Waterside School

Admissions Policy

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1. Introduction

Waterside School is an independent specialist school located on George Eliot Road, serving Coventry and surrounding areas. The Academy provides education for learners aged 7–18 years, all of whom have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) issued by their Local Authority. Our provision is specifically designed for learners who require high levels of structure, predictability, therapeutic input and individualised support in order to engage in education safely and successfully.
Waterside School has been established to meet the needs of learners whose educational, social and emotional needs cannot be met effectively even supported within mainstream settings. Our learners have often experienced significant barriers to education, including failed placements, unmet needs, and negative educational experiences. Resulting in learners presenting with behaviours that communicate distress, anxiety or unmet need rather than wilful non-compliance.

The majority of learners referred to Waterside School present with complex and overlapping needs, including:

- Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs, frequently associated with trauma, adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), anxiety, emotional dysregulation, or disrupted attachment.
- Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC), including learners with significant differences in communication, social interaction, flexibility of thought and sensory processing. Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and those with common co-occurring conditions including Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), Tourette's Syndrome, and Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA).
- Co-occurring learning difficulties, including moderate learning difficulties, uneven cognitive profiles and gaps in foundational learning.
- Sensory processing differences, which may impact regulation, behaviour, attention and engagement.
- A history of exclusion, placement breakdown, prolonged absence, school refusal or Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA).

Waterside School
Waterside School operates as a small, highly structured and nurturing provision, with high staff-to-learner ratios and a strong emphasis on safeguarding, emotional regulation and relational practice. Behaviour is understood as a form of communication, and learners are supported through trauma-informed SEN-specialist approaches.
Admissions to Waterside School are therefore carefully considered on an individual basis, with close attention paid to:

- Ability to meet the needs and outcomes identified within their EHCP
- The safety and wellbeing of the child
- The impact of admission on existing learners
- The Academy's capacity to deliver the provision required safely and effectively

The Academy is committed to working in close partnership with Local Authorities, parents/carers and external professionals, including health and social care services. This

collaborative approach ensures that admissions decisions are fair, lawful, transparent and evidence-based, and that placements are made only where they are appropriate, sustainable and in the best interests of the child.

2. Admission Criteria

Whilst it is normal practice for places to be offered for the start of the academic year in September. Waterside School recognise that some learners may be out of education for a range of reasons, at times throughout the year. Therefore, we do take admissions at other times of the year, at the discretion of the Headteacher.

All referrals and admissions are considered on an individual basis, on a first-come-first-served basis. A place will not be offered if it is considered that Waterside School is not the most suitable provision to meet the student's specific educational, pastoral or social needs.

Admission Eligibility Criteria:

- Learners must have a current EHCP.
- All our lessons and instructions are in English. We do accept leaners for whom English is not their first language.
- Learners are to be funded by the Local Authority.
- Those with parental responsibility for the learner will be invited to Transition Headteacher meeting during the admissions procedure. It is key that parents/carers are in support of the placement, have an opportunity to pass on valuable information, discuss any concern, agree with the Mission, Vision and Values of Waterside School, are happy with arrangements and agree to the education provided.
- Continued support of those with parental responsibility and partnership with Waterside School are essential for the success and viability of any placement.
- Waterside School has space in an appropriate class/peer group.
- Waterside School has a maximum capacity of 35 fulltime learner places.
- We do not hold a waiting list, as it is felt this may hinder the process of students being placed at other suitable provision, and potentially remaining out of education.

2.1 Statutory Requirement

Admission to Waterside School is available only to learners who have a current EHCP issued by their Local Authority. Waterside School. All admissions are considered in accordance with the Children and Families Act 2014 and the SEN Code of Practice (2015).

2.2 Age Range

Waterside School provides education for learners aged 9-19. Placements are considered within this age range where the Academy is satisfied that it can meet the learner's needs safely and effectively.

2.3 Primary Needs We Are Able to Meet

Waterside School is designed to meet the needs of learners whose primary areas of need fall within the following profiles:

- Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs, including learners whose presentation is influenced by trauma, anxiety, attachment difficulties or emotionally based school avoidance.
- Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC), including learners who require structured environments, predictable routines, autism-aware communication strategies and support with sensory regulation.
- Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and those with common co-occurring conditions including Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), Tourette's Syndrome, and Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA).
- Co-occurring learning difficulties, including uneven cognitive profiles, gaps in learning arising from disrupted education, and associated communication needs.
- Sensory processing differences, where learners benefit from carefully managed environments, sensory regulation strategies and access to low-stimulus or breakout spaces.

Learners admitted to Waterside School typically require:

- Small class sizes and high staff-to-learner ratios.
- Highly structured routines with clear expectations and consistency.
- Therapeutic and trauma-informed approaches, embedded throughout the school day.
- Access to breakout, sensory and regulation spaces, including individual or low-stimulus environments to support emotional regulation and engagement in learning.

2.4 Suitability of Placement

Each case is assessed individually and on the basis of evidence provided by the Local Authority, family/carers and other professionals. In considering whether a placement is suitable, Waterside School takes account of:

- The needs and outcomes specified within the EHCP.
- The learner's current presentation, including regulation, communication and engagement.
- The Academy's physical environment, staffing model and expertise, or training requirements.
- The potential impact of admission on the safety, wellbeing and education of other learners

2.5 When Waterside School May Not Be Able to Meet Need

Waterside School may determine that it is unable to offer a placement where, having considered reasonable adjustments and enhanced support, the Academy concludes that:

- The learner requires specific medical or nursing support beyond the scope of the Academy's staffing and facilities.

- The level or nature of risk presented by the learner's behaviour cannot be managed safely, even with high staff ratios, specialist strategies and environmental adaptations.
- The outcomes set out in the EHCP are not aligned with the provision, curriculum or therapeutic model offered by Waterside School.
- Admission would be incompatible with the efficient education of other learners or would compromise safeguarding, staffing ratios or the learning environment.

Decisions not to offer a place are never based solely on the presence of disability, diagnosis or challenging behaviour, but on a careful assessment of whether the Academy can meet need safely, effectively and sustainably.

3. Admissions Process

Admissions to Waterside School are managed through a fair, structured, transparent and safeguarding-led process, designed to ensure that every placement offered is safe, suitable and sustainable. The Academy works closely with Local Authorities, parents/carers and external professionals throughout the process.

3.1 Referral Route

All referrals to Waterside School are made via the Local Authority SEN team as part of the Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) process. Parents/carers may express a preference for Waterside School to their Local Authority. The Academy does not accept direct parental admissions and does not admit learners outside the statutory EHCP process.

3.2 Review of Documentation

Upon receipt of a formal consultation, the Admissions Panel (comprising the Headteacher, SENCo and Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)) undertake a detailed review of all available information, including:

- The Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)
- Professional reports and advice (education, health, social care)
- Current and historical risk assessments
- Behaviour support plans and safeguarding information

Safeguarding considerations are integral at this stage and may include, but are not limited to:

- Risk of exploitation (including child criminal or sexual exploitation)
- Missing or absconding behaviours
- Self-harm or suicidal ideation
- Aggression or sexualised behaviours that may pose a risk to self or others

Where necessary, additional information may be requested from the Local Authority to support robust decision-making.

3.3 Admission Process – Taster Visits

It is important to acknowledge that the admission process is more than a paper exercise and for a leaner to succeed in a specialist placement, the school needs to be the right fir for the learner. Before Waterside School agrees to provide a placement with the Local Authority it is vital that the learner participates in the admission Taster visits comprising the following steps:

1. Learner visit – this is an opportunity for the learner (and their Parents/Carers) to visit the school and look round during the working day to get a feeling about the process.
2. Taster 1 – this is a 45 min session with a member of Waterside School and the learner which takes place in the school. This is to make some initial assessments about the student and how they will work within the school.
3. Taster 2 – this is a 2-hour group session where the learner will be invited to join a group teaching session and examines how the learner will work as part of a small group learning activity.

3.4 Admission Process – Parent & Headteacher Meeting

Following the Taster sessions, the parent/carers will be invited to meet the Headteacher in school. This is a final opportunity for the school to gather any required information before a decision is made about the ability to meet the needs of the leaner.

A supportive relationship between the learner's parents/carers and the school. During this meeting the Headteacher will introduce parents to the Mission, Vision and Values of the School and discuss the methodologies that will be used to support their learner. Parents/carers will be asked to confirm their acceptance of these by signing a parent/carer contract.
Waterside School

3.5 Admissions Decision

Following the review of documentation, school visit, Taster session and Headteacher meeting, the Admissions Panel will determine whether Waterside School can meet the learner's needs safely and effectively.

The Academy aims to respond to Local Authority consultations within 15 working days, unless additional information is required. All decisions are evidence-based and formally recorded.
A written response is issued to the Local Authority confirming whether the Academy:

- Is able to meet the learner's needs; or
- Is unable to offer a placement, with clear and lawful reasons provided

3.6 Transition Planning

Where a placement is agreed and Waterside School is named the EHCP, a personalised transition plan is developed in collaboration with the Local Authority, parents/carers and relevant professionals. Transitions are typically upto 6 weeks long and arrangements are

designed to reduce anxiety, support regulation and promote a positive and safe start to school life.

Transition planning may include:

- Pre-admission safeguarding and risk assessments
- Allocation of a keyworker to act as a consistent point of contact
- Phased or staggered entry, where appropriate
- Individualised timetables and visual supports
- Opportunities for additional visits prior to start
- Multi-agency coordination to ensure continuity of support

3.7 **First Day**

On arrival at Waterside School, the priority with each learner is to develop a sense of belonging and familiarise them with our expectations and processes. This should be done by a staff member (usually their identified keyworker) on the leaners' first day. This will include:

- being shown around the school site, told where everything is where they are allowed and not allowed to go and who else might be on the premises on any given day.
- being introduced to all the adults on site, including Designated Safeguarding Lead(s) and told who they should speak to should they have any concerns over their safety/wellbeing.
- learners should be walked through the fire evacuation procedure.
- being made familiar with the Mission, Vision and Values for Waterside School.
- introduction to the Waterside School Behaviour and Rewards policies.
- learners should be informed that Waterside School does not judge or reject any learner based on behaviour at prior education settings. The onus is on each learner to choose to be with us and follow our rules for us to meet their needs.
- learners should be helped to understand Waterside School aims for learners to be able to gain the knowledge and skills they need to gain qualifications and/or move on to their next stage and to learn in a way that suits them.

4. Supporting Learners on Admission

Waterside School recognises that admission to a new school can be a significant and challenging transition for learners with complex SEN, particularly those with a history of trauma, disrupted education or school refusal. As such, support on admission is planned, proactive and safeguarding-led, with a strong emphasis on emotional regulation, predictability and relationship-building.

4.1 Safeguarding First Approach

Safeguarding underpins all admission arrangements. No learner will start at Waterside School without appropriate safeguarding and risk assessments in place. Risk assessments are shared with relevant staff and reviewed regularly to ensure arrangements remain appropriate and responsive to the learner's presentation.

Prior to the agreed start date, risk assessments are completed and may include consideration of:

- Required levels of supervision
- Risk of absconding or missing episodes
- Aggression or behaviours that may pose a risk to self or others
- Vulnerability to exploitation or peer influence
- Medical, personal care or sensory needs
- Environmental and timetable-related risks

4.2 Keyworker System

Every learner admitted to Waterside School is allocated a named keyworker prior to their start date. The keyworker role is central to establishing strong, secure relationships and supporting engagement in learning.

The keyworker:

- Acts as a consistent and trusted adult for the learner
- Supports the learner's emotional regulation and sense of safety
- Oversees the induction and transition process
- Acts as a primary point of contact for parents/carers
- Coordinates information between teaching, pastoral and therapeutic staff

4.3 Baseline Assessment and Individual Learning Planning

Within the first six weeks of admission, baseline assessments will be carried out to establish a clear understanding of the learner's strengths, needs and starting points.

Baseline assessments will cover:

- Literacy and numeracy (at an appropriate level)
- Social, emotional and mental health (SEMH)
- Communication and interaction
- Sensory regulation and engagement

The outcomes of baseline assessment inform the learner's Individual Learning Plan (ILP) and support the delivery of EHCP outcomes. Baseline information is also used to monitor progress over time and to inform reviews with parents/carers and the Local Authority.

4.4 Partnership with Parents and Carers

Waterside School recognises parents and carers as key partners in supporting successful admissions and transitions.

Support for families includes:

- Regular, open communication during the admission and transition period
- Opportunities for meetings, visits and discussions with key staff
- Clear points of contact for pastoral or safeguarding concerns
- Access to advice and guidance regarding routines, expectations and support strategies

The Academy operates an open and transparent approach, recognising that trust and collaboration are essential to learner wellbeing and progress.

4.5 Multi-Agency Collaboration

Where appropriate, Waterside School works closely with a range of external professionals and agencies to ensure continuity and effectiveness of support.

This may include coordination with:

- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)
- Children's social care and early help services
- Speech and Language Therapy (SaLT)
- Occupational Therapy (OT)
- Educational Psychology
- Other specialist services

Multi-agency input is coordinated to ensure that strategies are consistent, joined-up and aligned with EHCP outcomes and safeguarding plans.

5. Equality and Inclusion

Waterside School is committed to promoting equality, inclusion and fairness in all aspects of its work, including admissions. The Academy recognises its duties under the Equality Act 2010 and is committed to ensuring that no child or young person is treated less favourably because of disability, race, religion or belief, gender, sexual orientation, family background or any other protected characteristic.

All admissions decisions are made solely on the basis of whether Waterside School can safely, effectively and sustainably meet the needs identified within a learner's Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). Decisions are never based on diagnosis alone, perceived complexity, or previous educational history.

Waterside School recognises that learners with SEN may require reasonable adjustments in order to access education and participate fully in school life. Where appropriate, the Academy considers whether reasonable adjustments, additional support or adaptations could enable a safe and suitable placement, taking into account the needs of the individual learner and the wider school community.

However, the duty to make reasonable adjustments does not require the Academy to place a learner where doing so would compromise:

- The safety or wellbeing of the learner
- The safety, welfare or efficient education of other learners
- The Academy's ability to meet statutory safeguarding and regulatory requirements

Waterside School's approach to equality and inclusion is therefore balanced, lawful and child-centred, ensuring that placements are made only where they are genuinely appropriate, safe and in the best interests of the child.

6. Appeals

Waterside School is committed to promoting equality, inclusion and fairness in all aspects of its, including admissions. The Academy seeks to ensure that no child or young person is disadvantaged as a result of disability, background or protected characteristics.

All admissions decisions are made solely on the basis of whether Waterside School can safely and effectively meet the needs identified within the learner's Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). Decisions are never influenced by factors such as race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, family circumstances or social background.

Waterside School complies fully with its duties under the Equality Act 2010. The Academy recognises disability as a protected characteristic and is committed to making reasonable adjustments where appropriate to enable learners to access education safely and meaningfully.

In considering admissions, the Academy carefully balances its equality duties with its responsibility to:

- Safeguard the welfare of all learners
- Maintain a safe and supportive learning environment
- Ensure compatibility with the efficient education of other learners
- Use resources effectively and lawfully

Where the Academy determines that it is unable to offer a placement, this decision is not a judgement on the worth or entitlement of the child, but a professional assessment of whether the Academy can meet need safely, effectively and sustainably within its current provision.
Waterside School is committed to transparency and will always provide clear, evidence-based reasons for admissions decisions to the Local Authority, in line with statutory duties and equality legislation.

7. Monitoring and Review

Waterside School ensures that admissions arrangements are monitored rigorously and reviewed regularly to maintain compliance with statutory duties and to support continuous improvement.

Admissions decisions and placements are reported termly to the Governing Body, enabling effective oversight of:

- The number and nature of admissions and refusals
- Patterns or trends in learner need and placement requests
- The impact of admissions on safeguarding, staffing ratios and provision
- Any issues arising from transition or placement sustainability

Monitoring information is used to inform strategic planning, capacity management and resource allocation, ensuring that the Academy continues to operate safely and effectively within its specialist remit.

This Admissions Policy is reviewed annually, or sooner where there are changes to legislation, statutory guidance or local authority practice. The review process includes input from:

- Senior leaders and admissions decision-makers
- Teaching, pastoral and safeguarding staff
- Parents and carers, where appropriate
- Local Authorities and external partners, where relevant

The Academy uses feedback and review findings to refine admissions practice, strengthen safeguarding arrangements and ensure ongoing alignment with the Children and Families Act 2014, the SEND Code of Practice, the Equality Act 2010, and the Independent School Standards Regulations.

Appendix A: Admissions & Transition Checklist

Waterside School – Admissions & Transition Checklist

Learner Name: _____ Date of Admission: _____

Local Authority: _____ Year Group: _____

☐ EHCP reviewed by Headteacher, SENCo and DSL
☐ Learner School Visit
☐ Taster 1
☐ Taster 2
☐ Parent/carer signed agreement in Headteacher meeting
☐ Parent/carer welcome pack issued
☐ Risk assessment completed (absconding, aggression, medical, safeguarding)
☐ Keyworker allocated and introduced to learner and family
☐ Transition plan agreed with family and Local Authority
☐ Phased entry (if required) planned and communicated
☐ Baseline assessments scheduled (within first 6 weeks)
☐ Multi-agency contacts confirmed (e.g., CAMHS, social worker, therapists)
☐ Safeguarding system updated with learner details
☐ Review meeting date set (within first term)

Signed (Admissions Lead): _____ Date: _____