

# The Observatory School Our Local Offer



The Observatory School (TOS) is a specialist provision for children and young people aged 7-16 with Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) difficulties. Many young people at TOS also have other special educational and co-morbid needs. We list here some of the conditions and diagnosis our pupils have and which we cater for:

- Autistic Spectrum Condition
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
- Social Communication Disorders or Difficulties
- Dyslexia
- Dyspraxia
- Oppositional Defiance Disorder / Traits of Pathological Demand Avoidance
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
- Irlens Syndrome
- Tourette Syndrome

\*NB. This list is not exhaustive.

The range of co-morbid and complex needs that our pupils often present with impact on their individual behavioural presentation. Many of these CYP have experienced the impact of negative SEMH, which may have had a significant impact on their learning and social inclusion within one, or more educational establishments. Pupils behavioural responses to negative SEMH can manifest in a number of ways, which may include:

- Distractible and disruptive behaviour
- Becoming withdrawn or isolated
- Displaying challenging or disturbing behaviour
- Experiencing difficulties with low mood, anxiety or depression
- Self-harm
- Eating disorders
- Substance abuse or physical symptoms that are medically unexplained
- Suicidal ideation

- Breakdown in relationships that may otherwise have been previously secure
- Being vulnerable to criminal exploitation

The school's PAN is 160 and admits both boys and girls. All young people on roll are identified as having a Special Educational Need relating to SEMH or ASC as their primary area of need, and will have an Education Health Care Plan in place. Temporary assessment places may be offered to pupils without an EHC plan, where the Local Authority agrees an assessment will be initiated.

The school operates a split site mode, with three sites supporting pupils with varying needs:

**Leasowe Campus** caters for pupils with SEMH and co-morbid difficulties in years 3-7.

**Vyner Campus** caters for pupils with SEMH and co-morbid difficulties in years 7-11.

**Solar Campus** operates the Guardian curriculum, supporting the schools most complex learners in accessing key areas of the curriculum, to feel safe and confident to promote their creative side and to tackle wider barriers to learning such as low attendance and exclusion rates.

Our learners, regardless of the campus that they are educated on, have previously been unable to access learning in a mainstream or previous specialist environment. Some learners however join us in year 7 from other specialist schools having transitioned out of other KS2 provision. Through either consultation or Local Authority direction, they have been awarded a provision at The Observatory School.

At The Observatory School, we recognise that each child's environment significantly impacts their social, emotional, and mental health (SEMH). Particularly within the school setting, the culture, ethos, and quality of staff play a pivotal role in shaping a student's emotional wellbeing. A supportive and nurturing school environment is essential for creating conditions where students can thrive both academically and personally, highlighting the importance of a whole-school approach in promoting positive SEMH.

The development of positive relationships is fundamentally important in establishing a supportive atmosphere conducive to sustainable positive SEMH. When children experience positive SEMH, they are more likely to engage with their learning with confidence and enthusiasm. This increased engagement has a tangible impact on their academic attainment, illustrating the reciprocal relationship between SEMH and educational success.

The integration of SEMH considerations within the curriculum not only supports individual development but also nurtures a cohesive and resilient school community. By embedding SEMH principles into everyday teaching and learning, we create a

foundation that nurtures all students, offering them the best chance for success both inside and outside the classroom. We do this through adopting a whole-school and collaborative approach via engaging in staff training, reflective practice, and parental engagement, ensuring that every child's unique circumstances are acknowledged and addressed. Implementing good and inclusive teaching practices contributes significantly to improving overall outcomes for all children, particularly in the realm of SEMH. Through intentional efforts to create a compassionate and inclusive learning environment, we can better support our students' emotional and academic growth, ensuring that every learner has the opportunity to flourish.

Our school budget is set by Wirral Local Authority, though some pupils are awarded exceptional needs funding where required to meet their needs. Each site operates a slightly different funding model, detailed below:

**Leasowe Campus:** Staffing ratios include one class teacher and one teaching assistant in each class. This staffing model is funded via place and top-up funding\*, agreed by the LA. Classes with pupils with agreed exceptional needs budgets may have one or more additional teaching assistants, who work on a 1:1 basis with identified pupils.

**Vyner Campus:** Staffing ratios include one class teacher and one teaching assistant in each class. This staffing model is funded via place and top-up funding, agreed by the LA. Classes with pupils with agreed exceptional needs budgets may have one or more additional teaching assistants, who work on a 1:1 basis with identified pupils.

**Solar campus:** This is home of the school's guardian curriculum and staffing ratios are never less than 1:4 (staff/pupil), but are typically 1:2 or even 2:1 or above.

Within **KS2 -3** on both the **Leasowe** and **Vyner** campuses, pupils are streamlined into our **Sensory** and **Social** pathways.

#### **Aims of the Sensory Pathway:**

- To develop and facilitate a pathway for pupils with sensory needs; sensory processing difficulties, Autism, anxiety disorder, sleep disorder and medical needs
- Within individual base classrooms, provide an environment with visual clarity in regards to a safe, sensory-friendly and accessible classroom, not to overstimulate or distract

- To provide a therapeutic curriculum, developing social, emotional, communication, physical and academic progress
- For all pupils to access specialist teaching and learning
- Year 8-11, classes will have a blended and personalised curriculum within the sensory pathway creating flexibility of year groups

**Pupils on the Sensory Pathway may:**

- Be overly sensitive to stimulation, for example they may overreact to, or not like, touch, noise, smells, etc.
- Be easily distracted in the classroom, often out of his/her seat.
- Be easily overwhelmed in the playground, during break time and in class.
- Be slow to start and complete tasks.
- Have difficulty with fine motor tasks such as handwriting.
- Appear clumsy.
- Slouch in their chair.
- Seek rough play such as tackling/wrestling games.
- Be slow to learn new activities.
- Be constantly moving or fidgeting
- Have difficulty making friends.
- Have difficulty changing from one activity to another.
- Find changes to the normal routine hard to cope with.
- Confuse similar sounding words.
- Misinterpret questions or requests
- Have difficulty reading, especially aloud.
- Stumble over words when they are speaking
- Feel anxious and have difficulty managing their emotions

Teachers and support staff who work on the Sensory Pathway give high-quality teaching and support which provides appropriate learning opportunities to all pupils, whatever their individual needs.

**Level of support provided on the Sensory Pathway:**

- All staff have an awareness of the individual needs of the pupils through their IEP and EHCP
- Most subjects are taught in a nurture base classroom except for Science and Food Technology which are taught by specialist teachers in our Technology Block
- Consistent routines and boundaries are set
- Pupils have opportunities to experience success and are given praise
- Seating arrangements and where personal belongings are kept are considered so that pupils can manage normal daily activities in school.
- Use of laptop for coursework/in place of written work
- Environmental considerations have been taken into account, such as the lighting, noise, colour of the background of power points, etc
- Adjustments to school uniform if required
- Opportunities for pupils to have breaks or sensory activities during the day
- Use of fidget and sensory toys
- Where necessary, additional time is given to process language and complete tasks
- Provide visual timetables and visual task boards or checklists.
- Give instructions in small steps and visuals or objects used to help pupils understand what to do.
- The classrooms are clearly labelled so that resources are easy to find and pupils can learn to be independent.
- Planned support for times when there is going to be a change to the normal school routine
- Regular contact between parents/carers and the school through the home/school link book
- Access to the sensory room and quiet spaces in the school

The Sensory Pathway offers a broad and balanced curriculum and enables pupils to make social, emotional and academic progress. The curriculum is planned to enable progression from each phase of school life.

**The Social Curriculum at The Observatory School has been developed through research, We have consulted with our SENCo and ADHD Experts about the development of the Social Curriculum. The base class structure has been designed to reduce sensory need and not overstimulate pupils who access the provision, giving them the ability to access the school curriculum.**

**Aims of the Social Pathway:**

- To develop and facilitate a pathway for pupils with social barriers to learning; social communication, behaviour, relationships, background, home life
- To enable pupils on this pathway to successfully access the school curriculum
- To support pupils to communicate effectively
- Guide pupils to make the right choice through whole-class strategies
- Recognise personal situation and provide a tailored support plan during difficult times
- To promote and prioritise positive relationships between staff and pupils also, peer and peer relationships
- Inform a strategic approach from outcomes set in EHCP
- For all pupils to access specialist teaching and learning

**Pupils on the Social Pathway may:**

- Have overactive behaviour (hyperactivity)
- Come from a disruptive home life
- Have difficulty following instructions or completing tasks
- Have short attention spans and difficulty 'sticking to' an activity
- Have difficulty organising tasks and activities
- Be easily distracted and forgetful
- Not appear to listen when being spoken to
- May demonstrate Impulsive behaviour
- May fidget and appear restless finding it difficult to sit still in class
- Maybe noisy and talkative

- May run about when it is inappropriate
- May have difficulty in paying attention and distractibility (inattention)
- May interrupt others
- May blurt out answers without waiting for the question to be finished
- Have difficulty in waiting or taking turns

Teachers and support staff who work on the Social Pathway give high-quality teaching and support which provides appropriate learning opportunities to all pupils, whatever their individual needs.

*Level of support provided on the Social Pathway:*

With a differentiated approach to teaching and learning, our teachers and support staff help the pupils on the Social Pathway with academic skills such as organising their thoughts and helping the pupils to be aware of what is expected of them. This is completed through **structure** and **flexibility**.

**Examples of this are:**

- All staff have an awareness of the individual needs of the pupils through their IEP and EHCP
- Most subjects are taught in a base classroom except for Art, Science and Food Technology which are taught by specialist teachers in our Technology Block
- Providing a structured environment
- Planned breaks throughout the day
- Allow de-stress, tactile or fidget toys
- Have seating plans
- Opportunities for controlled movement around the classroom
- Lessons are broken down into manageable chunks
- Reward systems set up for each curriculum area
- Reward systems for positive choices
- Adaptable and flexible teaching methods
- Instructions kept short and simple
- Use of laptop for coursework/in place of written work

- Clear classroom rules and expectations
- Pupils use emotional regulation charts in lessons to support them with their learning

The Social Pathway offers a broad and balanced curriculum and enables pupils to make social, emotional and academic progress. The curriculum is planned to enable progression from each phase of school life.

KS4 pupils on the Vyner campus are set into our Vocational and Academic pathways:

The Academic Pathway has a strong focus on GCSE and BTEC qualifications.

The Vocational Pathway focuses on Functional Skills, ASDAN and Entry Level certificates.

### **Guardian curriculum / Solar Campus**

Overall, The Observatory School's Guardian Curriculum aims to implement a unique and comprehensive curricula initiative that seeks to provide a supportive and adaptive educational environment for students with diverse needs.

The thought process and driver behind this is that for some pupils, working solely towards formal qualifications will naturally end in failure and for many this will go on to define their view of themselves, damage self-confidence and further diminish what little resilience they already had. Instead, by providing them regular opportunities to achieve tangible and visible awards in areas of creative development, we at The Observatory School believe in looking to build the confidence and self-belief that can alternatively lay the foundations for their future successes.

There are three distinct levels within the Guardian Curriculum:

1. The Vulnerable Pupil Unit (Guardian curriculum/Solar Campus) (VPU)
2. Personal School Programme(PSP) / Specialist Alternative Provision (AP)
3. Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) Cohort