

Admissions Policy

Aurora Woodlands School

Policy Reference:	WDS27
Version Number:	5
Applies to:	Aurora Woodlands
Associated documents:	SEND policy; Child Protection and Safeguarding policy and local procedures; Equality and Accessibility policies; Attendance policy; Complaints procedure; placement agreement and privacy notice.
Approved by:	Head Teacher
Implementation date:	September 2026
Next review due by:	September 2027
<i>This policy has been reviewed to ensure it promotes safeguarding and does not present barriers to participation or disadvantage any protected groups</i>	

Summary of changes since previous version of policy

Confirmed the requirement for an EHCP and the Panel Lead's final authority on meeting need and offering a placement. Updated roles, legal context, admission criteria, response arrangements, equality commitments and transition safeguards. Removed the former three-month assessment period, completed definitions and corrected numbering and document control.

1. Aims

Aurora Woodlands School is an independent specialist school for young people aged 10–19 with needs associated with autism and/or social, emotional and mental health difficulties. We offer small classes, a nurturing approach and a creative, personalised curriculum.

This policy explains how referrals are assessed, placement decisions are made and admissions are planned. It aims to give young people, parents, carers and local authorities a clear, fair and supportive process. An Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) is required for admission.

2. Legislation and statutory requirements

This policy is informed by the Children and Families Act 2014, the Special Educational Needs and Disability Regulations 2014 and the SEND Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years, particularly the arrangements for independent schools in paragraph 9.84. It also reflects the Equality Act 2010, the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, applicable data protection legislation, current Keeping Children Safe in Education guidance and Working together to improve school attendance guidance.

Aurora Woodlands School is an independent school which is not approved under section 41 of the Children and Families Act 2014. The local authority must consider parental or young-person representations for a placement but is not under the same conditional duty to name the school that applies to section 41 approved settings. The local authority should establish that the school is willing to admit before naming it in an EHCP. Naming the school does not impose the section 43 duty to admit on Woodlands.

The local authority remains responsible for securing the special educational provision specified in Section F of the EHCP. Before admission, the school and commissioners must agree how the required provision will be delivered and funded. The school will fulfil its own legal and contractual responsibilities throughout the placement.

Admissions will be considered without unlawful discrimination. Reasonable adjustments will be considered and made for disabled prospective students throughout enquiries, visits, assessments and admission. Decisions will be based on individual needs and evidence, including adjustments and support that could enable a placement.

3. Scope

This policy applies to all enquiries, referrals, consultations and admissions to Aurora Woodlands School. It provides guidance for young people, parents, carers, commissioning local authorities and all staff involved in admissions. Enquiries and visits do not constitute an offer of a place.

4. Roles and responsibilities

The Headteacher is responsible for implementing this policy and ensuring that the school's assessment and recommendations are accurate, evidence-based and consistent with its registered provision.

The SENDCO coordinates the review of the EHCP and supporting evidence, gathers advice from education, pastoral and clinical colleagues as appropriate, and identifies the provision, staffing, adjustments and transition arrangements required.

The admissions panel considers the evidence and the school's recommendation. The Panel Lead makes the final decision on whether the school can meet the young person's needs and whether to offer a placement. Staff must not confirm a placement before the Panel Lead has authorised the offer.

The Placements and Business Development Manager and central commissioning team coordinate communications with local authorities and families, funding agreements, formal offers and contracts. School administration supports visits, records and the transfer of information.

5. Definitions

EHCP: Education, Health and Care Plan. Section B describes special educational needs; Section F specifies special educational provision; Section I identifies the educational placement.

LA: local authority. SEND: special educational needs and disabilities. SENDCO: Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Coordinator. ASC: autistic spectrum condition. SEMH: social, emotional and mental health. Panel Lead: the person leading the admissions panel who has final authority on the decision to meet need and offer a placement.

6. Admission process

6.1 Enquiries and referrals

Referrals may be submitted through the Aurora website, directly to the school or through the central commissioning team. Parents and carers are welcome to arrange a visit through the school administrator. Visits and communication will be adapted where reasonable to support accessibility and the young person's participation.

An EHCP is required for admission. Referrals are considered against the school's registered age range and specialist provision. Assessment focuses on the needs and provision described in the EHCP and supporting evidence; diagnostic labels alone do not determine suitability.

6.2 Information gathering and assessment

The school will request the current EHCP, most recent annual review and relevant education reports, together with available clinical advice, medical information, safeguarding information and risk assessments. Missing information will be requested promptly, with its impact on the assessment explained to the referring authority.

Assessment considers the young person's strengths, interests, aspirations, learning, communication, sensory and regulation needs, and the views of the young person and their parents or carers. Observation may take place in the current setting or through an appropriately supported school visit. Where attendance at an assessment visit is difficult, reasonable alternatives will be considered.

The assessment will identify whether the school can deliver the provision specified in Section F, offer an appropriate curriculum and peer group, and provide the required staffing, expertise, therapeutic input and facilities. It will consider actual capacity, individual risks, the potential impact on the young person and existing students, and reasonable adjustments or additional resources that could support a successful placement.

6.3 Panel consideration and decisions

The school's assessment and recommendation will be recorded and submitted to the admissions panel. The Panel Lead will make and record the final decision on whether needs can be met, and a placement offered, including any specific provision or funding requirements. A recommendation or indication of potential suitability is not a formal placement offer.

Referrals will be logged with the date received, response deadline, responsible officer and current status. School referral reviews will take place on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The school will aim to provide its initial assessment or recommendation within five working days of receiving the consultation, identifying promptly any additional information required. This is an internal service target, not a statutory deadline. The placements team will track the referring authority's deadline and coordinate panel consideration and the written response. Where further assessment is needed, the authority will receive an interim response explaining what is outstanding and the anticipated decision date.

Where a placement is declined, the written response will give an individual, evidence-based rationale. It will identify the needs or provision the school cannot meet, any relevant capacity or cohort constraints, and the adjustments or additional resources considered and why these would not resolve the identified difficulties. A lack of suitable space will be distinguished from an inability to meet need.

6.4 Offers and funding

Following the Panel Lead's authorisation, a formal offer may be issued once there is a formal application and written agreement of funding from the commissioning authority. The offer will set out the agreed provision and any conditions to be fulfilled before admission. The funding authority will receive the formal offer, with a copy to parents or carers and the young person as appropriate.

Aurora's placement contract must be signed before the placement starts. The school and placements team will confirm the agreed EHCP provision, staffing, therapeutic support and any additional arrangements with the commissioners. A start date will then be agreed and a Welcome Pack provided. Transport arrangements will be clarified with the family and commissioning authority before the start date.

6.5 Transition and admission

Before admission, the school will arrange a meeting with the young person, parents or carers and relevant professionals to plan an individual transition. The plan will identify key staff, communication arrangements, visits, support and review points. Essential staffing, provision, risk management and relevant medical and safeguarding arrangements must be in place from admission. Safeguarding and education records will be transferred securely, and admission and attendance records maintained in accordance with applicable requirements.

Full-time education is the expectation for pupils of compulsory school age. If an individual transition requires a temporary part-time timetable, it will be used only in very exceptional circumstances in the pupil's best interests. The school and the parent with whom the pupil normally lives must agree the arrangement. It will have a clear purpose, agreed attendance times, regular reviews and a proposed end date for full-time attendance. The school will discuss it with the LA so that the EHCP support package can be reviewed promptly, and will involve any social worker. Safeguarding arrangements for time away from school will be agreed and absence recorded appropriately. A part-time timetable will not be used to manage behaviour.

Teaching and support will be reviewed through the school's usual assessment, planning and EHCP review arrangements. Any concerns about the delivery or suitability of provision will be raised promptly with the family, young person and LA so that appropriate action can be agreed.

6.6 Reconsideration and complaints

Parents, carers, young people or the referring LA may request clarification or reconsideration through the placements team, particularly where new evidence or a change in circumstances is available. Further evidence will be referred to the Panel Lead for a decision. Concerns about the school's handling of the process may be raised under the school's complaints procedure. This does not replace the separate rights to challenge an LA decision about an EHCP; families may seek advice from their local SEND Information, Advice and Support Service.

7. Monitoring arrangements

The Headteacher and SENDCO will review this policy annually, or sooner following relevant changes in legislation, guidance or school arrangements. The Headteacher will approve the school review and submit the policy to the Operations Director for ratification. These are separate stages of policy approval and do not alter the Panel Lead's authority over individual placement decisions.

Monitoring will include the timeliness and reasons for placement decisions, consideration of reasonable adjustments, feedback and complaints, and the effectiveness of transition arrangements. Any changes to the school's registration or section 41 status will prompt a review of this policy.