



SEND/Local Offer Information

The Walnuts School is an all age community residential special school and Children's Home for pupils who are on the autistic spectrum or have social communication difficulties. The school currently caters for 180 pupils from Foundation to year 14. The building is fully wheelchair accessible and has disabled toilet facilities.

The school is divided into three departments each led by an Assistant Headteacher. The Lower School Department (Foundation and years one to four) is based at Hertford Place, Bletchley; Middle School and the majority of the Upper School Department together with the residential accommodation are based at the main site in Hazeley, and two classes of Post 16 students are based in Fenny Stratford. There are 26 classes, each with a teacher and between two and five teaching assistants and pupils are placed in a class which the school deems can best meet their needs. All staff receive regular training to develop their knowledge and understanding of autism.

The Walnuts residential provision is home for six students and also provides the opportunity for some students to access the 24-hour curriculum. A student may access up to four nights boarding, or just stay for an after-school activity tea. The residential and school staff liaise closely, through our key worker system, ensuring continuity and consistency for each student. Further information can be found in the residential statement of purpose.

All pupils starting at The Walnuts School will have an Education, Health and Care Plan, which will be reviewed annually at a meeting with parents/carers and professionals involved with the pupil. These annual review meetings are a chance to celebrate the achievements of our pupils and pupils are encouraged to contribute to the meeting where appropriate.

Curriculum:

At The Walnuts we use autism specific, empathetic approaches, and provide an autism friendly environment. The curriculum at the Walnuts School relates to all aspects of school life and is a vehicle through which the staff and governors seek to achieve the best possible progress and highest attainment for all pupils and to embrace the rich cultural diversity of our community. We recognise that each student is a unique individual; however, the underlying difficulty for every Walnuts student lies in the area

of communication. We therefore provide an environment where spoken language is clear and precise and, where appropriate, written communication, symbols and sometimes gestures are used to reinforce both expressive and receptive language.

In order to best meet the needs of our pupils we aim to teach skills within a meaningful social context and to provide opportunities for generalisation across settings. Our pedagogy is based upon the TEACCH approach, with the goal of pupils achieving a maximum level of independence through the provision of structure and the development of communication skills. This drives our approach to the curriculum and behaviour management throughout school. Knowledge and understanding of the individual, the building of positive relationships and the creation of personalised learning programmes delivered in an atmosphere of tolerance and understanding are at the heart of our approach.

Our curriculum strives to be responsive to the needs of each learner, and build on individual strengths and interests. A rolling plan is in place from Early Years to the end of Key Stage 3, which supports a balance of stimulating contexts for learning through different learning experiences, themes and subjects appropriate to the age and needs of the pupil. In Key Stage 4 and 5 there is a greater emphasis on life skills, independence, vocational education, careers information and guidance and, where possible, work experience, all aimed at preparing students for life beyond the Walnuts.

Partnership with Parents:

At The Walnuts School we welcome close involvement with parents and carers in all aspects of your child's education and the life of the school.

We adopt an 'open door approach' at all times.

Working closely together and sharing all that we do help us to achieve the very best for your child.

Information is shared in a number of ways:

- ❖ Phone calls/Regular Newsletters/Emails
- ❖ Home/School book - parents/carers comments are encouraged
- ❖ Termly parents/carers evenings to discuss progress and review and set Individual Education Plan (IEP) targets and Behaviour Management Plans.
- ❖ Parent/Carers workshops
- ❖ The Walnuts Parents, Friendship and Support Group hold regular coffee mornings to discuss common issues, such as sleep, diet or sensory issues

- ❖ Annual Review meetings
- ❖ End of Year Reports
- ❖ Friends of Walnuts hold regular meetings to discuss fundraising ideas and social events

Parents/carers are encouraged to raise any concerns initially with the child's key worker or teacher via the home/school diary or by phone. Where necessary the Head of Care, Head of Department or Headteacher will help to address concerns.

Key documents can be provided in alternative languages for parents/carers for whom English is not their first language. Parents may bring a friend or family member to interpret at meetings or, if necessary, the school will try to provide an interpreter.

Walnuts approach to behaviour and wellbeing:

A number of children at The Walnuts School have difficulties expressing their needs and wishes, which often shows itself in certain behaviours which can, at times, be challenging.

Our approach is to treat all behaviour as communications as outlined in our Behaviour Policy. The school has a dedicated Behaviour and Stress Management Team (BSMT) with representatives from the whole school and residential home which meets weekly, to discuss policy and individual cases referred.

All staff are trained in 'Team Teach' as the method of 'positive handling' recommended by the local authority.

The school recognises that pupils' behavioural difficulties most often arise from underlying communication or sensory difficulties. The school employs its own Speech and Language Therapists and Occupational Therapists who work together with class based staff to devise and implement programmes aimed at minimising these difficulties.

A number of staff have attended training regarding mental health needs of children and young adults and the school has a Wellbeing and Mental Health Team. Where appropriate, staff liaise with CAMHS to support pupils with mental health needs. The school employs an Art Therapist and a Counsellor to support identified pupils with wellbeing and mental health needs and play therapy, reiki and rhythmic movement are also offered.

Inclusion:

For some of our pupils it is appropriate to have the opportunity to spend time in a mainstream school. This may be for social or educational purposes.

The process begins by consulting with the child and parents/carers, and if agreed, the pupil is then carefully assessed as to their suitability to join the inclusion programme and is supported by experienced Walnuts staff.

Contact:

For pupils attending the school the class teacher is the first point of contact for parents. If the class teacher is unable to answer a query or resolve an issue this may be forwarded to the appropriate Head of Department.

Parents are welcome to visit The Walnuts School at any stage of the Education, Health and Care Plan Needs Assessment process by contacting the school on 01908 563885 or by email - admin@walnuts.milton-keynes.sch.uk.

The Walnuts School follows Milton Keynes Local Authority admissions procedures for children with special educational needs. Children who are under consideration for admission are discussed by the Special Schools Placement Panel and a place at The Walnuts School may be recommended.

The Local Authority Special Educational Needs (SEN) Team are based at Children and Families Services, Milton Keynes Council.