



FIRST BRIDGE SCHOOL

Admissions policy

Admissions to First Bridge School

Essential information and criteria

First Bridge is an independent, co-educational therapeutic day special school for pupils aged 2 to 9 years.

The school is arranged to support the needs of pupils with developmental delays, including autism. Some pupils may have additional learning difficulties and associated diagnoses such as speech and language delays, ADHD, epilepsy, OCD and/or other health or additional needs.

Pupils we admit will be performing at a developmental age or stage that is at least 12 months delayed from their chronological age to constitute the requirement for intensive, therapeutic education.

Pupils may or may not have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) naming First Bridge School as being responsible for the pupil's educational provision.

Placements range from 39 to a maximum of 48 weeks (year on year dependent).

Lack of a formal diagnosis, including for autism, will not preclude admission if the pupil fits the general profile of our suitability assessment. Our clinical team indicates our ability to meet needs.

Admission to First Bridge School is ordinarily under condition that all pupils can complete two full academic years. This does not include the time it takes to complete the admissions process. This is to ensure an appropriate time frame is included to facilitate the necessary level of education and to allow time for a smooth onwards transition. We will not preclude the admission of a pupil who would receive less than two full academic years of education, however such applications will be assessed and decided on a case-by-case basis, considering a number of additional factors e.g. peer group, behaviours etc.

Our maximum adult-to-pupil ratio is 1:1. We are not able to meet needs of pupils requiring a higher level of support. Though our pupils may have behaviours that are described as 'challenging', the intensity and frequency of such behaviours should not preclude the efficient education of other pupils, or require additional specialist resources and spaces, and/or staffing.

We recognise that some families explore government-funded nursery places; however, we are unable to accommodate government-funded hours due to restrictions imposed by the government on how and where the funding can be used. In line with school admissions, all Early Years places at our setting must be either privately funded or supported through the EHCP process.

The following factors will further inform whether First Bridge School may be a suitable placement:

- An appropriate peer group along with academic and social compatibility with the group will be taken into consideration. Where available places cannot be created in the appropriate age/peer group, a place may not be offered at that time.
- The number of pupils in each classroom is limited in order to minimise the impact of graduation on transition into and out of First Bridge School.
- Pupils requiring a staffing level of 2:1 will not meet our admission criteria. If, during a current placement, it is deemed necessary by the clinical team to increase the level of support at any time above 1:1 to keep a pupil or the environment safe, additional resources will be required. The cost of placement would be adjusted accordingly whilst appropriate transition is discussed (please see our parents' handbook, terms and conditions, and behaviour and exclusion policy for more information).
- Pupils with a physical disability will be admitted wherever reasonable adjustments (as per the Equality Act 2010) are possible and likely to fully meet the pupil's needs. First Bridge School is located within residential buildings and as such has limitations as to the environmental adjustments that are possible.
- If there is a secondary diagnosis, including but not limited to Down Syndrome, Visual Impairment, Hearing Impairment, Mental Health Needs and Genetic Disorders, consideration will be given as to whether these needs can be met within the staffing structure and expertise at First Bridge School. Should additional resources be required then the cost of placement would be adjusted accordingly.

- Consideration will be given as to whether long term medical needs can be accommodated within the staffing and provision model at First Bridge. Medical needs requiring on site nursing care cannot be accommodated.
- All those with parental responsibility/guardianship should be in support of the placement and in agreement with the approaches, values and ethos of First Bridge School. Continued support and partnership of those with parental responsibility/guardianship is essential for the success and viability of any placement.
- The journey time to and from First Bridge School will be a consideration. We appreciate that due to the limited nature of high-quality SEND provision, longer journey times may be unavoidable, and so this will not necessarily preclude admission.

Admissions process

The admissions process can be initiated by either parents and caregivers or a placing Local Authority.

Each application for admission is considered on an individual basis. In each case our suitability assessment process, facilitated by our expert colleagues, is required to evaluate the needs of the pupil in line with the latest SEND Code of Practice:

- Whether the provision is likely to be suitable for the pupil's age, ability, aptitude, and SEND.
- Whether attendance of the pupil at First Bridge School is likely to be compatible with the efficient education of others, or the efficient use of resources.

Placements initiated by families

First Bridge School encourages parents and caregivers and professionals to visit our school prior to stating their preference for a placement. This enables families and professionals to consider whether First Bridge School may be a suitable placement for the pupil concerned.

Following a visit and discussion, should parents/caregivers need to fund their place through their Local Authority, they will need to request that their Local Authority consult us on their behalf for a place at First Bridge School.

Alternatively, First Bridge accepts privately-funded placements, without support from Local Authorities.

Whether placement is due to be funded privately or through a placing Local Authority, parents and caregivers must complete an application form once they have visited and confirmed First Bridge School to be their preferred provision. Where families are requesting placement through the Local Authority, the Local Authority must agree to send us the consultation documents in order for the application to be considered as received.

Once the application has been received and reviewed by the admissions and clinical team, there are four initial potential outcomes:

1. An application response letter will be issued, informing the parent that First Bridge School will not be able to offer a placement for the pupil. The reason/s for this decision will be outlined in reference to this policy as well as the following factors set out in the latest SEND Code of Practice:
 - Whether the provision is unsuitable for the pupil's age, ability, aptitude, and SEND.
 - Whether attendance of the pupil or young person at First Bridge School would be incompatible with the efficient education of others, or the efficient use of resources.
2. An invitation to bring the pupil to First Bridge School for a meeting with the clinical team. This will be necessary when we need to more thoroughly consider the needs of the prospective pupil.
3. A conditional offer letter will be issued. This will occur when, based on the information in the form, First Bridge School believe that they could potentially meet the needs of the pupil. The conditions of the offer will be subject to:
 - The pupil completing our suitability assessment and considered suitable for services by a member of the clinical team.
 - A deposit equating to four weeks of services being paid OR a letter from the Local Authority, confirming their intention to fund the placement being received, within a set time frame, following the

suitability assessment.

4. A waiting list letter will be issued.

Placements initiated by Local Authorities

If a Local Authority recognises that a pupil's needs may be best met at First Bridge School, then they will make a referral to us directly without families requesting them to do so. We will respond to this request within three working days of receiving the Local Authority consultation.

First Bridge School's initial response is determined by the documentation received (i.e., EHCP, Annual Review reports, professional reports) followed by contacting the parents/caregivers in order to organise and facilitate an initial observation and assessment with the prospective pupil.

The assessment process may, where required, also involve a visit to their current educational placement to conduct observations. We may also have a discussion with staff who know the prospective pupil well, and questionnaires may be completed at this stage.

A visit to First Bridge School will also be arranged, during which time the pupil will have the opportunity to look around the setting and engage in some motivating activities with our staff and pupils. During this visit a senior member of our team will meet with parents/caregivers and complete further information, including a direct assessment of the pupil, as well as seeking information through parental questionnaires.

Where pupils do not have a current placement, arrangement may or may not be made to visit the pupil at home. This decision will be made by the assessing clinician and based on their professional opinion as to whether this would be required for us to conclude suitability.

If any aspect of First Bridge School's assessment process is likely to cause distress (for example, if a visit to First Bridge School without considerable prior planning may be aversive) then we will endeavour to work with families and placing Local Authorities to complete a thorough assessment process, with reasonable adjustments, to support the prospective pupil concerned.

First Bridge School's staff will always seek to gain the views of the pupil regarding their future educational provision, wherever possible.

If assessment concludes that First Bridge School feels able to meet the needs of the pupil, then a formal offer letter will be sent to parents/caregivers and the placing Local Authority.

If the Local Authority accepts the placement, then First Bridge School will be named on the pupil's EHCP. First Bridge School assumes that by being named on an EHCP, the placing Local Authority has agreed funding for the allocated place, as per our placement agreements issued via DocuSign.

If the Local Authority does not agree to the offered place, then parents/caregivers have the right to appeal to the Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal (SENDIST).

Once a placement and start date has been agreed the process of planning transition and induction into First Bridge School will be initiated.

Transition into First Bridge School

When a place has been confirmed and the funding agreed by the parent/caregiver and/or Local Authority, First Bridge School will:

- Send out admission forms to the parent/caregiver to complete and return. The fully completed forms must be returned at least two weeks in advance of the start date.
- Send out visual aids e.g., photographs of the setting, the pupil's classroom, and Clinical Supervisors.
- Allocate a lead practitioner* (most likely a Clinical Supervisor) to be the point of contact for parents/caregivers during the transition process.

*If required, the lead practitioner will work with the pupil, family, existing placement and placing authority to develop a personalised transition plan to ensure that transition into First Bridge School is as smooth as possible for the pupil concerned. We recognise this as a significant period of change for any pupil. Therefore, we support transition visits, meetings/phone calls/teams meeting for information gathering.

Assessment period

All pupils are provided with a four-week assessment and settling in period upon entry to First Bridge School. This is to confirm whether the placement remains suitable and to confirm/determine adequate resources to meet individual needs. A meeting will be held between First Bridge School's staff team and parents/caregivers at the end of this four-week period.

Waiting lists

A waiting list will be established if:

- At any time where the school's maximum capacity (as per our registration agreement with the DfE) has not been reached but the maximum class size of 12 pupils has been reached within an area of First Bridge School.
- At any time where the school's maximum capacity (as per our registration agreement with the DfE) has not been reached and the maximum class sizes have not been reached within an area of the school, but the introduction of a pupil would be incompatible with the efficient education of others.
- At any time, where the school's maximum capacity (as per our registration agreement with the DfE) has not been reached, and the maximum class sizes have not been reached, but there are insufficient staffing ratios, or a supporting clinical and educational team with the capacity to appropriately oversee and manage the pupil's placement.
- First Bridge School will maintain a clear, fair, and objective waiting list in ranked order in accordance with the oversubscription criteria above. To meet the SEND of each individual pupil, class sizes at First Bridge will not exceed 12. Waiting lists may, therefore, operate in class or year groupings. When a place becomes available in a class/year group operating a waiting list, the relevant family and Local Authority will be notified.

Tribunals

First Bridge School can support SEND Tribunal appeals. Please request for fee information if this situation arises. However, the number of tribunal cases undertaken will be limited at due to the requirement to hold places open for

extended periods. It may therefore be possible that First Bridge School is unable to support a tribunal appeal at a given time.

It is essential to provide evidence to First Bridge School that legal representation has been obtained, before a member First Bridge School can confirm their attendance to a tribunal. It is not guaranteed that a member of First Bridge School will be in attendance at tribunal for external pupils requesting a place at the school.

Temporary and emergency admissions

Due to the need for our pupils to have a planned transition we do not facilitate temporary (anything less than 6 months) or emergency admissions in most instances.

However, we endeavour to work as responsively as possible with Local Authorities and with families to provide a start date as soon as is feasible, always considering the needs of the incoming pupil and their families, and balancing this with the needs of the existing pupils at First Bridge.

Funding, contracts and fees

All places at First Bridge School will be offered in line with our terms and conditions.

For pupils funded to attend First Bridge School by their Local Authority, it is essential to have agreement in writing from the placing Local Authority to fund the placement. From February 2026, this will include the signing of our Pupil Placement Agreement via DocuSign.

Contractually, all pupils will receive a range of support. Additional reasonable services will be provided to enable First Bridge School to meet additional specific individual needs as specified in the EHCP or agreed by the Local Authority following the suitability assessment. These services will be confirmed prior to the contract being issued. Incontinence supplies/support must remain the responsibility of the Placing Authority.

Complex medical procedures that require additional support and training to non-medical staff will be considered through a joint meeting between First Bridge's School senior staff team and appropriate medical professionals. Should we feel able to meet a given need, there will be a tiered system for allocating the additional costs required to support high health needs.



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Highly specialist dietary needs can be supported but may require additional funding. Dietetic support must remain the responsibility of the Placing Authority.

Fees should be paid in line with the agreements made between First Bridge School and the parents/caregivers or the placing Local Authority. Fees may be invoiced to more than one funding provider if agreed as part of the terms and conditions.