



Admissions Policy

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Approved by:	Bridget Young, Irena Lempaszek
Review cycle:	Every year

Reviewed on	Reviewed by
September 2020	Lisa Camilleri
September 2022	Bridget Young
May 2023	Bridget Young Irena Lempaszek

Next review date
February 2025

The Holmewood School is owned and operated by Cavendish Education.

This policy is one of a series of school policies that, taken together, are designed to form a comprehensive statement of the school's aspiration to provide an outstanding education for each of its students and of the mechanisms and procedures in place to achieve this. Accordingly, this policy should be read alongside these policies. In particular it should be read in conjunction with the policies covering equality and diversity, Health and Safety, safeguarding and child protection.

All of these policies have been written, not simply to meet statutory and other requirements, but to enable and evidence the work that the whole school is undertaking to ensure the implementation of its core values.

While this current policy document may be referred to elsewhere in The Holmewood School documentation, including particulars of employment, it is non-contractual.

The school's policies, unless the specific context requires otherwise, the word "parent" is used in terms of Section 576 of the [Education Act 1996](#), which states that a 'parent', in relation to a child or young person, includes any person who is not a biological parent but who has parental responsibility, or who has care of the child. Department for Education guidance [Understanding and dealing with issues relating to parental responsibility](#) considers a 'parent' to include:

- all biological parents, whether they are married or not
- any person who, although not a biological parent, has parental responsibility for a child or young person - this could be an adoptive parent, a step-parent, guardian or other relative
- any person who, although not a biological parent and does not have parental responsibility, has care of a child or young person

A person typically has care of a child or young person if they are the person with whom the child lives, either full or part time and who looks after the child, irrespective of what their biological or legal relationship is with the child.

The school employs the services of the following consulting companies to ensure regulatory compliance and the implementation of best practice:

- Peninsula BrightHR
- Peninsula BusinessSafe (Health and Safety)
- Carecheck (DBS)
- Educare (online CPD)

The Holmewood School is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people and expects all staff, volunteers, pupils and visitors to share this commitment.

All outcomes generated by this document must take account of and seek to contribute to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people at The Holmewood School.

The policy documents of The Holmewood School are revised and published periodically in good faith. They are inevitably subject to revision. On occasions a significant revision, although promulgated in school separately, may have to take effect between the re-publication of a set of policy documents. Care should

therefore be taken to ensure, by consultation with the Senior Leadership Team, that the details of any policy document are still effectively current at a particular moment.

Introduction:

The Holmewood School, London (THSL) is an independent day school for neurodivergent children and young people aged from seven to 19 who have a primary diagnosis of autism. We celebrate the diversity of our cohort at THSL and we welcome young people from all walks of life who need an academic yet nurturing environment.

Our young people are broadly similar to their mainstream peers in their academic ability but require support with communication and interaction, executive functioning, anxiety, functional skills, and other needs related to their diagnosis. While many of our young people also have co-occurring diagnoses, such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and dyslexia, the primary need must be autism.

Whilst we acknowledge that pathological demand avoidance (PDA) and demand avoidant presentations can be part of the profile of autism, we unfortunately cannot cater for this profile. Similarly, we are unable to support young people whose primary needs are around social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs.

THSL is part of Cavendish Education, a wider group of specialist schools for children and young people with social communication disorders and SpLD. Our links with other schools in the Cavendish group provide opportunities for working in partnership.

THSL works on providing a parallel to the mainstream provision with the additional focus on therapeutic programmes and heavy emphasis on wellbeing, social skills and life skills. We have our own tailor made life skills curriculum that underpins all other work.

Admissions Criteria

Our admissions criteria should be used as a guide only. Each application is assessed on an individual basis. In each case, we take account of the needs of the individual student and consider whether the school would be suitable to meet their needs.

Specifically we ensure that -

- The young person is aged between 7-16 years old at time of admission. We admit students from the beginning of year three and students can stay in the school until the end of year 14.
- Fees will be paid by the local authority or privately.
- The young person has average or above average cognitive ability. We admit students who are exceeding, on par, or no more than two years below age related expectations with regards to academia.
- The young person has a diagnosis of autism and this is identified as a primary need on their education health and care plan (EHCP) or on other paperwork.
- ADHD, Mental Health needs and other specific learning difficulties (SpLD) are co occurring only and not as the primary diagnosis or main need.
- Students do not have demand avoidant profiles, PDA, significant mental health difficulties or developmental language disorder (DLD).

- All students should have current up-to-date paperwork or reports. Students referred from local authorities or parents will have a full EHCP (current and up to date). Private paying families may not need to provide an EHCP and should therefore provide other reports.
- Students can be offered a place and start at any time during the year if there is a vacancy available.
- Students are admitted having progressed through the four admissions stages. These stages are detailed in the sections below.
- Parents, families and the young person must be in support of the school placement. It is important that they share and support our approach, philosophy and values. They must sign and agree to the 'Parent Partnership Agreement' that is sent out with the confirmed offer. Total transparency and honesty about the student's strengths and needs is paramount. This includes information about mental health difficulties, social services input and safeguarding concerns.
- Parental expectations about academic success are managed. While our students are academically able, they have barriers that may impact their ability to achieve formal qualifications. The school will do everything possible to support the students with these barriers.
- Parental expectations are managed regarding the placement being agreed by the Local Authority. The school does not hold a 'waiting list'. Offer letters have a short time frame and we cannot guarantee that a place will be available once these have expired. We want to avoid a situation where a parent may hold out for a place at our school but be waiting a very long time, and therefore they may miss out on another suitable placement.
- Parents understand that most of our students will take their formal qualifications (GCSE, BTEC etc) over a three to four year period. This means that many will not finish their GCSEs until the end of year 12 and beyond.
- The young person is socially and academically compatible with the existing students where there is a vacancy. Admission of any new students must not be detrimental to the needs of existing students – no student should compromise the opportunities of others within the school. For example the young person does not have a safeguarding history that will put our vulnerable cohort at risk.
- The young person is compatible with our small and compact learning environment where everyone is in very close proximity to each other. Some additional diagnoses may require the student to have access to additional space that we do not have available, for example ample outdoor space or their own room.
- The young person must have a readiness to learn in a classroom environment. Unfortunately we do not have space to support one to one teaching as a model.
- Offers of placements are matched to specific vacancies. The Headteacher and admissions team will seek to ensure there is compatibility of age, social ability, communication style and so on. The school should be satisfied that the young person feels comfortable in the environment and that all needs can be met.

Please note that as THSL is not under Section 41, we cannot be named on the EHCP without prior consultation.

Our philosophy:

At The Holmewood School we *Think Differently*.

Our vision - *Holmewood is a diverse and inclusive community of excellence, creating ambitious learners ready to lead confident, independent and happy lives.*

Our unique selling points

- THSL is part of a group of specialist schools.
- THSL received an Outstanding Ofsted inspection in 2022.
- Advanced Accreditation from the NAS.
- We offer a wide range of in-house therapies (speech and language therapy (SALT), occupational therapy (OT), several types of psychodynamic therapy and reflexology).
- Subject specialist teachers and therapists work in partnership.
- A small school environment that supports the needs of the students.
- A focus on academic excellence within the parameters of the national curriculum.
- A tailored life skills curriculum.
- A balance of academic learning and social communication with a focus on wellbeing.
- Accredited Forest School and Duke of Edinburgh provider.
- Small class sizes.
- High staff to student ratio (approximately one staff member to two students).
- An outstanding specialised Sixth Form provision with strong links with local colleges.
- An integrated whole school approaches such as Social Thinking, Word Aware, Zones of Regulation and Restorative Justice.
- Personalised learning plans tailored to individual needs.
- Up to date training and development for all staff.
- All year round enrollment.

The Admissions Procedure

THSL's admissions chart is a step-by-step guide to help interested parties understand the process. We also encourage parents, carers and social workers to contact the school to find out more about the provision on offer.

Admissions Process for Parents

Stage 1

Admissions Manager takes initial details and gathers the relevant papers.

The papers include:

- latest EHCP,
- most recent school reports and Annual Review
- and if available an educational psychology (EP) report, OT report, SaLT report or any other relevant documents.

The admission process can progress to the next stage once all the relevant information has been shared with the Admissions Manager.

The admissions panel consists of an admissions manager and various members of SLT and/or other professionals. If the admissions panel believes that in principle THSL is able to meet the child or young person's needs and there is space in the relevant peer group, this will progress to a tour. The Admissions Manager will respond to family and/or Local Authority.

The parents will be invited to attend, with the young person on an initial visit and tour with the Admissions Manager. This is provided on an individual basis and should take approximately 30-60 minutes.

If the school believes that they can meet a young person's needs they will progress to the next stage.

At this point parents will be asked to request that the Local Authority formally consult with us.



Stage 2 :

The parents/ carers and the young person will be invited back to the school.

The young person will engage in one to one academic assessments for 1.5-3 hours (broken up) which includes

- Reading task including comprehension
- Writing task
- Maths tasks

(Older young people may take a different series of tests and attend an informal interview with a member of SLT).

The parent will attend an interview on the same day. The objective of this interview is to find out more about the family's journey and expectations, and should take no longer than an hour.

If the school believes that they can meet a young person's needs they will progress to the next stage.

The school may contact other agencies to ensure all pertinent information has been disclosed. This is to ensure we have the full picture of the young person before proceeding.



Stage 3

Taster assessments in class at THSL - a series of half or full day taster days in the classroom with the vacancy. In some cases this could be a block of consecutive days, in order to ensure the needs of the potential students can be met.

If the school believes that they can meet a young person's needs they will progress to the next stage.



Stage 4

The admissions panel meets to review the assessment and to plan next steps. The school may contact other agencies to ensure all pertinent information has been disclosed. This includes previous settings and the local authority safeguarding 'front door'. This is to ensure we have the full picture of the young person before proceeding. If the panel believes the school can meet the young person's needs, an offer letter will be sent to the LA and/or the family to formally offer a place. This offer is subject to funding and will come with an expiry date. A proposed start date may also be given.

In some cases THSL would offer temporary assessment placements for the duration of at least one term.



Stage 5

The LA and/or the family and young person (if funding) accept the offer and a contract is signed.

The LA rejects the offer/does not agree to funding.



We will send you an Admissions Pack, Parent Partnership Agreement and the transition documents for the young person.

Parents can choose to -

- Contact LA to discuss your options.
- Seek legal advice.
- Seek support from an advocacy service.

Please note that some disagreements over the naming of the placement may end up in an Educational Tribunal.



Your child starts at The Holmewood School.

Further Information and Guidance

- We are able to give parents information regarding our assessment and admission process on enquiry. For LA funded places we encourage parents to engage in a dialogue with their local authority and to make a joint application.
- It is important that the young person also visits the school at stage one of the admissions process, particularly if they have been out of school for some time. This is to support their wellbeing and so that they can be prepared for the assessment stage.

- Parent interviews at stage two are informal and consist of a discussion around:
 - Previous placement
 - Communication
 - Social interaction and skills
 - Behaviour and attitude to learning
 - Academic ability
 - Life skills and independence
 - Mental health history
 - Religious and cultural needs
 - Sensory needs
 - Likes and dislikes
 - Parent and student's aspirations for the future / what they want the school to do.
 - Young person's understanding of their autism
 - Social media and online awareness
 - Medical needs
 - Social Services input
 - Safeguarding history.

- Older students should be more involved in the stage two interview process and will meet with a member of staff to discuss the above points (where relevant) as well as take part in assessments.
- After the taster days, in most cases the school will be able to make a decision over the following week. However, in some cases (e.g. if the school happens to be opening a new class) this may take longer in order to ensure that compatibility of the child is explored as thoroughly as possible. In these cases the school will ensure parents/carers are kept updated about the process. We must stress that attending taster days does not ensure an offer of a place at the school.
- The school acknowledges that parents and students have often been through lengthy and stressful processes in the past. In recognition of this, the school will aim to advise parents of the outcome as quickly as possible. However, in a small number of cases, if the decision is uncertain, rather than make the wrong decision it may be more appropriate to delay a decision whilst more information can be obtained and additional school or home visits can be carried out.
- The offer of a placement at THSL will be made using the information provided. Should this information change, for example if the EHCP changes significantly, or if the presentation of the young person changes significantly, or if pertinent information was not disclosed during the admissions process, the school reserves the right to withdraw the offer.
- Any decision on a placement will be made in line with the Code of Practice for Special Educational Needs and will take into account:
 - It would be suitable for the age, ability, aptitude or SEN of the child or young person,
 - The attendance of the child or young person there would be compatible with the efficient education of others, or the efficient use of resources.
- The school must also be satisfied that all parents / carers and the young person are supportive of the placement and will work with the school. This is vital in ensuring an effective placement.
- The LA or parent must confirm acceptance of the place and the school fees. Once confirmed, a NASS contract will be sent to the person/service paying for the place.
- The parent or LA is responsible for all transport arrangements and will inform the school accordingly. Transport of any kind is not the responsibility of the school and is not included in the offer.

- Transition plans will be made with the LA, the current school placement and the parent/carer. Transitions are often difficult for autistic children. It will be essential to consider mechanisms/strategies that may make the process easier for the young person. These may include Social Stories or a Transition Book. Transition visits will be personalised. Some students may need one, others may need several over a long period. Some students may need to start on a part time basis only (particularly if they have been out of school). On a rare occasion, a student may be ready to start full time as soon as possible.
- The school will send out an admissions pack which will include information about the school for both parents and the student plus detailed pre admission questionnaires and permissions forms.
- Prior to admission the Head Teacher will ensure that the following information has been collected: a) Communication Profile and / or previous communication reports, b) Whether the young person is looked after and if so the name of the contact person and key personnel in the placing authority. c) Name and contact details of the parents or guardians, d) EHCP, e) Individual Health Care Plans (where applicable), f) Details of any matter which makes the young person particularly vulnerable or a danger to others and any associated risk assessments.
- A baseline assessment will commence as soon as the student starts school. In most circumstances this will take a term to complete.