



St Catherine's
School & College

*Specialists in Speech, Language and
Communication Needs*

ADMISSIONS POLICY

November 2025

Document Information

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ADMISSIONS POLICY

1. Background and rationale

St Catherine's is a national charity which is approved by the Department for Education to run a non-maintained residential special school for the education of students between the ages of 9 and 19 years who have a primary need of speech, language and communication.

Our centre in the heart of Ventnor on the Isle of Wight provides specialist education, intensive speech and language therapy and occupational therapy and residential facilities including a comprehensive life skills programme. At St Catherine's we believe that all children and young people with speech, language and communication needs should – and can – fulfil their potential in life and our intention is that all our students achieve more than they ever thought possible. Our approach supports effective learning; builds confidence and self-esteem; and reinforces the importance of providing wide-ranging personal development opportunities.

More details about St Catherine's provision can be found in our prospectus. This policy sets out the ways in which potential students are assessed for their suitability to attend St Catherine's.

We know that the choice parents/carers have to make about their child/young person's future is not an easy one. We appreciate that it is important that parents/carers find the right educational environment, which will meet all of their child/young person's particular needs to enable them to reach their full potential in life. We are very pleased to help in any way we can to enable parents/carers to come to a decision about whether they wish to pursue a place at St Catherine's School or Sixth Form College.

Places at St Catherine's can be funded by the student's Local Authority or privately. Students are able to start places at St Catherine's at the beginning of an academic year or term, as appropriate. St Catherine's offers day and weekly boarding placements.

2. Criteria for Student Admission

All young people applying to St Catherine's School and Sixth Form College must have a significant language disorder detailed in their Education, Health and Care Plan paperwork to be considered for admission. Whilst we recognise the comorbidity of language disorder and other forms of neurodiversity such as autism, a diagnosis or primary need of autism alone cannot be considered by the admission panel. This is due to the school taking a neuro-affirming approach to social engagement and participation.

St Catherine's may be the right place if:

- the student is between the ages of 9 and 19 and has a significant speech, language and communication need;
- the student has additional difficulties frequently associated with a speech, language and communication need. Examples may include autism, dyslexia and dyspraxia;
- the student is not meeting age related expectations and requires an adapted National Curriculum that is personalised for speech, language and communication;
- the student needs intensive and integrated speech and language therapy intervention;
- the student's safety can be ensured within the current cohort;
- the student can be accommodated into an appropriate cohort; socially, physically and academically; and

- St Catherine's is the appropriate environment/placement for the young person.

For students who meet the criteria and whose specific needs can be met within our community, St Catherine's offers two academic pathways:

Pathway 1 –

- for students who are behind their peers in terms of academic attainment and present with a varied language profile with several areas of relative strength and need.

Pathway 2 –

- for students who are significantly behind their peers in terms of academic attainment and present with a language profile that has less defined areas of relative strength and need.

3. The Admission Process

St Catherine's reserves the right to alter the admissions process, where it is deemed appropriate. Please note we ask that families who live on the Isle of Wight who would like to apply for a place at St Catherine's speak directly with the Isle of Wight Local Authority before making an application.

Parents/carers are not charged for the admissions process.

St Catherine's holds separate Open Days/Information Mornings for residential and day placements. Families can attend an open day before or after submitting an application. If an open day cannot be attended and the first stage of the admissions process (as detailed below) has been successfully completed, we can offer informal visits to families.

Stage 1 – Review of documentation

We ask parents/carers (or their local authority, at parents'/carers' request) to submit their child's/young person's documentation for review by our assessment team. Documentation should comprise of an Education, Health and Care Plan together with the most recent reports (Educational Psychology, Speech and Language Therapy, Occupational Therapy, School Annual Review and School Report as appropriate), along with the St Catherine's Admissions Form. As part of this form, we ask, if parents/carers are separated, that permission be sought from both parties to proceed with the Admissions Process.

In some cases, a member of the assessment panel may ask to visit your child/young person in their current education setting. This gives us the opportunity to learn more about the student and whether we can meet their needs.

Please note by completing our application form you are agreeing that we can contact your child's current/previous school to find out more about how best we can support them. As part of this we may discuss safeguarding concerns.

Stage 2 – Student trial days

The trial days helps us all ascertain whether St Catherine's is right for each individual child/young person and their family.

Residential trial days at St Catherine's School are three days. The trial days for the Sixth Form College is four days in length. Students seeking a residential placement will be supported by our residential staff outside of school hours. Residential students on trial days will join their relevant class group. Local children/young people usually attend on a non-residential basis and may attend one or more

group trial days, with other local children/young people. On occasion, local children/young people may join their relevant class group for their trial days. All students will follow the usual timetable. Although no formal testing is carried out, observations will take place in all settings and assessments will be made.

For safeguarding purposes, it will be necessary to verify the identity of students on trial days. Parents/carers will be asked to provide a passport or where one is not available a photo signed by a recognised professional e.g. teacher, doctor, social worker. We also require that medical forms etc are completed before the trial. If these are not completed the trial cannot proceed.

A feedback meeting/phone call will take place following the trial days, usually within a week. The purpose of this meeting/phone call is to give an overview of how the trial days went not to confirm whether there will be an offer of place. Once the assessment team have had an opportunity to discuss the trial days, we will inform parents/carers (and the local authority, as appropriate) of the outcome in writing. We aim to do this within two weeks of the interview.

4. The Admissions Team

A specialist team of multi-disciplinary professionals reviews each prospective student's documentation. For students who attend the trial days, an experienced Speech and Language Therapist and Occupational Therapist will undertake informal assessments, while our education team will report on how the child/young person has performed in lessons. Students who are seeking residential places will also receive an informal assessment by our experienced residential team. This team's observations will inform whether we feel that St Catherine's can meet the child/young person's needs. St Catherine's has a dedicated admissions co-ordinator who manages the admission process at an operational level and is a key link for parents/carers during the assessment process. The admission co-ordinator will ensure all the necessary consent forms are completed and will inform the assessment team of any relevant medical information. All of the information held on prospective students is stored and dealt with confidentially by this dedicated team and no information is shared with any external agencies without explicit prior consent from parents/carers, except when the admission request has been received directly from the Local Authority.

5. Further conditions of admission

Places are offered on a day, weekly or termly boarding basis according to a student's circumstances.

All places are offered subject to confirmation of appropriate funding, which, ordinarily, comes from a student's home Local Authority – although in certain circumstances, places may be funded privately.

All places are also offered on a first term's trial basis. If staff feel that St Catherine's is not able to adequately meet a student's needs as a result of the first term, then parents/carers (and the Local Authority) will be informed as soon as possible.

The school works in partnership with parents/carers at all times. However, in circumstances which are deemed by the Principal and/or trustees to be exceptional, parents/carers may be required to enter into contractual arrangements prior to a student's placement starting.

All placements will be reviewed annually as part of the Annual Review process.

In circumstances where – in the Principal's view – a placement becomes untenable, a placement

may be terminated in accordance, with relevant contracts.

6. Formal offer

If St Catherine's is deemed a suitable placement for the prospective student, a formal offer letter will be issued by the school, normally within two weeks of the trial days. Within the offer letter will be the expiry date of the offer and the length of time it is valid for; the length of time will be dependent on when the offer was made.

St Catherine's recognises that some families are unable to secure their child/young person's placement in this period due to circumstances beyond their control. The school will consider any parental request to extend the time of the offer, and extensions will be allowed at the school's discretion on consideration of all the circumstances of the particular case.

Once an offer has been made, if the family has made the referral, they will need to contact their Local Authority to secure funding.

Reports on the trial days will only be written for those students who have been offered a place and only on request. Once a request has been received, it will take 28 working days, not including school holidays, for a report to be written. If a report is requested where a place has not been offered, there will be a charge of £500.

7. SENDIS Tribunals

Parents/carers considering a formal tribunal hearing, if their local authority does not agree to the placement may find it helpful to contact St Catherine's to discuss their particular circumstances.

8. Transition to and Starting at St Catherine's

Once funding has been agreed, availability of a place confirmed, a contract has been signed between St Catherine's and the Local Authority (or with the parents/carers, if the place is being funded privately) and St Catherine's is named of the student's EHCP, a new student can start at St Catherine's at the beginning of the academic school year or term, if this is deemed best for the child/young person and the appropriate curriculum can be provided.

For new children/young people starting at St Catherine's during the academic year, a transition timetable is individually tailored to each case. Students starting at the beginning of the academic year are invited to attend "Transition Days". These take place during the summer term prior to their first academic year. Parents/carers are invited to meet with members of the Senior Leadership Team, Family Liaison Officer, Nurses and Residential staff, if residential, as the students arrive. The students will join their new classes on these days and meet their class staff for the new academic year. The focus of the day is to build relationships with the families so that they and staff at St Catherine's can work together to meet the needs of their child/young person. Parents/carers are given the opportunity to provide additional information about their child/young person and find out more about the school curriculum and policies. Where possible, we aim for all new students to start at St Catherine's in a phased manner, during the first three to four weeks of the autumn term.

In addition to this, for day students the Family Liaison Officer visits the family at home and a member of the education team attend the student's last Annual Review.

9. Procedures in the event of over-subscriptions for placements

St Catherine's is registered by the Department for Education for both day student and boarding

placements. Once a placement has been offered and funding has been secured, every effort is made to ensure each student's needs are met by their placement in the school or sixth form.

In the event that places at St Catherine's are oversubscribed, places will be prioritised based on each individual student's specific needs, circumstances, current placement arrangements, peer group and boarding status.

10. Appeals

Appeals against decisions made during the admissions process, whether in relation to the decision to undertake pre-admission trial days or to offer a place, should be directed to the Principal.

11. Contact details

For more information or to discuss a child/young person's needs, parents/carers and local authorities should contact St Catherine's Admissions Co-ordinator on 01983 852 722 or email admissions@stcatherines.org.uk

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