

A PARENT'S GUIDE TO OUR SCHOOL

Our School at a glance...

- Co-educational
- Day, 38 and 52-week Placements
- 4 - 19 Years
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How does the school know when a young person needs extra help?

Acorn Park is an independent special school for children with autism located in Banham, Norfolk. The school offers a residential provision for children both during term time and all year round. The children who attend Acorn Park have a variety of needs that are typical of individuals with autism, as well as other conditions, such as ADHD, epilepsy, Tourette's, medical needs and Attachment. With these needs in mind, we have on-site occupational therapists, speech and language therapists, psychological services and nurses as part of our multi-disciplinary team.

Children who have not been successful in a mainstream setting or other specialist units find the high staff to young people ratios, autism-friendly environment and therapeutic approach to learning a refreshing change that lends itself to lower levels of anxiety and high levels of engagement. All children who attend Acorn Park have an Education, Health and Care Plan and a primary diagnosis of ASD. These needs are reviewed annually through the Annual Review of the Plan.

Acorn Park knows that your child needs extra help because they have been referred to us and have an Education, Health and Care Plan, which documents those particular needs. In cases where additional special educational needs are identified while residing at Acorn Park, our multi-disciplinary team (MDT) would add these needs to the Plan and ensure that support was offered.

The academic progress together with the progress made against the young people's individual objectives written into the Plan, is monitored regularly to ensure progress. Staff work together to design, implement and evaluate interventions where required. The school communicates with parents about additional interventions, which are delivered by our own, skilled Intervention Team who also work alongside parents to enable them to support them at home.

How will the school staff support my young person?

All young people at Acorn Park have an Education, Health and Care Plan. These documents outline the needs of your child. This document will make recommendations as to what kind of provision, resources, approaches to delivering the education and any multi-agency involvement is

required to meet those needs. The overall objectives of the Plan are broken down into smaller targets on the young person's Individual Education Plan (IEP). Individual Education Plans are drawn up each half term by our teachers in consultation with the SENDCO, MDT, parents and young people. Targets are set and the progress made is reviewed each term. All staff work to enable your child to meet their IEP targets. We use continual teacher and therapeutic assessments to identify how well young people are making progress academically and in terms of identified needs. We also work closely with our therapists to ensure that all of the needs that are outlined on the Education, Health and Care Plan are met and progress is evidenced. We record and report progress through our Earwig and Provision Map platforms.

Young people who live in our residential provision will also be able to work on areas identified in their plan as part of our 24-hour curriculum. All stakeholders are invited to attend our team around the child meetings held every 6 weeks to coordinate our efforts. Young people who live on site have access to the therapists to support their living in the home.

How will the curriculum be matched to my young person's needs?

When a child is first referred to Acorn Park we ask the child and the people around them, 'what are your expectations?' After listening and completing our assessments, we present a bespoke plan that takes into account the strengths and needs of the child. As part of this plan, all children have access to the National Curriculum, therapeutic services, life skills, out of school experiences in the community and activities that support the child to meet their objectives. We follow the National Curriculum and offer a wide range of qualifications from life skills to GCSEs. Our curriculum is differentiated for each individual and falls into two pathways. More complex learners follow our Semi-Formal Pathway which is based around experiential learning and heavily weighted towards achieving IEP and EHCP targets. Our other learners follow our Formal, Pathway, which is most appropriate for those learners who are at or around age-related expectations and able to access a full National Curriculum offer. Class sizes range between four to eight young people. These classes are supported by a teacher, higher-level teaching assistant (HLTA) and a learning support assistant (LSA). Our Semi-formal classes often have much higher levels of support, depending on the young person's needs.

Our approach to learning involves differentiating our activities and lessons. In some lessons, there may be elements of small group teaching or 1:1 tuition. We are able to support young people by managing the environment, being ASD friendly with our approach to learning and keeping anxiety levels down, which, in turn, supports learning. Each classroom uses Zones of Regulation to support emotional regulation for young people. All young people have bespoke educational packages that contain academic and behavioural targets linked to National Curriculum levels and their IEP, which are reviewed termly. In addition to their academic needs, our school work has integrated our MDT into the curriculum so that young people participate in therapies that are intended to reduce anxiety, increase resilience, and demonstrate the acquisition of life skills. Our objective is to find ways to present the content of the curriculum in such a way that there are no barriers to learning.

How will both you and I know how my young person's doing and how will you help me to support my young person's needs?

All young people at Acorn Park have an Education, Health and Care Plan. These documents outline the needs of your child. The overall objectives of the Plan are broken down into smaller targets on the young person's Individual Education Plan (IEP). These Individual Education Plans are created each half term. Targets are set and the progress made is reviewed with termly reports to families completed each year for all stakeholders to assess.

All progress for your child is evidenced either through the completion of IEP goals, our assessment platforms, NC age-related targets or through our therapeutic team reports. We further support parents/carers by communicating what works in schools to manage anxiety so that they too can create an ASD friendly environment. We measure well-being in many ways, academic progress being one important way, but we also like to evidence progress with behaviour, self-esteem, anxiety levels, and young person's acquisition of social skills as well as progress in being able to communicate and manipulate the environment. We hold Parent Consultations in the Autumn and Spring terms, will a full school report at the end of the Summer term. In addition, we hold Parent Open Days on the last day of each term where we invite families to share the successes of the term with us as a school community.

What support will there be for my young person's overall well-being?

We are committed to a multi-disciplinary approach across all our settings. We do this to ensure that all the needs of the young person are met. All therapies are individually conceived and implemented with clinical oversight by the MDT.

Professionals in our MDT include a mental health & learning disability nurse, speech and language therapist, occupational therapist, and school nurses.

We offer access to a number of interventions that focus on reducing anxiety and promoting positive self-esteem. For young people with very high levels of anxiety, we teach coping strategies to help them remain calm. We also work with young people to promote sensory integration. Young people will also have opportunities to develop empathy and an awareness of the needs of others.

We encourage young people to use their own voices to raise any concerns or issues that they have. Young people are involved in planning for their care and targets through IEPs, annual reviews and residential provision through their care plan.

What specialist services and expertise are available at or accessed by the school?

All of our residential and educational staff have undertaken specialist training and development that is ongoing. Many of our teachers have, in addition to their teaching qualifications, achieved further qualifications in SEN, speech, language and communication needs, and behaviour needs. We have several staff who hold Masters Level Autism Specific qualifications.

In school and children's homes we have on-staff the following professionals:

- Lead Clinician - Highly Specialist Occupational Therapist and Advanced Sensory Integration Practitioner
- Occupational Therapy: 3 qualified therapists and 1 assistant

- Speech and Language Therapy: 4 qualified therapists and 2 assistants
- Psychotherapy: 2 qualified therapists
- 2 therapy assistants

What training have the staff supporting children and young people with SEND had or are having?

Teachers, Teaching Assistants and members of the residential team have received CPI training in de-escalation and safety intervention.

As a school, we are working towards a Total Communication approach, as we recognise the wide variety of ways our children communicate with us. We support the use of PECS systems and Makaton and use objects of reference where appropriate.

We also have a regular internal team around the child meeting (ITAC) for each young person for all stakeholders that always includes the MDT, the education team, and the residential team. This is where we discuss the best approaches and strategies for meeting the needs of the young people.

Relevant staff receive weekly, high-quality training around current thinking, legislation, Autism, Quality Teaching and Learning, health and safety and safeguarding, and all school staff receive annual safeguarding refresher training.

How will my young person be included in the activities outside the classroom including school trips?

All young people are invited to attend the school trips and activities if it is appropriate. Our off-site visits are designed to enhance curricular, life skills and recreational opportunities for all of our young people. Off-site visits are also designed to create opportunities for developing independence, communication and self-management skills, and to promote positive self-esteem. We have a rigorous in-house health and safety screening as part of our educational visits policy. All visits and off-site activities are risk-assessed using the EVOLVE system to ensure they are appropriate and can be managed to suit individual needs.

As a minimum, all young people access termly curriculum-based trips to enhance learning. We also provide two 'Heartbeat' trips each year for all young people. These are trips chosen by young people that are not linked to formal learning, but instead, provide access to fun activities and experiences that they may otherwise not experience.

Heartbeat trips so far– The Harry Potter Studios, Pleasurewood Hills, Bewilderwood, One Life Left Gaming Café.

How accessible is the school environment?

Many of our classrooms are wheelchair accessible. There are rooms in 3 buildings that can only be accessed via a flight of stairs and are not wheelchair accessible.

The top floors of our residential provision can only be accessed via a flight of stairs and are not wheelchair accessible.

Disabled visitors would be able to access the admin building through the main entrance.

We have disabled toilets and disabled parking available.

How will the school prepare and support my young person to join the school, transfer to a college or the next stage of education and life?

We work closely with your Local Authority to ensure that the child is offered a provision that can meet their needs. Prior to joining Acorn Park parents and carers are encouraged to visit at least once and where possible the young person is also encouraged to visit so that he/she can become familiar with the building and staff. Staff will complete a comprehensive pre-admission questionnaire with the parents/carers and, where possible, with staff from the previous placement. This pre-admission information is used to inform both the individual education plan and the care plan for youngsters who are residential.

Options for the future are always kept in mind when we review progress. There are no limits put on the child if they have the aspirations to attend college or return to mainstream education. We can continue to provide support across these settings and can create bespoke educational packages that include or combine all approaches and options so that our support remains in place when young people wish to continue with support from Acorn Park, but want to try mainstream for a class or college for a few days a week with further support educationally at Acorn Park.

How are the school's resources allocated and matched to young people's special educational needs?

The most valuable resource at Acorn Park is its staff team. Recruiting procedures are rigorous and robust to ensure that the young people are taught and cared for by staff who have the necessary skills and attributes. Staff ratios are high so that the young people's individual needs can be fully met. Staff are highly trained so that their interactions with the young people impact positively on the youngsters' learning, well-being and happiness. Staff are carefully matched to individual young people to ensure that the best possible outcomes can be achieved by the young people.

Acorn Park provides an autism-friendly learning environment that takes account of the fact that many young people who have autism can suffer from sensory overload. Careful consideration is given to the layout of classrooms and to the way in which young people are grouped. Learning resources are robust, attractive, and fit for purpose. Resources are age and stage appropriate, and appealing to individual young people in terms of their particular interests.

Specific resources such as therapy input are allocated on the basis of individual needs.

How is the decision made about what type and how much support my child will receive?

The decision about the nature, level and frequency of support provided for the young people at Acorn Park is largely determined by their Education, Health and Care Plan. The needs of the young people are articulated in their individual education plan and are met through the curriculum and the programmes designed for them by the therapy team.

Throughout their time at Acorn Park, there may well be periods when young people need additional support perhaps on a short-term basis. For example, a young person who is due to have a minor operation under anaesthetic would almost certainly need support before, during and after the event. The level and type of support would depend on the individual young person and would be bespoke to meet his/her specific needs.

On occasions when staff believe that a young person would benefit from additional or targeted support, perhaps in managing a new behaviour, contact would be made with the parents to discuss the matter and to agree a suggested way forward. Wherever possible Acorn Park would aim to work in partnership with parents to achieve the best outcomes for the young people.

How are parents involved in the school? How can I be involved?

Parents at Acorn Park are the main source of information about their child. We rely on them to help us shape the expectations for their child. We make every effort to have consultations both informally and formally. We have prescribed communication plans for children in the home that is tailored to each family. We invite parents to our celebrations held termly and our regular Outreach Coffee Mornings. Parent opinions are collected through surveys both in the residential home and the school.

Our school is most successful when we work collaboratively with parents.