



Waingels

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www.waingels.wokingham.sch.uk

*Waingels is an **inclusive** school where everyone **belongs, thrives and succeeds***

Consultation on Proposed Special Educational Needs Unit (SEND Unit) for Autism (ASD) at Waingels School for September 2026.

Waingels School is proposing to establish a new SEND Unit for students with an autism (ASD) diagnosis who have Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and require targeted specialist support alongside mainstream education. The Unit will provide a structured, autism-friendly environment where students can access personalised interventions while remaining part of the wider school community. Pupils are expected to spend around 70% of their time in the SEND Unit and 30% in mainstream lessons, ensuring a balanced and supportive pathway into inclusive learning.

Why is this change proposed?

The proposed SEND Unit will help address the increasing local demand for specialist autism provision, ensuring that students can access mainstream education while receiving the personalised support they need to succeed. By creating a dedicated, inclusive environment, the Unit aims to strengthen integration and improve academic and social outcomes for students with SEND.

This new provision will also support continuity for pupils currently attending specialist bases in local primary schools and will enhance the support available to existing Waingels students. The proposal is fully supported by the school, Governors and our Trust, and we believe it represents an important opportunity for our whole school community. We welcome your views as part of this consultation.

How will the new building be funded?

The SEND Unit will require a new building, the capital costs of this are subject to a successful Local Authority bid.

The purpose of the Consultation

This consultation is required under Section 10 of the Academies Act and will run for a minimum of three weeks, including at least two weeks during term time. We invite feedback from parents, carers, staff, local schools and community stakeholders.

How do you respond to this Consultation?

The consultation period for the above changes begins Wednesday 4th February 2026 and will run for 5 weeks, closing on Wednesday 11th March 2026. Should you wish to make any comments, thoughts or have any queries, please contact: admissions@waingels.wokingham.sch.uk



Some frequently asked questions:

1. What is a SEND Unit?

A SEND Unit is a dedicated provision within a mainstream school for students with specific special educational needs - in this case, autism. It provides targeted support while enabling students to access mainstream education for part of their timetable. At Waingels, SEND Unit students will spend approximately 70% of their time in the SEND Unit and 30% in mainstream classes, supported by specialist staff.

2. Who is the SEND Unit for?

The SEND Unit is designed for children and young people whose primary area of need is Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and who require a level of specialist support that cannot be met within a mainstream setting, even with substantial adjustments and targeted interventions.

Pupils attending the Unit will have an EHCP identifying ASD as their main area of need. This aligns with the national expectation that ASD placements fall under the “communication and interaction” category. Children and young people must be within the age range appropriate for the school (11–18) on admission.

Pupils will:

- Have a primary special educational need of ASD.
- Be able to access aspects of the mainstream curriculum at a level appropriate to their age and ability (with or without support), typically within the broad average range of ability or above.
- Have found a mainstream setting highly challenging, despite graduated interventions (for example, withdrawing from regular attendance or experiencing exclusion).
- Require ongoing specialist support to develop social understanding, communication and peer relationships.
- Require regular access to small-group teaching and/or personalised support from specialist staff in order to access learning effectively.

In addition, pupils may:

- Have sensory sensitivities requiring regular environmental adaptations (e.g., need for low arousal spaces or distress caused by loud/unexpected noise).
- Require a low-distraction learning environment and may need to work outside mainstream classrooms for substantial parts of the day.
- Require a highly structured daily routine to reduce anxiety and support learning.
- Experience significant anxiety in mainstream settings.
- Have specific areas of strength that benefit from supported access to mainstream opportunities.

3. How many places will be available?

The SEND Unit will have up to 25 places, phased in gradually:

- Year 1: 5 pupils (Year 7)
- Year 2: +5 pupils (Year 7)
- Full capacity reached over 5 years (Years 7–11).

4. Will students in the SEND Unit be part of the school's normal admissions process?

No. Places in the SEND Unit can only be allocated by the Local Authority SEND Panel through the statutory EHCP process. Admissions to the Unit are made outside the school's Published Admission Number (PAN) of 240 students per year group. This means that any child with an EHCP must be considered and placed via the Local Authority SEND Panel, not through the school's standard admissions route.

5. How will students be supported in mainstream lessons?

Students from the SEND Unit will typically attend mainstream lessons for around 30% of their timetable. They will be supported by specialist teaching assistants, adapted materials, and evidence-based strategies drawn from organisations such as the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF).

Mainstream staff will use a consistent set of ASD-friendly approaches, including:

- Clear structure and predictability: visual timetables, step-by-step task lists, and advance warning of changes.
- Communication support: visual prompts, simplified instructions, and extra processing time.
- Sensory adjustments: low-stimulus seating, noise-reduction options, and access to a calm space when needed.
- Structured social support: pre-teaching expectations for group work, assigned roles, and buddy systems.
- Adapted learning materials: visually supported worksheets, chunked tasks, models/examples, and alternative ways of recording work.

These strategies help students access lessons successfully while building confidence and independence over time.

6. What specialist facilities will the SEND Unit have?

The SEND Unit will include:

- A fully equipped sensory room with adjustable lighting, soothing sounds, tactile resources and bubble-tube/UV-light equipment to support self-regulation and anxiety reduction.
- A low-stimulus safe space with minimal visual clutter, soft lighting and padded walls, which may also function as a movement zone with balance boards and resistance bands for sensory and energy regulation.
- Noise-dampening features and soft lighting in classrooms to reduce sensory overload.
- Individual workstations for focused, low-distraction tasks.
- Computer access for assistive technology and structured learning.
- A domestic kitchen for life-skills development and practical independence.
- A small intervention room suitable for 1:1 Speech and Language Therapy (SaLT), Occupational Therapy (OT), Educational Psychology (EP) sessions, or other targeted interventions.

7. How will the SEND Unit help students feel included?

The proposed SEND Unit would be built at the back of Red Zone, near the main school buildings to ensure students are still part of the wider school community. SEND Unit Students will join mainstream lessons, social activities and extra-curricular opportunities, supported by staff who understand their needs.

8. How is the SEND Unit funded?

Funding for operational costs comes from the Dedicated Schools Grant and the High Needs Block. The capital costs are subject to a successful Local Authority bid. The financing of the main school will be unaffected.

9. Will this affect our current mainstream students?

No. The SEND Unit is designed to enhance inclusion without reducing opportunities for mainstream students. It will bring additional expertise and resources into the school, benefiting all staff and students through improved SEND awareness and training.

10. Will the SEND Unit impact the SEND offer from The Den to our mainstream students?

No, the staffing for the SEND Unit will be separate to our Den staffing. The DEN SEND offer to our SEND students in our mainstream school will remain.

11. How will staff be trained?

Mainstream staff will require specialist autism training to ensure they can confidently support pupils from the Unit in their lessons. This will include:

- Autism awareness and neurodiversity training (communication, sensory needs, masking).
- Strategies for autism-friendly classrooms (reducing sensory overload, structure, visual supports).
- Training in emotional regulation support (recognising anxiety, meltdowns/shutdowns).

SEND Unit staff will have or be working towards specialist qualifications and will engage in ongoing CPD.

Training will be delivered through a mix of in-house sessions and external providers (e.g. Wokingham SEND team).