ACORN
Assessment Centre

Admissions Policy

Acorn is an Assessment and Intervention Centre in Barnet that caters for pre-school children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). There are two sites: one at Queenswell Infant School in Whetstone and one at Colindale Primary School. Acorn is line-managed via Oakleigh School.

The Queenswell site has one morning and one afternoon group, each with a maximum of 8 children and a high staff-to-child ratio.

The Colindale site has four groups: two in the morning and two in the afternoon, each also with a high staff-to-child ratio.

Children attending Acorn can take part in five 3-hour sessions per week (morning or afternoon), making up 15 hours of nursery entitlement. Due to high demand, we encourage children to attend all five sessions. Individual family circumstances will be considered; however, children are expected to attend a minimum of three sessions per week **when they are well. This expected attendance does not include absences due to illness or medical/health appointments.**

Referral to the Early Years SEND Admissions Panel.

The Early Years SEND Admissions Panel allocates places at Acorn and Kingfisher (ASC nursery based at Livingstone). Children referred are usually already known to services. Referrals may come from:

- EY SEND Advisory team
- BEAM
- SENCO's
- Specialist Advisory Teams
- Parents/Carers

Applications will only be considered for children for the year they are due to start nursery.

A panel is responsible for considering referrals and allocating places at Acorn. The panel is made up of:

- Head of Service in charge of Acorn
- Head of Service in charge of the Pre-school Teaching Team
- Manager of Livingstone Nursery
- Representatives from BEAM
- A representative from the Barnet SEN Team

The panel holds **one main intake meeting in April/May each year** to identify children who may need a place and to allocate these places. **Mini panels** may also be held throughout the year, depending on place availability and demand.

The **Local Authority has overarching responsibility** for both the allocation of places at Acorn and for funding.

Criteria

When a referral is received, it will be considered by all panel members, and decisions will be made based on the criteria listed below and the availability of places. The child will either be offered a place or placed on a waiting list if they meet the following criteria:

1. The child must live within the London Borough of Barnet. Parents may be asked to provide evidence of residency (e.g., address on Child Benefit award).
2. Entrance needs to be 2 terms prior to starting Reception, unless exceptional circumstances exist (such as safeguarding concerns).
3. The child's early learning and play skills are significantly delayed due to:
    - A complex medical or physical condition
    - A diagnosed syndrome or condition
    - Visual or hearing impairment with additional learning challenges/differences
    - Children with communication and interaction differences, including autism
    - Children with significant developmental differences affecting multiple areas of learning and development
4. A child **does not need a formal diagnosis or an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)** to be considered for a place at Acorn. However, typically, the child will have been identified as having differences across a range of learning areas and developmental delays.
5. Priority is given to children with complex degenerative medical conditions.
6. Nursery 2 children are given priority, and their assessment will be processed as quickly as possible. They also have priority over younger children on the waiting list.
7. Children already attending another nursery will have lower priority, unless that placement has broken down or cannot meet their needs even with additional resources available within Barnet.
8. The panel will generally only consider applications for children in their first or second year of nursery. Exceptional cases may include N0 children with complex SEND and additional healthcare needs who are 2 years old, if places remain after accommodating all N1 and N2 children requiring a place.
9. Wherever possible, placement will be offered at the setting closest to the child's home.

Acorn is a specialist nursery provision offering early intervention for children with significant and complex learning needs. The placement will continue until the assessment is complete or the child is ready to start Reception. If, following assessment, it is felt that a child can access an alternative educational provision, we will discuss this with parents/carers and plan

a supported transition. This approach ensures that places are available for children who require early intervention.

Facilities

Acorn offers:

- Access to the Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum, differentiated to meet children's individual needs
- Detailed assessments, regularly reviewed to assess progress
- Small class groups of 8 and a high ratio of staff
- Highly skilled staff with expertise in supporting children with SEND
- Children are supported using a **Total Communication approach**, which means using all ways of communicating that work best for them.
- This may include **visual supports**, such as objects of reference, object cues, pictures, and symbols, as well as **high-tech communication devices** where appropriate.
- Staff use a range of **strategies and techniques** tailored to each child's needs to help them understand, express themselves, and participate in activities.
- **A Family Support Worker to support the development of strategies around communication and other areas of development, as well as signposting families to external agencies where needed (e.g., housing, MENCAL, Social Care, Occupational Therapy for adaptations).**
- Regular parent meetings to discuss progress
- Parent workshops to support understanding of their child's needs
- Trained staff to support children with medication, gastrostomy feeds, oxygen, etc., liaising with relevant health professionals to ensure staff are appropriately trained
- An allocated nurse to support Health Care Plans (not based on site)
- Music Therapy and/or Drama and Movement Therapy
- Specialist equipment, e.g., hydrotherapy/swimming pool, sensory room, soft play area, and outdoor play spaces
- Specialist teaching methodologies, including SCERTS, TEACCH, and Attention Autism
- Joint placements with mainstream pre-school settings as appropriate
- Multi-disciplinary intervention and assessment, including:
    - Physiotherapy, Speech and Language Therapy, and Occupational Therapy are provided through Barnet Children's Integrated Therapies, part of Whittington Health NHS Trust, in line with individual children's needs and at the discretion of the service. Where a child has a statutory Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), provision will be made in line with the outcomes and requirements specified in the plan.
    - Liaison with consultant community paediatricians, school nursing, dieticians, and wheelchair services
    - Close working with specialist teachers for Multi-Sensory Impairment, Visual and Hearing Impairment

Additional Information

Funding

- **Acorn is a specialist nursery provision.** Attendance at Acorn counts as the child's full 15-hour FEE2/FEE3 entitlement, reflecting the specialist support and early intervention provided. Children who are only entitled to 15 hours cannot split this entitlement with another setting.
- **Children eligible for 30-hour funding:** Eligible children may attend Acorn for 15 hours and another registered setting for the remaining 15 hours. The additional setting may request High Needs Funding if the child has complex SEND and requires additional support beyond the standard funding.

Transport

Home-to-school transport is not available for children who are not of statutory school age. Children attending Acorn are therefore not eligible for home-to-school transport. Placement at Acorn depends on parents/carers being able to transport their child to the site closest to their home.

Intervention from other teams

Once children are attending Acorn/Livingstone, they will no longer be entitled to receive input from other specialist provisions in Barnet, such as the Early Years SEND Advisory Team or BEAM.

Allocation of setting

The panel reserves the right to allocate a place for a child in the most appropriate setting considering location and spaces available. Parent's wishes will be considered but it may not always be possible to match parental wishes to place offered.