admissions to Liberty Academy Trust school

1. The child will have an Education Health and Care plan which documents a diagnosis of Autism, issued by their local authority.
2. The local authority will accept financial responsibility for the pupils provision at the school.
3. The child's attendance at school will be compatible with the provision of efficient and safe education for the children with whom the child would be educated.
4. The attendance of the child at school would be compatible with the efficient use of school resources.

5. Admissions are made on the basis of availability of placements, taking into account the above factors, plus a child's level of functioning, learning difficulties and age.

8. Approach to education

Each Liberty academy trust school follows a traditional model of education. It benefits children that require lower class sizes and higher levels of structure and access to specialist support and onsite therapy teams but are able to follow classroom teaching and complete work set for them. Teachers differentiate and individualise work. However, our schools are not suitable for pupils whose level of needs require their own dedicated education space and fully bespoke curriculum.

In our secondary classes children follow a traditional secondary model and may move from class to class independently following a timetable. The child will have the commitment to their own learning and be able to follow directions to learn and benefit from an academically rigorous curriculum.

Where schools have a sixth form provision, pupils will continue to pursue relevant pathways and qualification routes. These qualifications may include vocational, entry level, functional skills, and GCSE qualifications or a combination. The small sizes of our schools means that it would not be possible to offer a full suite of A-levels. However, the school may work with other Academic providers to support students to attend an A level course at an appropriate venue.

The school will have the support of their parents and carers / carers in following the educational approach and parents and carers will sign the home / school contract.

Pupils are educated at their stage not age. Schools will use prior attainment data and baseline testing to establish children's current levels and then identify appropriate secondary pathways. These pathways include working towards a range of qualifications suitable to their levels. These may include GCSE's and A-Levels but if pupils are not working at that level, they will follow other suitable courses including BTEC and Functional skills qualifications. Where pupils are able to follow a GCSE pathway this will include the number of GCSE courses that it is appropriate for them to follow. And it is also understood that in some cases for some of our pupils it may be appropriate to take GCSE courses in the sixth form.

9. Behaviour that challenges

We will not refuse to admit a child solely on grounds of behaviour that challenges, in the normal admissions round or at any point in the normal year of entry. We may, however, take into account compatibility of others and in some cases not be able to admit a pupil on the grounds that admitting them to the school would have an adverse effect on the current pupils or the provision we offer (as per paragraph 9.79 of the SEN Code of Practice 2015)

We may refuse admission in certain cases where the specific criteria listed in the School Admissions Code (paragraph 3.8) apply, i.e., where section 87 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 is engaged.

10. Oversubscription Criteria

The school will seek to work collaboratively with all neighbouring Local Authorities to manage referrals. Where there are more applicants than vacancies, places will be prioritised according to the Admissions Criteria, which also acts as the Oversubscription Criteria.

The Academy will also prioritise applications in accordance with the following oversubscription criteria, in order:

- (1) Children who are looked after or are previously looked after child;
- (2) Children who are eligible for the pupil premium, [or] service premium [or early years premium];

Oversubscription should not impact the safety and wellbeing of pupils or appropriate staff/pupil ratios.

11. Monitoring arrangements

The Principal is responsible for the implementation of this policy and ensuring admissions are carried out fairly and within agreed timescales. Principals should monitor that referrals are responded to within timescales and there is good communication with parents, particularly around expected start dates.

The Trust Executive team will maintain will have regular oversight of admissions in schools to ensure implementation of this policy.

12. Definitions

- 12.1 A 'looked after child' is a child is (a) in the care of a local authority, or (b) being provided with accommodation by a local authority in the exercise of their social services functions.
- 12.2 A 'previously looked after child' is a child that ceased to be looked after because they were adopted, became subject to child arrangements order or special guardianship order. This includes children who appear to the Trust to have been in state care outside of England but ceased to be so because they were adopted.

13. Applying for a year group outside of chronological age group

Where parents and carers want their child to be educated outside of their chronological age group, an application should be made in writing to the local authority when a place at the school is requested. This should explain why the parents and carers wish for their child to be educated outside of their chronological age group and enclosing any evidence that supports it. The local authority should specify any arrangements as part of the Education

Health and Care Plan and should include this information when consulting with the school on whether a place would be suitable.

This decision is separate from the decision on whether a place is granted.

14. Appeals

Should a placement be considered unsuitable for a pupil (following the admissions procedure) feedback to parents and carers/carers will be provided by the Local Authority as to the grounds for the decision.

If the Local Authority decides not to name, the school in a pupil's EHC Plan the parents and carers have the right to appeal to the First-Tier Tribunal (Special Educational Needs and Disability) and should refer directly to the Local Authority for contact details and their intention to appeal a decision.

15. In-year Applications

Local authorities may approach the school to request a place outside of the normal admissions round which is in time for a place to start at the start of the academic year (September). Where multiple applications are received and the Academy does not have sufficient places for every child that has applied for one, places will be allocated on the basis of the oversubscription criteria.

16. Withdrawing Places

In certain circumstances the Trust may decide to withdraw a place, following consultation the with Local Authority, if one of the following circumstances occurs:

- Where a parent/carers has not responded to the offer of a place, even after additional communication via a different means.
- Where fraudulent or intentionally misleading information is used as part of the application; or
- Where the offer has been made in error.

The offer will only be withdrawn following written agreement from the Local Authority.

Appendix 1 - Assessment Process

1. Once a referral and all relevant paperwork have been received by the school, the application will be reviewed by a member of the senior leadership team who will then discuss the application with at least one professional from the school. A letter/email acknowledging receipt of the referral will be sent from the school to the Local Authority within 15 calendar days of receipt.
2. If, following scrutiny of the received paperwork, it is likely that the pupil may be suitable for the school, a member of the senior leadership team will arrange to meet and observe/assess the prospective pupil. This may be:
 - In their current school (preferred option in most cases)
 - In the home setting (if it is in the home setting then two members of staff will visit as per Home Visits policy)
 - During a visit to the school (in which case this step may be combined with Stage 5)

Liberty Academy Trust will be flexible in this process in order to respond appropriately to the differing needs of applicants.

3. A pre-admission assessment form will be completed by a member of the senior leadership team and / or Transdisciplinary team, and presented to senior leadership team, for further consideration of a placement offer. A decision made by the senior leadership team will be recorded and the relevant feedback will be given to the referring Local Authority. The school has 15 calendar days to respond to the Local Authority with a view about the proposed placement.
4. If there is evidence and it is agreed by the senior leadership team that the school can meet the pupil's needs, a letter of a placement offer is sent to the Local Authority. This information shall inform the contract agreement once the Local Authority confirms a placement. The Local Authority will arrange for amendments to the EHC Plan (part 4) or the young person's EHC plan if they agree with the decision. The 'letter of a placement offer' to the Local Authority will be provided by the school within the required 15-day period, providing information to indicate that the school is able to meet the pupil's needs. The local authority has 15 calendar days to respond to the offer of placement, after this the offer of placement may be withdrawn and re-allocated. Once the contract is agreed by the Local Authority, an admission start date will be determined.
5. If there is insufficient evidence that, at this stage, a formal placement offer can be made, further investigation and/or assessment may be necessary. If the School and Local Authority agree this is necessary, it will be arranged by the school team and will determine whether the school can meet the needs of the individual. Examples where further assessment may be required are: high medical needs, missing or out of date information received, complex mental health needs, complex learning needs, higher support levels may be required, specialist intervention or availability of resources or where there is evidence of high-risk behaviours such as severe self-harm or suicidal ideation. Parents and Carers and the Local Authority will be fully informed and involved should this be a necessary part of the assessment. Where pupils demonstrate high risk

behaviours the Principal should request a central admissions panel meeting which will include the input of specialist leads within the organisation.

6. The principal will decide if a compatibility assessment is required. This will support decisions about whether the individual can be supported effectively in the current class / year groups without any detrimental effect on existing pupils.
7. If at this stage or any other stage of this process the admissions review panel consider the placement unsuitable for an individual, a letter and report stating reasons for the decision will be sent to the Local Authority.
8. Following stages 3 - 6 of the above, parents and carers and the pupil may be invited for a tour of the school and presentation about the provision, arranged by the school. Where the young person attends, an experienced member of staff may encourage them to engage in a preferred activity enabling the school to assess how they respond to the environment and peers. The member of the senior leadership team meeting with the family will use the opportunity to obtain up to date further information regarding the young person in order to establish how the school will meet the following areas of need:
 - Social communication
 - Behaviour
 - Academic ability
 - Independent living skills
 - Religious and cultural needs
 - Parents' and carers' aspirations for the future/what they want the school to do.
9. The Local Authority is responsible for making suitable and appropriate transport arrangements with the parents and carers and will inform the school accordingly. Transport will be carefully considered alongside the pupil's transition plan and individual needs.
10. Prior to admission Liberty Academy Trust schools will identify specific provision to meet the areas of need identified in the EHC plan. This will be shared with all relevant members of staff ahead of the pupil starting and may include all, some or additional to the following areas of need:
 - Health/medical
 - Social communication
 - Academic ability
 - Independent living skills
 - Emotional regulation
 - Sensory needs
 - Religious and cultural
11. Prior to admission the principal will nominate someone responsible for transition planning. This person will work with parents and carers and other relevant stakeholders to ensure transition planning meets the needs of the pupil and promotes a successful start.
12. A baseline assessment will commence upon a pupil's admission to the school. This will inform pupil's documentation (including but not limited to Pupil profiles, Risk Assessments, Education Plans, Positive Behaviour Support plans) that will then be drawn up and discussed with parents and carers. This will usually take place towards the end of the first term / at 12 weeks.

13. All pupils undergo annual reviews as laid down by the SEN Code of Practice (including Transition Review meetings from Year 9).

Appendix 2 - Admissions Process Flowchart

