

Y7-9 Creative Programme Referral Criteria (Community Strand)

Overview

This programme has been designed by Croydon Council's Creative Health team and partners to support students in Years 7, 8 and 9 who are finding attending and/or fully engaging in mainstream school difficult, particularly due to suspected or diagnosed autism.

However, no formal diagnosis is required to take part, and young people or families who don't identify as autistic are welcome to join if they share similar characteristics that can make school challenging, such as high anxiety and/or sensitivity. Parent-facing documents therefore use the phrasing 'due to high anxiety, sensitivity and/or neurodivergence' in order not to exclude families who do not identify with this diagnosis.

Structure

The programme consists of 10-week 'interventions', made up of weekly (term time) creative sessions. Each intervention will work with cohorts of maximum 15 young people, and provide supportive, neuro-affirming spaces where young people can explore and be themselves alongside other young people in similar circumstances, facilitated by neurodivergent professional artists from [A Collective](#).

The programme uses a variety of creative activities to support young people to develop self-esteem, identity, confidence and friendships, ultimately improving wellbeing and awareness of wider support networks available to young people at school and in the community.

In autumn term 2025, the programme is being held on Saturday mornings (11:00-12:45) from October to December at Thornton Heath Library. **Please note:** this is a pilot programme, and future interventions may be held at other locations/times as feedback dictates; please see the Feedback section below to share any thoughts as to how the programme can best suit potential beneficiaries.

Criteria

The programme welcomes young people living in or registered with a school in Croydon who are finding attending or engaging with school difficult due to high anxiety, sensitivity and/or neurodivergence. The programme has particularly been designed for young people who are, or may be, autistic.

Young people who would benefit from the programme may:

- Present as 'fine' at school, but experience high levels of anxiety and fatigue once home (i.e., masking)
- Display anxiety around attending school; this might include experiencing chronic pain, stomach upset, difficulty sleeping or other physical symptoms
- Show a pattern of unexplained absences, perhaps avoiding a particular lesson or towards the end of a week or term (e.g., when they may be experiencing burnout)
- Appear not to have bonded friendships; they may struggle to connect with others at lunchtime or during other non-structured times of the school day
- Behave in a 'people pleasing' manner, or always try to respond with the 'right' answer rather than giving their own opinion. For example, always replying 'I don't mind' rather than expressing a choice.
- Be likely to stay quiet in the back of the classroom and avoid attention
- Be reluctant to answer questions that written work indicates they know
- Fall asleep in lessons or 'zone out' even in favourite subjects
- Appear forgetful, fail to complete homework or not quite follow classroom instructions
- Be sensitive to injustice, possibly feeling unable to move on from an instance of perceived injustice without confiding in a trusted adult or parent

Young people may also experience the co-occurring conditions, such as:

- Situational mutism
- Dyspraxia
- Dyslexia
- Tourette's, or other tics
- ADHD, where this is the secondary condition rather than main presentation

This programme is **not** suitable for young people with general learning/intellectual disabilities, who require 1:1 support at school, or who struggle in group environments (e.g., difficulties with turn-taking or sharing space with others).

The programme is designed to support all young people who are finding attending or fully engaging with school challenging, and may be appropriate for young people who are:

- attending full time, but feeling exhausted, burnt out or otherwise struggling
- attending, but avoiding or not engaging in certain lessons
- attending, but have experienced low attendance in the past
- attending on a reduced timetable
- attending only occasionally
- not attending at all

To refer

If you have identified a young person who matches the criteria listed above and you think would benefit from the programme, please speak to the parent/carer and either:

- Complete the Referral Form to allow the Creative Health team contact the family directly; or
- Share the weblink below with families and ask them to contact the team directly.

Further information about the young person may be requested from you at a later date, if required and if consent is received.

Referral forms and further information for parents can be found online at:

<https://www.culturecroydon.com/home/creative-health-croydon/creative-programmes-for-autistic-young-people-in-years-7-9/>

Feedback

As a pilot project, we are keen to hear from families and professionals to understand how the programme can best fit your needs.

If you would like to give feedback about how we could change or improve the project to better suit a young person – this could include the day, time, location, ages, content, delivery style (e.g., online), marketing or any other ideas – or enquire about hosting an in-school project at your school, please get in touch on creativehealth@croydon.gov.uk and we will arrange a time to speak.