



Lower School and Early Years

First Steps to Learning



[Information for new families](#)

We hope the information in this booklet will answer some of your questions. Parents are children's first and most important educator; a two way flow of information between families and school is vital to the development of a positive working relationship. This will ensure we are able to provide a caring environment which meets the needs of your child: educationally, socially and emotionally. Children are most successful when there is a positive partnership between parents and school.

The Walnuts School

Lower School Department
Hertford Place
Bletchley
MK3 7HE



Tel: 01908 646119

Email: admin@walnuts.milton-keynes.sch.uk

The information contained in this booklet is in addition to the whole school prospectus, which provides comprehensive information relating to the school's admission policy, ethos and values, staffing and a wide range of issues relating to the school day, education and assessment.

Walnuts is a special school for children with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD)

Walnuts is based at two sites:

1. The Lower School Department at Hertford Place, Bletchley.
Tel: 01908 646119
2. The main school at Hazeley, Milton Keynes.
Tel: 01908 563885

At the Lower School Department, the telephone will be answered by Jacquie who is happy to deal with any enquiries or take messages. There will be another member of the Business Support Team on a Mondays and Tuesdays.



Tel: 01908 646119



Our Interim Executive Headteacher is Jonathan Budd and our Interim Head of School is Lisa Munro. The Head of Department is Kim Harman. They are all willing to discuss with you issues about your child's education, behaviour management and welfare.



Classes at the Lower School Department

Pine:

Reception; Yr 1

Cedar:

Yr 1, 2 & 3

Ash

Year 2 & 3

Laurel

Years 2, 3 & 4

Holly:

Years 2 & 3

Cypress:

Years 3 & 4

Sycamore:

Years 3, 4 & 5

Cherry:

Years 3 & 4



Key Workers

In addition to your child's class teacher, a member of staff from your child's class will be named as your child's 'key worker'. The role of the key worker is to help ensure your child's care is tailored to meet their individual needs. They will help your child become familiar with their new class and to settle in. The key worker will continue to build a settled and secure relationship with your child and continue to be their key worker for the rest of the school year. They will keep you informed about daily progress and ensure that a positive relationship develops that benefits both you and your child.



Positive relationships

We want our children to feel safe and happy so they are able to develop their full potential socially, emotionally, intellectually and physically. We aim to provide a secure and caring environment that supports each child's need for a broad and balanced curriculum. We want our parents to feel welcome and involved from the beginning of their child's school life.

We aim to work closely with all parents. We will listen to your views and seek information about your child so we can build upon your child's experiences, knowledge, understanding and skills and thus provide appropriate opportunities to meet your child's needs.

We hold Parents Evenings every term, or Meet the Teacher coffee morning if your child moves to a new class in September, you will be invited in to meet their new teacher. We also hold a yearly Annual Review to look at what is working well (or not) for your child, what support needs to be put in place and to set new targets and update the Education Health Care Plan as necessary, this is usually held within 12 months of the last annual review date or the date of the finalised statement.

Home visits

Your child will have been introduced to their class and staff on their transition visit. Before your child starts at school the teacher and key worker will visit you at home. This gives your child an opportunity to meet staff within the security of their own home. As parents we are sure you will also have a lot of questions to ask and this is an ideal time for those questions to be asked and answered.

Starting school



Starting school is going to be a big step for your child and will involve change. Children with autism can find change challenging, change can equal anxiety. In the Reception class your child will be given their own start date and they will initially, for the first half term, attend school for mornings only.

First session at school

- The length of stay for your child's first session will be negotiated with you.



- At the end of the first session, the length of the next session can be discussed. Every child is different. Some children separate happily from their parents others can become distressed.



- Staff will use this time to work with your child. Using information from yourself and school observations, at the end of the first half term you will be invited to meet the staff to discuss how your child settled in.



Time of school sessions

9.00a.m. – 3.00p.m.

Arrival:

On arrival the children will be met from transport and taken into school. As many of our children may have spent some time travelling to school, time is made available for toileting and play. Staff will read the home / school diary to inform them of any information you want us to know about to help us settle your child into the school day.

End of school day:

If your child has school transport, staff will ensure your child is safely put on the bus along with equipment to go home.

If you are collecting your child, please note that car parking can be a difficulty, please be patient.

Relative or friend collecting:

In the interests of safety, please let us know if someone other than yourself is going to be collecting your child. Providing us with written permission and a photograph can help us prepare your child about who will be collecting them.

Absences:

If your child has to miss school through illness or a medical appointment, please let the school know by 9.00am of the first day of absence.

If your child has transport it is your responsibility to phone and cancel the transport arrangements for the duration of the absence.



Transport:

If you have any queries about transport please contact Milton Keynes Home School Transport Department on 01908 252526, unless you are living in another county in which case, please contact your local authority.

Uniform:

Red cardigan or jumper.

Red zip up fleeces: Optional.

Black/Grey trousers, skirts or pinafores.

Polo shirts: White or red.

Order forms are available from reception, but will be included in your admission pack. Orders must be accompanied with payment.



Book Bags:

A Walnuts book bag can be purchased for you to keep your child's home / school book and other books in. This often acts as a visual cue that it is time to go to school. Cost is currently £4.09.

Universal Free School Meals (UFMS)

Universal free school meals are available for those pupils in Years R, 1 and 2. Also available for our pupils in the above years are free fruit and vegetables on the FVS (Fruit and Vegetable Scheme). Pupils are given fruit/vegetables as a snack through the scheme.

Free School Meals (FSM)

Your child may be entitled to Free School Meals if in year 3 and above, please ask the school for a council application form for FSM.

School Dinners:

Cost = £2.00 per day.

The school makes its own school dinners and is happy to meet different diets and cultural needs. Please note we are a NUT FREE school.



Packed Lunch:

You are welcome to send in a packed lunch for your child. Please be aware that we do not have fridge space for packed lunch boxes - so please ensure an icepack is put in the lunch box to keep it cool. Parents are requested not to send glass bottles or tins in lunchboxes. Please remember not to include any NUT products.



Milk:

Milk is free for children in reception class but you do need to fill out a request form. This can be completed during the home visit or by contact to the School.

Snack and Cookery sessions:

We provide a range of snacks, both healthy and motivating. We ask parents to make a voluntary contribution towards the cost of daily snack. This money also covers the ingredients used in cookery lessons.



Swimming

The children will visit our local pool for a half hour session weekly, for half the school year.

Forest School

The children access Forest School on a weekly basis every other half term from Y2 onwards. This enables them to learn in the outdoors throughout the seasons. In addition, Forest School has a positive effect on well-being and the development of emotional resilience.

Medicines in school

We only administer medicine prescribed by a doctor. All medication has to be in its original packaging with instructions on how to store and administer.

- Children with epilepsy or a regular prescribed medication will have a care plan drawn up that is agreed between the home, school and health professionals.

School makes a lot of additional demands upon your young child. If they are not well, they are unable to cope with the demands of a school day; which can delay them getting better. In fairness to other children and staff, please keep your child at home if you suspect they are unwell.

Children with diarrhoea and/or sickness are asked to stay at home for 48 hours to help them get better and prevent the spread of the infection. This is in line with Local Authority guidelines.

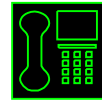
Toilet training

Toilet training will be undertaken in consultation with families when appropriate. We are happy to discuss this with you and support you with any necessary symbols. We apologise in advance,

but we cannot wash soiled underwear, which will be sent home in a sealed bag.

Accidents at school

Unfortunately accidents do happen, even with close supervision bumps and falls can occur. All accidents will be appropriately treated by a first aider. This will be recorded and you will be informed the same day. If a serious accident occurs and your child needs to go home, the school will use your contact numbers to contact you immediately. It is important that you can be contacted at all times. Please keep the school informed of any change in telephone numbers.



Parent Training Programme

Every term a variety of courses and training sessions are offered to parents. You are very welcome to attend. Please let Kim know if you have any ideas for future training sessions.

What will the children be learning?

In the Lower School children learn through the Foundation Curriculum. This covers seven areas of learning and development.

There will be **3 prime areas** inter-connected with **4 specific areas** of learning and development.

The Prime Areas are:

- Communication and language
- Physical development
- Personal, social and emotional development.

The Specific Areas are:

- Literacy
- Mathematics
- Understanding of the World
- Expressive arts and design.

Once the children have completed the stages of learning outcomes, they will move on to the higher level curriculum.

Learning through play

Play activities which are planned and directed by children as well as adults are seen as strong elements of good Early Years teaching. For some of our young children the drive to play is not so well developed, so we help our children by creating situations to teach the children how to play with different toys and play equipment. Taking into account each child's developmental level we encourage and teach the children how to share equipment and how to take turns with different toys and games.



Motivation and children's motivators

You will be asked at the home visit about what toys, items your child likes to play with, use, tap, look at, spin etc. This information is used to establish a communicative connection to your child, to help them develop an awareness that they need to communicate their needs to someone else. At Walnuts we use motivators to entice children to engage with adults as a first step to building upon and extending their communication skills. Not all of our children will use spoken language but we use a range of different augmented systems such as PECS, signing and a range of technological devices e.g. Big Macs, I Pads, Go Boards and similar equipment. Children are encourage to construct sentences using 'colourful semantics'.

Interdisciplinary Therapy

Interdisciplinary Therapy:

At The Walnuts, the Speech and Language Therapists and Occupational Therapist set targets, write reports and deliver therapy collaboratively. This collaborative way of working is supported by the SCERTS (Social Communication, Emotional Regulation and Transactional Support) approach. The emphasis is on social communication and emotional regulation (including the Zones of Regulation. SCERTS is designed to help families, educators and therapists work cooperatively as a team. Therapy targets are written jointly by both the Speech and Language Therapist and the Occupational Therapist and are incorporated into each pupil's IEP. Programmes to help pupils achieve their targets are then incorporated into the school day by classroom staff. Progress towards achieving targets is monitored and reviewed by the pupil's lead Therapist at least termly.

New pupils are assessed predominantly through observation and discussion with the class staff; this will be shared with you at the time of your child's annual review. The therapists will contribute to the annual review process for your child by providing a report. In most cases this report will contain a summary of the therapy your child has received during the year with relevant therapy outcomes and provision recommended. New starters and those students who have transitioned from Lower to Middle or Middle to Upper school will receive a more detailed therapy assessment report at the time of the annual review.

Occasionally, if this is an identified need, pupils may be identified for individual or small group work with a therapist or assistant therapy practitioners under the guidance of the therapists. However, for many of our pupils it is the consistent

implementation of strategies across a child's day that will have the biggest impact.

PECS:

PECS stands for the Picture Exchange Communication System.

This 'system' can be used to help children with some spoken language to structure and extend what they want to say (augmented) or act as an alternative communication mode for those children with little or no spoken language. The use of PECS does not inhibit a child's ability to acquire spoken language. The speech and language therapists at Walnuts work as part of a multi-disciplinary team to support all staff in the delivery of speech therapy for your child. PECS may be included in your child's speech and language targets, please speak to the class teacher to discuss this further. At the Lower School Department, Anna Campbell or Clare Donahoe, would be happy to speak to parents about their child's needs.



Children with English as an additional language

In our school we have many bilingual children and staff. These are some of the languages spoken: Bengali, French, German, Gujarati, Hindi, Lingala, Polish, Somal, Swahili/Kiswahili, and Urdu.

At the Walnuts School we encourage parents to continue to use their home language in their family environment. This is fundamental in maintaining positive connections within the family. Speaking home language will help to support a full and rich communication within the family. As the child's home language develops, the linguistic skills they acquire will be transferred to the new language and their understanding of the way language works will be strengthened.

INDIAN DANCE DAY



Not all children with Autism will develop spoken language. But for all basic communication skills it is important to grow up in a relaxed and competent language environment.



Research shows that being bilingual has its advantages. Children who are bilingual tend to be more aware of others, are more creative and are better at problem solving. (EMASS literature)

SHARING FOOD AT EID



A recent research report of a survey of bilingualism in autism spectrum disorders shows that children with autism who were exposed to different languages were acquiring the languages they were exposed to.

There is evidence that bilingualism can benefit children's overall academic and intellectual development. (International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders, January 2012).

VISIT TO THE GURDWARA



Language and culture are inextricably linked, so using the home language of the culture a child grows up in will give their experience more meaning and will help the child in making sense of the world. School need to support the use of home language as far as possible by acknowledging the cultural and language experience a pupil has through culturally relevant resources and displays.

AFRICAN DRUMMING



Any involvement of parents and family in the school setting to help achieve this is welcomed by all at the Walnuts School.

Children learn through their experiences. We celebrate different festivals throughout the year enriching those experiences through play and learning activities, food tasting, trying on different clothes, music and art activities as well as visits. We are always interested in parents/carers getting involved and helping out.

We would really welcome all communities getting involved; this could be through special cooking days, where parents/carers could help our children cook foods from their own cultures.

Equal opportunities

We endeavour to provide each child with the same opportunities irrespective of race, gender, religion or social class. Through our

work we aim to challenge all stereotyping and prejudice and to promote harmony between children.

Equipment/Resources/Training Opportunities

1) Home/school diary

This is a book to help keep you informed about your child's school day and to help the communication between home and school.

At the end of each day your child's key worker will write in this book to give you the key points about your child's day at school/ and ask you questions/or pass on information.

It is helpful to staff if you too can write each day in the book informing staff of your child's progress at home so we can celebrate with you and integrate such progress into your child's schooling. It is also helpful if you can inform us about changes and whether we need to be aware of factors that affect your child's behaviour e.g. not sleeping / eating as well as they used to. Your child's teacher is also happy to talk to you about your child on the phone. Staff meetings, courses and other appointments means that teachers are not always immediately available but they will get back to you as soon as conveniently possible. Further information about the curriculum/trips and special events may also be included. Any confidential information is sent in a sealed, separate letter. Any significant information from parents is brought to the attention of the Head of Department.

2) Library and reading books

We hope that all of our children will develop a love for books, stories, pictures and facts. For this reason we will send home a library book at a suitable developmental level for you to read to your child. To begin with the expectation is simply to share the story, for your child to learn to spend time looking at a book in the company of another person. Learning to respect the book (not tearing pages out or scribbling in the book), learning to turn the

pages appropriately, open the flaps / look at the pictures - you can help your child to point to an item in the picture that you name. Learning to look and listen until the end of the story. As you can see there is a lot to be gained by you reading regularly to your child, we hope that you will take this opportunity and record in the recording booklet how your child responded to the reading session.

When the children are ready they may also bring home reading scheme books, words and letters. Not all of our children will learn to read but together we can encourage them to develop a love of all books.

3) [Visuals](#)

Many children with autism find the use of visual symbols can clarify the spoken word when used contextually. As we all are aware learning does not begin and end at the school gate. So as not to confuse your child we will be seeking to work closely with you and share information about symbol use. Staff will endeavour to get symbols printed off for you as soon as possible but please be aware that you might be in a queue.

4) [Information/ Earlybird Plus course](#)

The school invites all new parents to participate in the Early Bird Plus course, designed by the National Autistic Society. This is a specific programme, designed to meet the need of parents whose children have recently had a diagnosis of autism. It looks at the characteristics of autism, visual structure and development of communication and behaviour management. We usually run the course in the spring term and will invite parents to an information meeting about the course. It involves you attending a number of sessions in school and a home visit. This is an excellent first programme that helps you explore how together we can all best meet the needs of your child.

Equipment your child needs

A) Coat— preferably waterproof.

B) A pair of wellies - (Please be prepared for your child to get wet and muddy. We encourage the children to experience a range of activities and play experiences both indoors and out. This includes being outdoors enjoying all types of weather.)

C) Change of clothes bag - Your child will need a bag with a change of clothes; they do not have to be uniform items but please include vest, t-shirt, trousers / pinafore, socks and if toilet training pants / knickers.

Children enjoy water play and often get very wet despite aprons.

D) P.E. bag - Your child will be encouraged to change for P.E. for hygiene reasons but also to practise their independent dressing skills. They will need: a pair of shorts and a t-shirt, again, please name all items.

E) Swim bag - A swimming bag, swim trunks or costume, towel, and swim nappy (if your child is not yet toilet trained). Swimming kit will be sent home, to be returned for the following week. Reception class will not swim until after the Spring half term.

F) Home—school bag - You can provide your own bag or you can purchase a purpose made home -school bag from the school office at the cost of £4.09. The bag will be used to transfer the home-school diary, reading book and any letters to and from school.

G) Nappies - If your child is in nappies you need to regularly supply the school with a pack of nappies and baby wipes would also be appreciated. Staff will inform you through the home / school

book when your child's supply of nappies is running low and need replaced. Nappy rashes do occur from time to time - if you want staff to apply creams please send the cream in its original container with a written permission slip from yourself. If you are not yet being provided with free nappies, please ask the class teacher to refer you to the School Nurse for a continence assessment.

H) **Sun hat & sun cream (summer term)** - To protect your child from the hot sun we will encourage the wearing of hats. Not all children with autism can tolerate a hat on their head. For this reason we ask you, during the hot weather, to apply sun cream before your child arrives at school. We are happy to re-apply sun cream if you supply the cream and appropriate permission slip. We cannot use a generic sun cream on your child - only the sun cream you supply.



Please ensure that you label all of your child's clothing and any other items / equipment that belong to them.

What can you as parents do to prepare your child for school?

There is no easy answer to this question as every child is different and may be at a different point on the autistic spectrum as well as at a different age and different point of development.

Below are some pointers you might want to think about - not all of them will be applicable to your child.

Prepare your child for the home visit in September. Look at the school photograph book together; get out the school uniform, the book bag or any item that will be regularly associated with school.



For the home visit, write a list of things your child likes and dislikes and help your child to show the staff the toys / motivators they like to use / play with at home.



Encourage your child to sit in a car with the seat belt on. If you can, do a few 'dummy runs' to school in your car so the 'visual route' becomes familiar.



Supporting learning at home

Routine is very important to children with ASD's. This can be a strength but also a limitation in that the child can be less flexible about change. BUT a general routine of getting up at a regular time, with regular meal times, play times and bedtimes can help give structure and meaning to a day.



Children with ASD's can need help to learn to share attention with someone else. It is helpful if your child can learn to attend to the adult agenda, e.g. set aside some 'special time' each day when you ask your child to share an activity with you i.e. singing action songs, looking at a book, building a tower together - an activity you decide rather than your child.



Introduce sharing and turn taking in e.g. at the dinner table sharing out the vegetables, pouring out drinks. Turn taking when playing e.g. lotto or taking turns to bounce on the trampoline etc.



Introduce the concept of 'waiting'. We all have to wait at certain points in a day, e.g. we have to wait at traffic lights, wait in a queue in the shop, wait at the Dr's surgery etc.

We often go for walks around the school and to local parks - help your child by doing the same, teaching them the importance of holding hands and staying with you.



It helps if your child recognises the sound of their own name and can respond to it when called.



Early skills that we will be working on at school:

- Helping your child learn to recognise his / her own possessions.
- Teaching your child how to take off and put on their own shoes.
- How to take off a coat and hang it up on a peg.
- If toilet trained - how to request the toilet.

It would be helpful if you could work on these areas too.

Trust your instinct and share your experiences with other parents, you can learn so much from each other. Come along to parent meetings that the school hosts and meet other parents. There will also be ideas for supporting learning at home for each class on the school website, updated every term. These will be linked to topics which change each half term.

Additional Information

Children with Disabilities Team:

The Children with Disabilities Team works with families who have children with a disability. They offer a range of services including short breaks, liaising with other professionals and supporting transitions. The service is decided through assessment with a team member, yourself and other professionals involved with your child. The aim would always be to try to keep the child with their family. You can refer yourself, or ask school to refer you.

The team has a duty worker who you can talk to from 9.30am - 1pm each working day. The telephone number is **01908 253617**.

Useful contact information

Duty Telephone number (CDT):	01908 253617
Emergency Social Work Team:	01908 265545
Carers Milton Keynes:	01908 231703
Autism Helpline:	0845 070 4004
SENDIAS (Special Education Needs	01908 254518 or
Disability Information, Advice and	email mksendias@milton-keynes.gov.uk
Support Service)	
Milton Keynes Local Offer	https://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/schools-and-lifelong-learning/send-local-offer