Pathway for Acorns

Purpose of the Provision

The Acorns provision is for pupils with Autism and Complex Learning Difficulties and is lead by a Lead Practitioner. It is sixteen place unit, over two classes with eight school places and 8 Local Authority places.

Aim of provision

The Acorns provision aims to:

- Provide a highly specialist, Autism-informed environment for pupils with significant and complex needs.
- Deliver a personalised curriculum using the Equals Curriculum, focusing on engagement, communication, sensory regulation, and independence.
- Offer a safe, predictable, low-arousal space where pupils can access learning at their developmental stage.
- Support pupils whose needs cannot be met through mainstream provision alone.
- Prepare pupils for transition to specialist settings, including special schools or specialist secondary provisions.

Eligibilty Criteria

A pupil may be considered for palcement in Acorns if they meet **all** or **most** of the following indicators:

Learning Profile

- EHCP in place with Autism as primary need.
- Working significantly below age-related expectations, often within pre-formal or semi-formal stages.
- Requires a curriculum focused on engagement, communication, and sensory regulation rather than subject-based learning.

Assessment information

- ·Evidence from EP, SALT, OT, or medical professionals indicating complex needs.
- Assessments showing limited progress despite high-quality interventions.
- Observations demonstrating difficulty accessing mainstream routines and expectations.

Previous Support

- Quality First Teaching adaptations implemented and reviewed.
- Targeted interventions delivered with fidelity but insufficient impact.
- High levels of adult support required to maintain safety and engagement.

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Eligibility Criteria Continued

Social, Emotional and Regulation Needs

- Significant sensory processing differences.
- High levels of dysregulation impacting learning and safety.
- Difficulty coping with transitions, noise, unpredictability, or social demands.

Parent/Carer Engagement

- Parents/carers understand and support the placement.
- Willingness to collaborate with school and external agencies.

Referral and Decision Making Progress

Identification of Need

- Class teacher identifies concerns and discusses them with the SENCO and leadership. This is usually done in Foundation for the in school placements. The Local Authority will liaise with a child's current school and Acorns.
- Evidence is collected: assessments, work samples, intervention data, observations.

Pupil Discussion Meeting

Held with:

- Class Teacher
- SENCO
- Acorns Lead
- Senior leader responsible for inclusion
- Parents Carers

Decision and start date

A collaborative decision is made based on need, suitability, and capacity within Acorns.
A start date is agreed, and the baseline process begins.

Provision Overview

Pupils in Acorns access:

- A highly structured, low-arousal environment tailored to Autism-specific needs.
- The Equals Curriculum, including:
  - My Communication
  - My Thinking and Problem Solving
  - My Independence
  - My Physical Wellbeing
  - My Creativity

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Provision Overview continued

- Daily sensory regulation opportunities (sensory circuits, sensory breaks, personalised sensory diets).
- Intensive communication support (SALT, Total Communication, Dual Coded, Makaton).
- Small-group and 1:1 learning based on engagement levels.
- Close collaboration with therapists and external professionals.

Class Teacher Responsibility (Integrated Seamlessly)

The child's Acorns teacher becomes the lead professional and holds overall responsibility for:

- The pupil's progress.
- Provision planning and curriculum entitlement.
- Monitoring and reviewing learning.
- Maintaining the pupil's connection to their school and peer community.

Review and monitoring

Baseline Assessment

Within the first two weeks, the Acorns lead and class teacher capture a detailed baseline across:

- Engagement levels (using the Engagement Model)
- Communication and interaction
- Sensory processing profile
- Emotional regulation
- Independence and self-help skills
- Developmental learning stage (pre-formal/semi-formal)

Ongoing Review

- Weekly review between class teacher and Acorns lead.
- Adjustments made based on pupil response.
- Regular communication with parents/carers.

Termly Review Meeting

Attended by:

- Class teacher
- Acorns lead
- SENCO
- Parents/carers
- External professionals (as appropriate)

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Review and monitoring continued

The meeting reviews:

- Progress towards EHCP outcomes
- Curriculum engagement
- Sensory and emotional regulation
- Suitability of continued placement
- Long-term planning, including specialist transition

Transition Pathway to Specialist Provision

Because pupils in Acorns typically have complex needs, the long-term pathway usually involves transition to:

- A special school, or
- A specialist secondary provision

Transition is based on readiness and professional judgement, not age or time spent in Acorns.
A child may begin transition planning when they demonstrate:

- A consistent developmental profile aligned with specialist provision criteria
- Need for a curriculum delivered entirely through pre-formal or semi-formal approaches
- High levels of sensory or emotional need requiring specialist environments

Transition Process

Stage 1: Planning and Consultation

- SENCO consults with the Local Authority and potential specialist settings.
- Parents/carers involved throughout.

Stage 2: Visits and Familiarisation

- Supported visits to specialist settings.
- Photo books, social stories, and transition visuals created.

Stage 3: Gradual Transition

- Increasing time spent in the new setting.
- Joint planning between Acorns staff and receiving school.

Stage 4: Full Transition

- Child moves to specialist provision.
- SENCO monitors for 6–12 weeks.

Exit Criteria

A child may exit Acorns if:

- They transition to a special school or specialist secondary provision.
- Their needs change and a different pathway is required (e.g., medical needs pathway).
- Parents and school agree on an alternative plan.