



# **ACORN FREE SCHOOL**

## **Admissions Policy**

**Date of Issue: January 2019**

**Next Review Due: January 2020**

# ACORN FREE SCHOOL

## Admissions Policy

### Introduction

The Acorn Free School is an alternative provision school for pupils aged 11-16 who would benefit from a placement away from their mainstream setting.

The aim of the school is to promote inclusion and raise standards of behaviour and achievement by proactive early intervention. This will support schools in reducing fixed term and permanent exclusions.

Pupils are likely, but not exclusively, to have experienced school attendance issues, social, emotional or behavioural difficulties. Pupils who will benefit from a placement at the Acorn Free School are likely to fall into the following categories:-

- Pupils who have had, or are at risk of having a fixed term exclusion
- Pupils who are at risk of permanent exclusion
- Pupils who are disaffected with mainstream education to such an extent that continuation of a full-time placement in their setting is no longer a positive option
- Pupils who have social and emotional issues which are impacting on their education. This may manifest itself through negative and challenging behaviours or withdrawal from education and school life
- Pupils who have been bullied, or have bullied others
- Pupils who have had patterns of poor school attendance and cannot re-establish consistent attendance at their mainstream setting
- Pupils who are disadvantaged and vulnerable due to a range of social circumstances (e.g. families experiencing risks such as poverty, substance misuse, mental health issues )

The purpose of this document is to set out the school's admission policy and to demonstrate that pupil admissions will be fair, open and transparent. The admissions policy will:

- Offer schools and academies early intervention placements to meet the needs of disaffected and vulnerable pupils and those who are at risk of permanent exclusion
- Enable the Acorn Free School to provide a structured, stable environment which will ensure that we are able to meet the individual needs of each pupil

- Provide a rapid response to schools and academies within 48 hours of emergency referral
- Support the aims of the Acorn Free School which is to re-engage pupils with learning and return them to a mainstream education

We already work closely with a wide range of Academies and maintained schools throughout and beyond Lincolnshire. We have a robust admissions process which referring organisations must follow before a young person starts their education with us. We are determined for the school to continue to be seen as a partner in fulfilling the education needs of schools and the local community. We are an equal opportunities non-discriminatory school and we therefore welcome applications for admission of young people from diverse backgrounds and with varying needs. Each admission is considered on a case-by-case basis to ensure that the pupils we admit are ones which will benefit from the education provision we offer. The Acorn Free School operates a fair, objective and transparent admissions system that includes a complaints procedure.

### **Admission Arrangements**

The primary aim of the Acorn Free School is to provide early intervention for schools and pupils and help re-engage pupils with their learning in a mainstream setting. Due to this the majority of placements at the Acorn Free School will be short term, part-time placements which will be subject to regular review. Full time or longer term placements will be available where it is clear that an early return to mainstream school would not be appropriate. All placements at the Acorn Free School are on a dual registered basis.

The Acorn Academy Trust will only admit pupils to the Acorn Free School in accordance with DfE guidelines - 'Children of compulsory age can only be admitted to an alternative provision Free School by being referred from local authorities, schools and Academies using their existing referral powers or duties.'

The Acorn Free School will be run in accordance with all equalities law. It will admit pupils aged between 11 and 16 years who have been referred to the school through one of the referral routes set out below:

1. Referred by a Local Authority or by an Academy which, under general powers in the Articles of the Academy Trust may send pupils off-site to an alternative provision Academy as part of early intervention measures to address behaviour
2. Named pupils on application from the local authority, in accordance with a School Attendance Order<sup>1</sup> after consultation with the Secretary of State.

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<sup>1</sup> Local authorities are able to issue school attendance orders if a child is not attending school. These are legally binding upon parents. Such an order might, for instance, be appropriate where a child has a place at Acorn Free School but his/her parents are refusing to send him/her to school. The order will require a parent to ensure his/her child attends a specified school.

3. Referred by a maintained school or Academy may when they have a duty under Section 100 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006<sup>2</sup>.

Acorn Free School does not accept applications from parents/carers or self-referrals from potential pupils.

### **Pupil Admission Numbers**

As the school will operate with predominantly short-term and part-time placements the admission numbers should allow for considerable flexibility in meeting commissioner's needs.

Pupils will not be admitted above the published admission number unless there are exceptional circumstances.

School placements are purchased by commissioners on an annual basis, the commissioning process takes place during April – June in readiness for September. Governors will agree the cost of annual pupil placements and publish this information to accompany the school prospectus. The cost of placements is currently broadly in line with the equivalent AWPU. Purchased placements do not equate to the admission of a named pupil. A commissioned place offers the opportunity to use the placement flexibly throughout the academic year for a number of pupils on a short term and/or part-time basis. The majority of placements at the Acorn Free School are intended to be planned, early interventions which the annual commissioned place model supports. Through the admissions procedure a longer term, full-time placement can be agreed, however the pupil will always remain dual registered with their mainstream setting, and be subject to regular progress reviews.

The Acorn Free School will maintain a small number of 'emergency placements' each year, not commissioned on an annual basis. This will allow the Acorn Free School to respond quickly and work with new commissioners each academic year, when existing annual placements have been purchased. Emergency placements will also ensure fair access for pupils whose schools do not commission an annual placement. Applications for pupils on 'emergency placements' will follow the same admission procedure as those for pupils accessing support via an annual commissioned place. When all emergency placements are full the oversubscriptions criteria will apply.

Prospective commissioners should be aware that the nature of the provision will mean that pupil numbers fluctuate throughout the year, and are at their lowest in September/October. Allowing for our planned increase in PAN, the Acorn Free School has reached its maximum annual commissioned places in December/January each academic year. Demand for places

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<sup>2</sup> Section 100 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 requires maintained schools and Academies to arrange full-time education for pupils on a fixed period exclusion of more than five days from the sixth day of the exclusion.

often peaks around this time, and also towards the end of the academic year, when the school is typically oversubscribed.

### **Admission Procedures**

Successful referral to The Acorn Free School are most likely where the following conditions are met for a particular student:

1. That full-time mainstream education whilst currently not deemed appropriate, is the long term aim of school, students and parents
2. That a personalised education and behaviour programme will stabilise mainstream school circumstances and aid progress and achievement
3. That there is a clear need for the type of provision on offer and that this provision is not available in the mainstream setting
4. That the referral is not a direct substitute for provision already identified in a Statement of Special Educational Needs/Education Health Care Plan. If specific support is mentioned in a Statement of SEN/EHC plan then the school/LA referring the student to the Acorn Free School needs to continue to fulfil specific tasks or by negotiation and agreement, devolve the task(s) to The Acorn Free School. This will also involve devolvement of funding
5. That the support available to the young person from other agencies prior to placement continues
6. That the interests of the young person are the priority

### ***Prospective students and parents are welcome to visit the Acorn Free School prior to the formal referral process***

The referral procedure is as follows, and applies once a commissioner has purchased a placement at the Acorn Free School, or when an emergency placement is requested:-

1. Applications for a placement must be made on the Acorn Free School referral form and have the consent of parents or carers. All referral forms need to be accompanied with the pupil's most recent IEP or behaviour plan
2. Acorn Free School will discuss potential referrals both with commissioners and the pupil's parents/carers, where a pupil is not already known to the Acorn outreach service. In cases where a higher level of difficulty leads to consideration of longer term support at the Acorn Free School, commissioners will be asked to set up a planning meeting to explore in greater detail the needs and capabilities of the learner and the nature of the provision required. Where there is some doubt about whether the Acorn Free School is the correct provision to meet a pupil's needs, an assessment place/probationary period may be offered.

3. Referrals may be made at any time throughout the year; however for planned interventions it is the intention that these commence at the start of a school term.
4. Placements will be offered to all pupils whose needs can be met by the Acorn Free School, subject to published admission numbers.
5. Within 48 hours of an emergency placement request the head teacher of the Acorn Free School will contact the commissioner to set up a meeting with parents/carers, SENCO and any other relevant agency.
6. All placements will be reviewed at termly intervals to determine their feasibility. The Headteacher will make decisions regarding appropriateness of placement after consultation with all concerned parties. It is always our aim to enable students to return to the mainstream setting and the vast majority of our students follow this route. In all cases we work closely with the referring school or provider to ensure that the provision made for the young person is absolutely in his or her best interests and provides the greatest opportunity for achieving positive outcomes.
7. The Acorn Free School endeavours to offer successful personalised education to all young people who are admitted. Sometimes, however valid the placement seems, it may become evident that a young person's stay at The Acorn School will not work in their best interests. We aim to tailor each young person's provision to suit their individual requirements. If, however, we are unable to meet their needs we will review each case on its merits to agree (for the student's best interests) a more appropriate option for all concerned.
8. The Secretary of State may direct The Acorn Free School to admit a pupil regardless of the above and that direction shall be binding on The Acorn Free School

### **Pupil registration and information sharing**

The Acorn Free School will make sure that all pupils are registered accordingly in line with section 434 of the Education Act 1996. All part-time and full-time pupils or those attending on early intervention or on fixed term exclusion will remain on the register at the commissioning school and with the Acorn Free School (dual registration).

### **Oversubscription Criteria and Appeals**

The Acorn Free School aims to be flexible in its approach to placement requests and will at all times strive to offer a part-time 3 day per week placement as a minimum to commissioners. In the case of oversubscription, after the admission of pupils with statements of Special Educational Needs/Education Health Care Plans where Acorn Free School is named on the statement, the following criteria will be applied

1. Looked After Children who are in public care and previously Looked After Children
2. Following that, pupils will be offered a place at the Acorn Free School according to individual need and whether these can be best met by a placement at the school.

Additional information from commissioners will be requested to make an informed judgement as follows:-

- Evidence from any professionals or supporting agencies stating that placement at the Acorn Free School would meet the pupils needs
- Details of strategies and support implemented in school and the current level of provision in place for the pupil
- Number and duration of fixed term exclusions in the preceding year. Those pupils with the highest number of exclusions will take precedence
- Identification of vulnerable children (e.g. safeguarding issues ongoing, children who have been out of education, children who are young carers, children who have extenuating home circumstances etc.)

Placements will be offered initially to pupils where the commissioning school can evidence that another professional or external agency has recommended or supported a referral.

Priority will then be given pupils where the commissioning school can demonstrate that they have fulfilled all of the criteria for pupils as recognised in the SEN code of practice and where there are additional factors identifying the pupil as vulnerable

### **Complaints Process Criteria**

Admission Appeals arrangements are not statutory regarding AP schools, however at Acorn Free School we want to be as fair, objective and transparent as we can with all stakeholders regarding our admissions procedures.

Commissioners have the right of appeal against the refusal of a place at the Acorn Free School. Commissioners wishing to appeal must follow the procedure contained within the complaints policy.

The Commissioner of any child who is refused a place at Acorn Free School has a right of appeal to an Independent Appeals Panel. The panel consist of three people who are independent of the school Body and the Local Authority. The panel will consider the circumstances of the case put before them, both the Acorn Free School and the Commissioner must abide by the decision it makes.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Chair, Governing Body

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Headteacher