

The New School at West Heath

Policy on Admissions Criteria

Introduction

The New School at West Heath is popular with special educational needs sections of local authorities that are seeking places for young people who have failed, or have been failed in the mainstream schools. This is because of our unusual approach in expecting high academic achievement from students with special needs.

There are three main routes of referral, local educational authorities, parents who fully fund places at the school directly and parents whose children receive full or partial bursaries. Students in the first category almost invariably have Statements of Special Educational Need. Students in the second two categories usually do not although their needs are none the less severe for that.

Aims and Objectives

To provide a therapeutic, caring environment where children who have failed or have been failed in mainstream or special schools can restart their education.

We aim to restore their confidence in the possibility, value and worth of education. The majority of our students join us having experienced severe trauma. They may also have lost faith in the educational system through their poor experiences. Many will have been temporarily or permanently excluded from a range of schools and will have been relegated to receiving a minimal number of hours home teaching each week (typically 5).

The students come to us disenfranchised, dispirited and suspicious of our open and positive intentions to recognise their individuality for what it is. We aim to work with them to build their self-confidence through their experience of success and achievement. We hope that they will discover that they can enjoy the experience of learning. We want them to find that learning is not only rewarding and enjoyable but also that it does not end with schooldays.

Mostly students join us too late to be helped to re-integrate back into mainstream schools. Frequently it takes several years before the needs of our students are recognised and understood. They blossom in our nurturing environment but often remain still too vulnerable to return to mainstream education. Our aim is to integrate them into the experience of and success in educational achievement.

However we are cognisant of the recommendations prescribed in the Code of Practice. We are aware of the need to support our students' return to mainstream education (or its equivalent if this is desirable) and in their best

interests and give support insofar as this is commensurate with the students' well being and parental wishes. We place great emphasis on helping them achieve qualifications to enter further education and take their place in society.

Admissions Criteria

The New School does not sit at all comfortably with the label EBD. We see two particular problems with this designation.

1. In reality is it understood and interpreted as BD with minimal attention given to the E behind the B. The current way of categorising students is not of our devising and we are working with a system which has a limited number of designations available. We would prefer to see a category of students identified based on their need rather than their difficulty. We would therefore propose the designation "vulnerable". This would be shorthand for a student who is educationally, socially, emotionally, psychologically / psychiatrically or physically vulnerable. Another difficulty with the label EBD is that it has no reference to learning, surely an omission when thinking about categories of educational need.
2. Behaviour is contextual. Frequently a youngster whose documentation describes a catalogue of troubled and troublesome behaviour changes beyond all recognition when given a fresh start in a sympathetic and supportive environment. Acting out behaviour may be telling us more about the way a child has been treated than about the nature of the child themselves. It may be a response to context rather than something inherent.

The New School takes students who are vulnerable. They may be vulnerable for a variety of complex reasons always emotionally linked to social, psychological, psychiatric or physical needs which have a severe impact on their lives and on their learning to such an extent that mainstream education is inappropriate.

We take students at Key Stages 3 and 4 who have experienced a breakdown of schooling and who have *average potential*. We do not take students with severe learning difficulties and who would require a modified rather than differentiated curriculum. It is, however, true that many of the students on arrival at the school are considerably under-performing for a variety of reasons including un-addressed literacy issues. The students need intensive help in order to begin realising their true potential.

We would be able to help students whose needs have been described in one or more of the following ways:-

- diagnosed with ME and post viral syndrome
- illnesses which have prevented normal school attendance and progress
- phobias inhibiting school attendance or "normal" living

- refusal to attend school
- suffered depression and related problems which in the extreme have led to self harm and suicide attempts
- relationship problems and lack of social skills
- suffered family trauma as a result of events such as accidents or bereavement
- social difficulties and may have suffered extreme discrimination or bullying
- family difficulties which need the child to be the carer
- been failed by earlier schools with the child retreating “into a shell” and unable to verbalise the problems
- specific learning difficulties with resultant behaviour reactions
- social and communication difficulties
- Asperger's Syndrome
- mental health problems
- suffered as a result of poverty and deprivation
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

Whilst we are able to cater to meet the individual needs described above, a decision to offer a placement will only be made following a full and comprehensive assessment.

We do not normally take students who:

- Need an alternative curriculum to that available at the New School, (which is based on the National Curriculum, suitably differentiated. Many of the students on arrival at the school are considerably under-performing often because of un-addressed literacy issues. These need intensive help in order to begin realising their true potential)
- Have had a history of arson
- Have had a history of bringing fire arms, knives or other dangerous items into school
- Have had a history of violence directed against property, students or staff – not explained contextually
- Need physical restraint as a regular part of their behaviour management. Some of our students have had a history of “acting-out” behaviour but this has not been repeated with us, because the environment and ethos is different. This is something that is considered very carefully during an assessment period
- Persistently refuse to take their prescribed medication
- Whose behaviour creates unacceptable health & safety risks, especially in food technology, design & technology and physical education
- Have been known to supply or deal in drugs at school
- Who have severe learning difficulties and who are unable to access the broad and balanced curriculum delivered for students of average or above potential.

A decision to offer a permanent placement will only be made following an annual review, held in the first term of attendance, and comprehensive assessment. In some instances, usually when there is an issue surrounding the student's willingness to accept personal responsibility for his/her behaviour the assessment period may be extended. In such cases there will be review meetings at least termly involving parents and the sponsoring authority where targets will be monitored and set.

Admission Criteria	
This Policy should be read in conjunction with the following policies: Admission Procedure, Curriculum	
Appendices:	
Monitoring of Policy Implementation is the responsibility of: The Senior Leadership Team	
Lead responsibility:	Principal
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