



# **Odyssey House School**

## **Admissions Policy**

|                           |                       |              |                           |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|--------------|---------------------------|
| <b>Author / reviewer:</b> | <b>Shilpa Walia</b>   | <b>Role:</b> | <b>Director</b>           |
| <b>Date:</b>              | <b>September 2023</b> |              |                           |
| <b>Approved by:</b>       | <b>Charu Kashyap</b>  | <b>Role:</b> | <b>CEO and Proprietor</b> |
| <b>Review date:</b>       | <b>September 2025</b> |              |                           |

## Introduction

Odyssey House School is an independent co-educational, non-denominational school for learners aged from 7 to 18 years old.

Odyssey House School Wokingham is an independent school, regulated by Ofsted. We are registered for 45 learners and offer places to children who are unable to manage in a large mainstream education setting.

We educate children and young people aged between 7 and 18 years who are of average or above average cognitive ability, with a diagnosis of language and communication difficulties, high functioning autism, Asperger's Syndrome, mild social and emotional difficulties and those difficulties associated with specific learning difficulties. Some of our learners have high levels of anxiety and may have been school refusers for a number of reasons including having had very poor education experiences in the past.

## Our Mission

To change a child's experience of education through connection, nurture and belief to help them learn, grow and achieve transformative life outcomes.

## Our Aims & Ethos

Odyssey House School was created for learners who are unable to cope in a large mainstream education environment and don't quite meet the threshold for a special needs school. It is geared to support those young people who need a bespoke, holistic and therapeutic education approach to help them learn, grow successfully and achieve their personal best. We are also able to support learners who may have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

## Our goals

- ★ With an **innovative child-led approach, collaborative nature** and **exceptional team**, we will become the go to school for learners who need a small and nurturing education environment.
- ★ Through our evidence-based approach and exceptional levels of service, we will be known for making a significant difference to the futures of our learners.
- ★ Learners will relish their experience of education, and we will help them build happy childhood memories.

At Odyssey, we are committed to our aims and goals of ensuring that all learners who are admitted to Odyssey House School are happy and have a positive education experience.

We believe that it is never a child who doesn't fit into a school but that schools are not geared up to meet the needs of every child. Our ultimate aim is to ensure that through a thorough admissions process we offer a placement only when we know that the child will hugely benefit from the school's offering and that we can help them achieve their personal best. Hence, we accept that Odyssey will not be for everyone, and that sometime learners and parents may not necessarily understand our ethos and approach.

## Our offering

- A small nurturing learning environment – class sizes are very small and we have up to 6 learners in a classroom setting. This offers learners the opportunity to have focused support and teaching and learning can be differentiated and personalised to meet the needs of every child
- A high staff: student ratio
- An innovative and engaging curriculum with personal, social, emotional well-being and development at the core of all learning
- A personalised and engaging education programme that works at the pace of the learner making learning an exciting experience
- A unique curriculum pathway that allows learners to choose and define their learning journey and flourish in different subjects across our curriculum offering
- A range of enrichment activities to give learners opportunities to new and varied experiences and help them find things that they may want to develop further (e.g. sailing, electric go-karting, cycling, trekking etc) The enrichment activities have a direct link to the curriculum and learners are able to achieve relevant qualifications depending on their interest, engagement and performance.
- Specialist transition and education re-engagement programmes for pupils who have been out of education for a while and for those who find it difficult to engage in full-time education
- A team of trained and qualified staff who have a good understanding of SEN
- Close partnership working with parents and multi-agency professionals
- Specialist assessments and support as required
- A trauma-informed and therapeutic approach to education and behaviour

We find that learners adapt to the nurturing environment at Odyssey House School very well and in a short period of time make great progress with school attendance and re-engagement routines. We always encourage our learners with their progress and have high expectations for them. However, the majority of our students have experienced huge gaps in their learning journey so it is important for parents and learners to have realistic expectations of their outcomes. Close home school partnerships are vital and play a key role in the outcomes for students at the school. To ensure this support we feel it is important that parents/ carers sign up to the home school partnership agreement as part of the admissions process. We need parental buy-in and understanding of our approach and offering and encourage regular meetings and timely communication to ensure that all parties are working to support our learner to achieve their agreed goals and targets.

The school helps learners to understand their career and educational options, set goals and then provides them with the support needed to achieve their goals. This could mean that learners choose to remain at Odyssey House School for their entire school journey or they may aspire to attend a larger school in a few years and may choose Odyssey to be the stepping stone to help them re-integrate into a larger school setting. We have successfully transitioned learners in and out of the school and helped them achieve their goals.

On the rare occasion that the school is either unable to meet the needs of the learner or unable to form a positive working relationship with parents/ carers whereby it starts to impact on the school's ability to keep to its offering, then the school reserves the right to review the child's placement.

## Admission 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.

### **Learners can be offered a place and start at any time during the year if there is a vacancy available.**

- Young person is aged between 7-16 years old at time of admission.
- Private fee-paying learners and Local Authority funded learners.
- School refusers who have experienced poor education experiences that have led to them disengaging with education
- School anxiety and associated mental health issues
- Adverse childhood trauma / experiences that have had a significant impact on a young person's learning (e.g. loss and bereavement, bullying, witnessing domestic violence or parental separation)
- Average or above average cognitive ability. Any cognitive impairments should be mild (we would expect that learners would be achieving no less than one to two years below national expectations) We do however understand that learners who have missed a large amount of their education may be further behind and hence we will consider each case based on the student's previous education journey as well.
- A single diagnosis of language & communication difficulties, Asperger's Syndrome, high functioning autism, autism spectrum disorder/condition, or mild social pragmatic difficulties.
- ADHD, PDA, Mental Health disorders, EBD and SpLD as a comorbid diagnosis only and **NOT** as primary diagnosis or main need.
- All learners should have current up-to-date paperwork or reports. Learners referred from local authorities should be the subject of a full EHCP (current and up to date) or undergoing statutory assessment.
- Learners are admitted on consideration of papers (EHCP, reports from key professionals, previous school reports etc.), assessments and observations completed at Odyssey House School, discovery day feedback from staff and student council, interviews with parents (and for KS3, KS4 & KS4+ with the student directly). This is to ensure that the school can suitably meet the needs of the young person. Parents and families must be in full support of the school placement and fully follow the school's approach and philosophy. They must sign and agree to the 'Parent Partnership Agreement' that is sent out with the confirmed offer.
- The school maintains a very small waiting list to ensure that learners who can benefit from the school's offering are able to be offered a place as soon as it becomes available. This is reviewed and updated by the School Director on a termly basis.
- The young person is socially and academically compatible with the existing learners where there is a vacancy. Admission of any new learners must not be detrimental to the needs of existing learners – no student should compromise the opportunities and learning experiences of others within the school.
- The young person is compatible to 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 (e.g. their own room) that we do not have available.
- Vacancies are matched to need. The School Director, Head Teacher and admissions team will seek to ensure there is compatibility of age, social ability, communication style and gender if applicable. The school should be satisfied that the young person feels comfortable in the environment and that all needs can be met.

## Starting the admissions process

The admissions process is designed to achieve a successful fit between the school and its learners, by allowing the school to gain a realistic picture of the prospective pupil, and the pupil and parents to gain one of the school. The school is a successful learning community and it is important for you and your child that you understand and are sympathetic to the school's ethos and approach.

The first step is to register your child for entry: registration forms are available from the admissions team ([admissoins@odysseyeducation.org.uk](mailto:admissoins@odysseyeducation.org.uk)) or via the website ([www.odysseyeducation.org.uk](http://www.odysseyeducation.org.uk)). A non-refundable registration fee may be applicable, you will be informed whether this applies to you.

The school will contact you to confirm your registration and to let you know the situation regarding places and waiting lists. The next step is to arrange for you to meet a member of the Senior Leadership Team, and arrange a time for you and your child to visit the school.

## How we (and you) decide if Odyssey House is the right school for your child

We want you and your child to get to know and experience Odyssey House School before you make your decision. We also aim to get to know you and your child. We are honest with parents and learners about the offering at Odyssey House and when we meet you, we will do our best to help you understand our ethos and approach. We ask you to be honest with us and to be open about your child and what he or she needs. Understanding your child's needs fully will help us enable to ensure that we are able to make an informed decision throughout the admissions process.

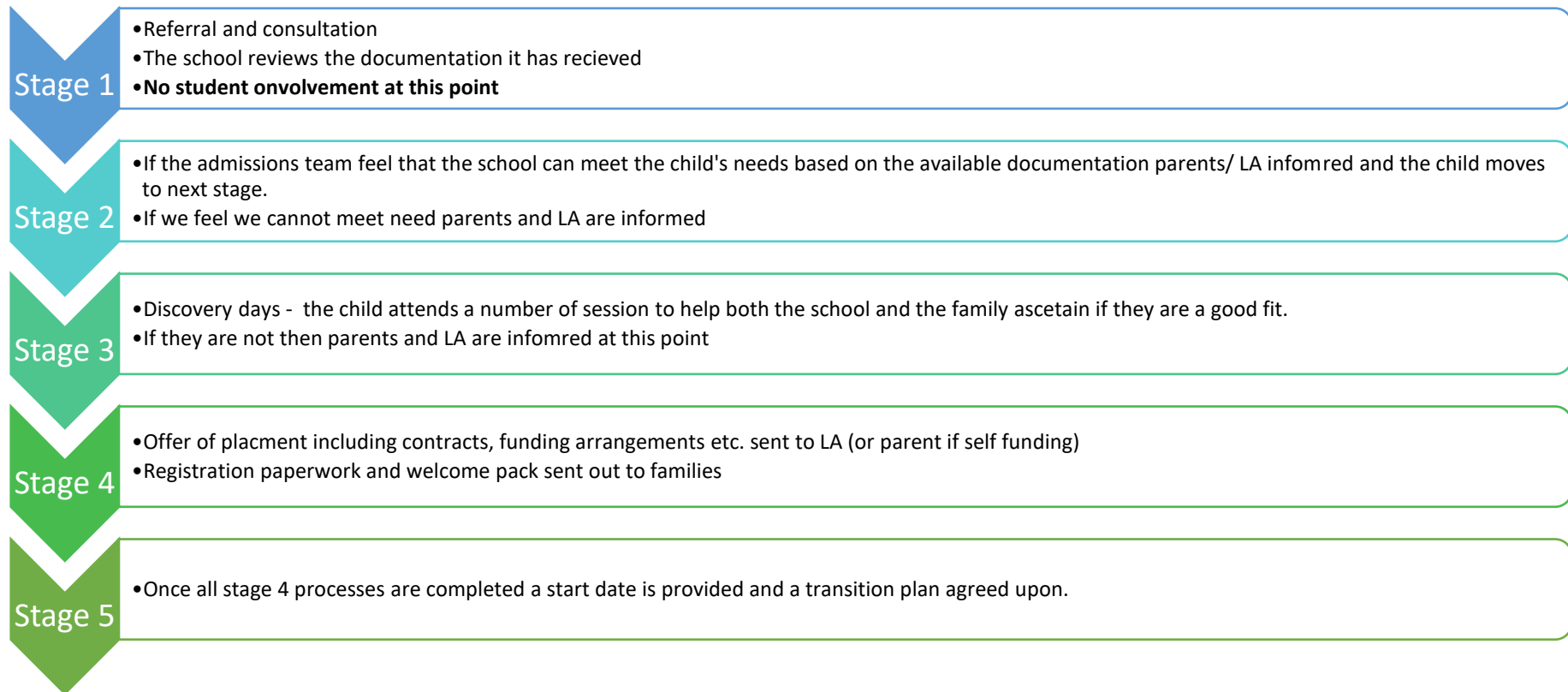
We offer places to children who will thrive at Odyssey House and who will contribute positively to a school community that is creative, social and academic. In assessing potential learners, we recognise a range of abilities (including academic ability, but also including creative, personal and social) and look for potential.

Odyssey House is an inclusive school and will make reasonable adjustments to cater for the needs of applicants while giving equal importance to ensuring that no other pupil's education is impaired. All parents are asked to complete a form detailing their child's requirements and any reasonable adjustments necessary for the child to be education at Odyssey House.

The school has the final decision in all cases of admissions.

## Admissions flowchart

The school's admissions flowchart, as below, is a step-by-step guide to help you through the process of getting your child registered for the school. Whether you have already had a discussion with us about including our school on your child's statement of special educational needs, or whether you are concerned that your current school is not meeting your child's needs and are considering other options, we hope you find this guide useful. We also encourage parents, carers and social workers to contact the school to find out more about the provision on offer.



## **Pre-admission planning and process**

The Inclusion Manager and Headteacher lead on all admission enquiries and referrals. Supported by the central admissions team. The inclusion manager is the single point of contact for the school for all matters relating to a child's admission into the school.

The pre-admission stage requires collation of information and apart from filling out the necessary pre-admission / referral form, the school gathers the relevant papers.

The papers include:

- latest EHCP/statement,
- most recent school report,
- and if available EP report, OT report, SALT report any other relevant documents.

The admission process will progress to the next stage if all the relevant information has been shared with the inclusion manager. The inclusion manager consults with the headteacher, SLT and the multi-disciplinary team as needed and agrees to take forward admissions or not. If we believe we can meet your child needs we will progress to the next stage. The Inclusion manager responds to the family and/or Local Authority, accordingly.

## **Admission Process**

### **Stage 1**

- ⇒ The school receives a referral/consultation in writing from the local authority with the student's EHCP plan and other relevant documentation;
- ⇒ The school's admission and referral team review the documentation and have an initial discussion on whether they can meet the student's needs based on the documentation provided;
- ⇒ If the EHCP and other relevant reports / documents are significantly out of date, the school will consult with the local authority and request permission to contact the professional team currently working with the student and/or family;
- ⇒ The child will not be involved at this stage.

### **Stage 2**

- ⇒ Once the school has received all relevant documentation and information and if the school feels they can meet the student's needs and an appropriate placement is available, the school will contact the family and arrange a meeting with the prospective student, family and/or other professionals;
- ⇒ The aim of this meeting is to consider the potential placement, support required and gather any other information required to evaluate the likely success of the placement.

### **Stage 3**

- ⇒ The school will liaise directly with parents to arrange a school visit;
- ⇒ This will be followed by a discovery day to include observations and assessments) at the school in which the child will visit the school and participate in a typical day. The school and parents will decide on a duration of the discovery day, ensuring the child's best interest is always accounted for. The discovery day may need to be spread over a 1 or 2 days depending on the duration and observations made on the initial discovery day;
- ⇒ The school will complete a discovery day evaluation form, and this will form the basis of identifying next steps. Following this, school may require further information and/or may need to arrange additional meetings with the parents and/or child.

### **Stage 4**

- ⇒ Following the discovery day and if the school feels it can meet the needs of the child, the school will make an offer of placement (consultation response) to the placing local authority;
- ⇒ The school's consultation response will provide details of the next steps and process to secure placement at the school;
- ⇒ The local authority will sign and return the offer letter and sign the school's terms and conditions / SLA provided by the school;
- ⇒ The school will send out invoices to the local authority based on the signed offer letter;
- ⇒ Once the local authority has made the due payments as per the offer letter, school will confirm placement and issue a start date for the child;
- ⇒ The school will contact the parents and send out school registration paperwork and a welcome pack for the child;
- ⇒ The local authority will add the school's name on the EHCP and provide the school with the final copy of the pupils EHCP

### **Stage 5**

- ⇒ Once all the placement formalities have been completed and have been agreed between all parties and the above outlined steps in stage 4 are completed, the school will provide a start date for the child and the child will be placed on the school roll;
- ⇒ The school will be in contact with parents to discuss a child-centred transition plan aimed at reducing anxiety and providing the right support for a successful transition in the school.



## Important Information- Admission delays and Early Termination of Placement

- ⇒ The school understands that due to high volume of referrals, funding decisions at local authority panels etc. may result in a delayed response from the local authority in confirming placement as outlined in the school's offer letter;
- ⇒ In the above situation, the school will work closely with the local authority to support and accelerate the process. However, we are unable to bypass the processes outlined in stage 4;
- ⇒ The school sends local authority reminders for approaching admission deadlines and encourages timely offer letter responses and payments. However, the school cannot be held responsible for delays in the child's admission date if the school's admission process is not completed (stage 4) and the delays have not been as a result of the school's processes outlined in this document;
- ⇒ We understand delays can be frustrating, especially when it is taking longer than anticipated and thereby resulting in delays for the education of your child. However, we request that respectful communication is maintained during such times with all school staff;
- ⇒ The school cannot be held responsible for admission delays if referrals are made in the week before the school is due to break up for half term/school holidays or a consultation is made during the school holiday/break. In such situations, the school will resume the admissions process after the school holiday;
- ⇒ The school has a waiting list and is unable to guarantee placement if there are significant delays in securing the placement with the school. In such circumstances, the school has the right to withdraw the offer and offer the place to the next child in the waiting list;
- ⇒ In very rare circumstances, the school or parents may raise concerns about the suitability of the placement after the placement has commenced. In such a situation, the school will hold an internal review within 2 months of a start date, where all aspects of the pupil's placement will be reviewed. In the unlikely event that the school is unable to meet needs of the child, the school would hold an emergency review and invite pupil and parent feedback for the review as well as the placing LA to decide next steps and agree the support plan for the child if the decision is for the placement to conclude at the school.
- ⇒ Independent schools have different types of registrations and in some cases they opt in to be a S41 school. This means that sometimes parents or local authorities may feel that an Independent School is best placed to meet the needs of their child or young person. Where appropriate an independent school could be named by parents or a local authority in section 'I' of the child or young person's Education Health and Care Plan. Odyssey House School is **not** a s41 school. The school has the final decision in all cases of admissions.

## Admissions Overview

1. We aim to provide as much information about the school as possible to parents and local authorities at point of an enquiry for a place. The school accepts referrals and organises admissions visits and discovery days throughout the academic year. Admissions and intake into the school is not restricted to September only.
2. Where placements are funded by local authorities, we encourage parents to consult with the LA as soon as possible about an admission at Odyssey House School.
3. If during the referral stage the school determines (through reviewing the young person's papers, reports and initial conversation with the parents) that the school may be able to meet the young person's needs and the school has an available vacancy, then the school will invite parents to visit the school and meet with either the Headteacher or a member of the SLT.
4. If after the school tour, the parents are still keen to pursue the placement, then as a next step, the young person will be invited to visit the school with the parents and meet with the Headteacher. At this stage, if the placement is LA funded then we will seek written confirmation of funding being available should Odyssey House School offer the child a placement. If the placement is privately funded or parents are going through the process of a funding application being approved, then the school registration fees will need to be paid to organise the discovery day/s for the child.
5. If the school visit goes well, the young person will be offered discovery days - this could be for a few hours or a full day. The day is usually planned around an activity or lesson that the learner is interested in. The purpose of the day is to help the learner get a feel for the school and also an opportunity for them to interact with staff and peers. If required, a couple of discovery days could be offered to ensure that the child is comfortable and for the school to assess that it is able to provide the child with the required support for a positive education experience if they were to join the school.
6. 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.
7. The school will send out an admissions pack which will include information about the school for both parents and student and detailed pre-admission questionnaires and permissions forms.
8. 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 and any associated risk assessments.
9. A baseline assessment will commence after the first few weeks of the student starting at school. In most circumstances this will take a term to complete. This is to allow the student the time and opportunity to settle into the school environment and start to build initial relationships with the staff and peers.

## **Transition offers**

As part of the initial assessment of needs and meetings with the student and parents, the school may offer a transition offer. This means that the student will be offered a full-time place at the school but will have an agreed transition plan in line with their needs and education engagement.

Transitions are often difficult for children who have autism. It will be essential to consider mechanisms/strategies that may make the process easier for the young person. These may include 'My Education Journey' book 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).

Transition plans will be made with the LA, the current school placement and the parent/carer and will be reviewed by the school fortnightly. Any changes to the plan will include the views of the student, the progress they have made against targets in their transition plan, parents views and teachers / intervention leads' feedback.

### **Application Process in summary:**

#### **Private application for fee paying families/students not funded by Local Authorities:**

- An enquiry is made and details are taken and logged.
- A prospectus is sent to the family.
- Families are asked to send any reports or assessments they have had on their child.
- The Admissions team will review the documents and if initial findings show we can possibly meet needs and have a vacancy a tour and a visit to the school is arranged.
- The school will carry out admissions assessments and interviews.
- The school will invite the young person to attend discovery days (at this stage a non-refundable registration fee may be applicable)
- The school will offer or decline to offer a place to the young person.
- Families fill in an acceptance form and pay the school deposit and first term fees as per the school's terms and conditions.
- A student pack is sent home.
- A support or transition plan (depending on the education offer) is put in place.

#### **Local Authority referrals:**

- The school receives the referral sent from the Local Authority.
- Inclusion manger will review the initial documents and will circulate papers to the admissions team. An initial response will be formulated and sent to the LA. This will outline if the school are happy to pursue the enquiry or decline.
- Contact is made with parents and a tour and visit to the school is booked.
- If families are happy to continue then they are asked to fill out an application.
- The school will carry out admissions assessments and interviews.
- The school will invite the young person to attend discovery days.
- The school will offer or decline to offer a place to the young person.
- The school will liaise with Local Authority who will in turn communicate with the parents.
- If placement is agreed, then the Local Authority will name Odyssey House School on the EHCP.
- Parents will be sent a parent pack, including an acceptance form to be returned asap.
- A support or transition plan (depending on the education offer) is put in place.

**Private enquiry for families seeking Local Authority funding:**

- An enquiry is made and details are taken and logged.
- School information is sent to the family.
- Families are asked to send any reports or assessments (including EHCP) about their child.
- Families are asked to fill out an application.
- Communication with the Local Authority about the enquiry begins.
- The school will carry out admissions assessments and interviews.
- The school will invite the young person to attend discovery days.
- The school will offer or decline to offer a place to the young person.
- The school will liaise with Local Authority who will in turn communicate with the parents.
- If the LA agree to fund the place the process continues as outlined above. If the LA does not agree to fund a place, possible panel meetings and or tribunal may take place between parents and Local Authorities. Odyssey House School may send a representative to any of these as deemed necessary.