



Public Consultation

Proposed change in the age range of students educated at Orion Academy from age 10 to 18 years (Year 7 to Year 13) to 5 to 18 years (Year 1 to Year 13)

The purpose of this consultation is to seek views from interested parties on a proposal to extend the age range of students educated at Orion Academy, Knights Road, Oxford. The extension in age range is planned to commence on a phased basis from January 2026.

It is important to us that all those involved or who have an interest have a say, and we welcome your views.

Introduction

Orion Academy is a special school which currently caters for students aged 10 to 18 years, covering Key Stages 3, 4, and 5. It is proposed that the school extends its age range to include students from 5 years of age, thereby encompassing Key Stages 1 and 2.

This extension would enable the school to provide specialist support and intervention at a much earlier stage in a child's educational journey. Evidence shows that early access to specialist provision can significantly enhance long-term educational outcomes, improve social and emotional development, and support reintegration into mainstream education, where appropriate.

By intervening early and providing a tailored, supportive environment from the outset, students are more likely to experience stability, progress positively through their education, prepare for adulthood, and achieve improved academic and personal outcomes.

The enrolment of younger students will take place on a gradual basis, commencing from January 2026 onwards. It is anticipated that a total of approximately 30 students will be enrolled across Years 1 to 6 (3 primary classes), representing around 25 - 30% of the total school population once fully established.

It is not proposed to increase the total number of student places at the school. The number of student places at Orion Academy will remain at the current built capacity, a maximum of 108.

About Orion Academy

Orion Academy is a special school for children and young people with Social, Emotional and Mental Health Needs (SEMH). All students have Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) which describe their needs and the support they require. The current students on roll come from across Oxfordshire.

Ofsted inspected Orion Academy in June 2024. The Ofsted Report states that:
“This is a welcoming and supportive school where pupils receive a high level of support. Staff understand pupils’ social and emotional needs well and build positive relationships. Pupils feel safe and trust staff to help them.

When in school, pupils behave well ... [and] a well-trained pastoral team is on hand to help them.

Personal development is a real strength...”

Orion Academy is currently part of the DfE’s RISE programme (Regional Improvement for Standards and Excellence). This means our school will benefit from researched informed expertise, resources and guidance to help us keep raising standards. The RISE / DfE regional support will work in partnership with us as a School and Trust. The support will focus on key areas like attendance, and it will complement the plans to further improve Orion. By working together with the RISE team, the School and the Trust will build on its strengths and tackle challenges enabling all to continue to deliver strong education and develop further for our amazing students and families.

About The Gallery Trust

The school is part of The Gallery Trust, Oxfordshire’s largest Special Multi Academy Trust. There are 7 special academies in the Trust, with a further new special academy opening in 2026/2027 in Faringdon. A total of 782 students are currently on roll.

The Trust is funded by the Department for Education and Local Authorities. It is a not for profit organisation and an exempt charity, which exists to deliver education for the public benefit in Oxfordshire. The values of the Trust are:

- Commitment to special education – striving to provide the best specialist learning experience for all students
- Opportunities for all to learn – ensuring that students and staff have access to learning pathways which enhance their lives
- Genuine respect and value – creating relationships which promote trust, confidence and respect within environments which are safe and secure

Benefits of this proposal

Offering specialist education to students from the age of 5, rather than the current age of 10, at a purpose-built, well-resourced special school, brings significant benefits. Orion Academy is staffed by a highly qualified and experienced team with expertise in supporting students with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

Students will benefit from moving to specialist provision earlier in their educational journey. Support from a younger age allows for greater consistency in provision and a more stable learning environment throughout the child’s schooling. Extending the age range also removes the need for a major transition at age 10, which can often be a source of anxiety for students with SEND and their families. It will allow students to build secure, long-term

relationships with familiar and trusted adults. They will benefit from consistent expectations, routines, and values: key elements needed for emotional security and successful learning.

Furthermore, this change will support a stronger school community. Students will grow within a familiar and inclusive setting, where their individual strengths and needs are understood over time. This continuity supports not only learning, but also the development of a shared sense of belonging and identity.

This proposal will also help address a clear local need. Currently, the only state-funded special school in Oxfordshire providing education for primary-aged students with Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs, Northern House Academy, is significantly oversubscribed. Both Orion Academy and Northern House Academy are part of The Gallery Trust, which will allow for the sharing of expertise and successful practices in supporting Key Stage 1 and 2 pupils.

Meeting the needs of younger students

Orion Academy has the physical space, building, site, infrastructure, and facilities already in place to accommodate the needs of a younger age group. Some minor adaptations and the purchase of age-appropriate resources will be required, which will be funded by Orion Academy. The intake of younger students will be phased gradually over a period of 6 to 18 months, beginning in January 2026. This staged approach will support a smooth transition and ensure the sustainability and success of the provision as the new age group is embedded.

Staff recruitment will be aligned with this phased enrolment. New staff with specific experience in working with younger students will be appointed as needed. All new and existing staff will receive a comprehensive induction programme, along with specialised and tailored training. This will ensure that the team is well equipped with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to provide a nurturing, structured, and engaging environment for all students at the school,

Orion Academy will also review and adapt its curriculum and provision to meet the academic, developmental, and pastoral needs of students in Key Stages 1 and 2. This will include the design of age-appropriate learning experiences and a focus on building early skills. The Academy will draw on the expertise of colleagues from Northern House Academy, who have an established track record in delivering successful provision for younger students within the Trust.

Operational arrangements will also be reviewed to ensure a safe, structured, and inclusive school day for all students. This may include:

- Split break and lunch times to support age-appropriate play and supervision
- Staggered arrival and departure times which can naturally align with current transport arrangements (e.g. staggered taxi arrivals and use of multiple gates)
- Age appropriate assemblies, celebrations and rewards systems
- Additionally whole school celebrations and assemblies will foster a sense of community and inclusion across the age ranges

Robust and age-appropriate safeguarding arrangements will be in place. These will include clear policies, staff training, and a whole-school safeguarding culture that recognises the specific vulnerabilities of students with Social, Emotional, and Mental Health (SEMH) needs. This will provide proactive and preventative support to reduce risk and ensure the safety and wellbeing of every child.

This proposed change will also mirror the age and admissions of The Gallery Trust's new special school, Artemis Academy, which is due to open in Faringdon in 2026/2027, providing further opportunity for collaboration and learning.

Next Steps - How you can respond to this consultation

We are now entering a formal consultation period. Your feedback is important to us. The consultation will run from 8th September to 5th October 2025 and all stakeholders, including parents, carers, staff, students, and local residents, are invited to contribute their views.

There are several ways you can submit your views:

- complete the online survey at [Consultation Gallery Trust Orion Form](#)
- complete and email the form which accompanies this document to public.consultation@thegallerytrust.co.uk
- complete and print the form which accompanies this document and post it to Consultation, The Gallery Trust, c/o Northern House Academy, 23 South Parade, Oxford, OX2 7JN
- Hard copies of the information sheet and the consultation response form can be requested from the Orion Academy school office

The deadline for your response is 5th October 2025, when the consultation will end.

The Trust will collate all responses, analyse the feedback, address any concerns raised and decide whether to proceed with the submission of the application for the change to the Department for Education.

If you would like a response to your comments, please provide your name, address, and email address or telephone number on your response. Your personal data will be retained in a confidential manner and will be used solely for the purpose of replying to you. Your personal data will be deleted at the end of the consultation.

How can I find out about the outcome of the consultation?

We will confirm the outcome of the consultation in a report which will be published on the Orion Academy and The Gallery Trust websites.

*Thank you for contributing to this consultation.
Your views are welcomed and appreciated.*