The New Walk School *Bespoke support. Brighter futures.*

Admissions Policy

The New Walk School policy framework

Policy	Admissions Policy	**Version**	V1
Issue date	08 May 2026	**Next review**	08 May 2027
Policy owner	Headteacher	**Approved by**	Directors of The New Walk School Ltd

1. About The New Walk School

The New Walk School is an independent specialist day school for pupils aged 7 to 19 who have Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs, autism spectrum conditions, learning difficulties and communication difficulties. The school is located on New Walk in Leicester — a setting with a long-standing association with academic life — and is operated by The New Walk School Ltd, a Company Limited by Guarantee.

The majority of our pupils hold an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and many have experienced previous educational placements that did not meet their needs. Our offer combines a broad academic curriculum with an in-built therapeutic provision rooted in the PACE model — Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy — developed by Dr Dan Hughes. PACE is a relational approach designed to build trust, regulate distress and create the safety from which learning can take place. It informs how every adult in the school speaks to, listens to and works with our pupils.

2. The PACE therapeutic model in practice

Admission is the first relational moment between a pupil, their family and The New Walk School. PACE shapes our admissions process so that families experience us as accepting and curious from the very first contact:

- Playfulness — staff use a light, warm tone to reduce shame and de-escalate distress, using humour appropriate to the pupil and the moment.
- Acceptance — pupils' feelings and inner experiences are accepted unconditionally, even where specific behaviours are not. Acceptance is communicated before any limit is set.
- Curiosity — staff seek to understand the meaning behind a pupil's behaviour rather than reacting to its surface, asking 'what is this telling me?'
- Empathy — staff name and stay with the pupil's emotional experience, communicating that the pupil is not alone with what they feel.

PACE is not a behaviour-management tool layered on top of practice; it is the relational foundation from which all other aspects of the school operate.

3. Statutory framework

This policy is in line with the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, the SEND Code of Practice 2015, the Equality Act 2010 and the Children and Families Act 2014. As an independent specialist school, The New Walk School is not bound by the School Admissions Code that applies to maintained schools, but operates a fair, transparent and equality-compliant admissions process.

4. The school we are admitting to

The New Walk School is an independent specialist day school for pupils aged 7–19 with SEMH needs, autism spectrum conditions, learning difficulties and communication difficulties. We are not a school for pupils who do not have these needs. Our admissions process is therefore based on a careful assessment of fit between the pupil's needs and the school's offer.

5. Routes of admission

- Local authority commissioned placements — by far the most common route. The local authority approaches the school after consulting the family; the school carries out a needs and fit assessment; if the school can meet need, the placement is named in the EHCP at consultation, annual review or change-of-school review.
- Direct family enquiries — families may contact the school directly. The school will visit, advise on the EHCP and consultation route, and signpost to SENDIASS where helpful.
- Privately funded places — exceptional and rare; admitted by the same fit-assessment process as commissioned places, subject to fee agreement.

6. Admissions criteria

The school will admit a pupil where:

- The pupil falls within the age range 7–19 (with priority given to age groups currently being phased in as the school grows).
- The pupil has SEND that fall within the school's defined offer (SEMH, autism spectrum conditions, learning difficulties and communication difficulties).
- The school can meet the pupil's needs as set out in the EHCP, drawing on its own staffing, therapeutic provision and premises.
- Admission is compatible with the efficient education of other pupils on roll.
- Admission is compatible with the efficient use of resources.

7. Assessment of need and fit

The fit assessment includes: a desktop review of the EHCP and supporting professional reports; a meeting with the pupil and family at the school or at home; observation of the pupil in their current setting where this is helpful; and consultation with the placing local authority. The Headteacher takes the final decision after discussion with the SENCO and therapeutic lead.

8. Equality and non-discrimination

Admission decisions are made without discrimination on the grounds of any protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010. The school takes a child's SEND into account in its fit assessment because that is the central question for a specialist setting; this is not unlawful discrimination.

9. Transition

Once a place is agreed, an individual transition plan is produced. Transition is paced to the pupil — for some this is a single visit before joining; for others it is weeks of graduated visits. The therapeutic mentor and SENCO co-ordinate transition with the family and previous setting. A transition assessment of needs (academic, sensory, regulatory, communication) is completed before the first day.

10. Refusal and appeals

Where the school determines it cannot meet a pupil's needs, this is set out in writing to the placing authority and family with reasons. Families may pursue mediation or appeal to the SEND First-Tier Tribunal in line with the SEND Regulations 2014; the school will engage constructively with any such process.

11. Roll caps and waiting lists

The school will not admit beyond the maximum agreed roll for which it is registered with the DfE. Where a place is offered to a pupil but cannot be taken up immediately, the family is informed of estimated availability and kept under review.

Monitoring and review

This policy is reviewed annually by the Headteacher in consultation with the senior leadership team and the Directors of The New Walk School Ltd. It will be reviewed earlier where there is a material change in legislation, statutory guidance or the operational needs of the school. The most recent version is held on the school's policy register and is made available to parents, carers and staff on request.

Linked policies and documents

This policy should be read alongside the school's wider policy suite, including: Safeguarding and Child Protection; SEND; Behaviour and Relationships; Anti-Bullying; Equality, Diversity and Inclusion; Health and Safety; Curriculum; and Complaints.