

# Hope Tree School



A school for autistic girls between the ages of 7 and 16

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# Welcome

We are very happy to welcome you to Hope Tree School. We believe that our students will make the most progress when they feel safe and are enjoying school. We embrace the differences within our school community and celebrate successes of every shape and size. Students who attend Hope Tree School often arrive having developed significant barriers to learning resulting in gaps in their educational journey.

Through building positive and safe relationships, adapting teaching styles and learning activities to suit each individual student we strive to remove barriers to learning. We aim to facilitate the development of lifelong learning skills alongside teaching key life skills to support all students to achieve their potential, be themselves and take their place in society with strong foundations, good self esteem and stable mental health.



# History

Hope Tree School is a non-profit organisation founded by two parents with autistic children.

The school recognises that autistic girls often present differently. Many of them experience significant sensory differences, often mask their difficulties and are highly vulnerable to developing mental health difficulties.

Many girls are stuck in mainstream settings and have nowhere else to go. Some have been traumatised by their experiences and are not attending school at all or have been placed in the only settings available due to a nationwide lack of specific provision.

Hope Tree School has been created to bridge that gap between the need to access a mainstream curriculum and the need for that mainstream curriculum to be delivered in a sensory-aware, calm and predictable environment.

Hope Tree School will give autistic girls access to education, generate opportunities to make friends and develop social skills. Providing a calm and predictable environment will allow them to recover from their previous experiences and achieve their potential.



# Our Aims

Access education

Make friends

Provide a safe place to:

Learn life skills

Prepare for adult life



# Hope Tree School: what is on offer

- Access to a mainstream curriculum
- Small class sizes (maximum of 6)
- Rural peaceful setting
- Autism specific teaching
- Holistic approach
- Opportunities for outdoor learning
- Use of technology to support learning
- OT support and interventions
- SALT support and interventions
- Psychological support and interventions
- School Dog
- Animal Assisted Interventions (AAI)



# Admissions

- Applications for a place at Hope Tree School will be considered at any time of year.
- Admission to the school is subject to there being a place available within an appropriate cohort of students.
- All students at the school will have either: -
  - a primary diagnosis of Autism.
  - be on a waiting list for an Autism Assessment with evidence to support the need for assessment.
  - a strong suspicion of Autism recognised and evidenced by professionals already working with the student.
  - evidence for an identified need for additional support e.g. OT, SaLT, therapy and/or a sensory friendly environment.
- A cognitive assessment must have been carried out which evidences the students need for a mainstream curriculum.
- For those students with a primary diagnosis of Autism the assessment must have been carried out by:
  - A statutory provider, e.g. NHS, Paediatrician, Educational Psychologist
  - An independent assessment carried out in accordance with NICE guidelines.
- Each application will be individually considered following discussions with parents/carers, statutory services and any other relevant professional.

## Uniform

In order to take account of the sensory differences of many of our students, Hope Tree School has adopted school colours rather than a set school uniform. A common barrier to accessing education is how different clothes feel on each individual student. Uncomfortable clothes can often be a distraction from learning and cause discomfort and distress.

As such all students will be encouraged to wear navy bottoms (any style and material that the student finds comfortable and is appropriate for the task of learning and being active) and a white top (this should cover the students shoulders and be of a comfortable material). On days where PE is scheduled, students can change into Navy Shorts, a white T-shirt and trainers. Seam/label free zipped Hoodies with the school logo are available from the school. While clothing/uniform will never be made a barrier to attending school, students will be given choice and opportunities to wear clothes to school that highlight and value Hope Tree School, enabling a sense of belonging as many of their siblings or children in their community do.

At Hope Tree School there will be many opportunities to take learning outside the classroom. As a result all students will need waterproof shoes for outside and comfortable enclosed shoes for inside.

# Lunch/snacks provision

Many autistic children, particularly those with sensory differences have a restricted range of foods they are comfortable eating. Feeling hungry or uncomfortable is a significant barrier to learning. At Hope Tree School we want every student to enjoy their meals, feel nourished and have the energy and resources needed for learning. Monday to Thursday children will bring their own packed lunch to school, eaten outside, picnic-style, on any day when the weather allows. At other times lunch will be eaten inside on a communal table.

On Fridays we will have a shared meal prepared by school staff. Students will vote from a selection of lunch meals offered for each Friday. Individual adaptations will be taken into account where possible. The regular communal meals will give students the opportunity to try new things, explore new flavours and challenge themselves a little. These communal meals will also give opportunities for staff to model positive behaviours and reinforce any learning in a conversational context.

Healthy snacks and water will be available to students throughout the school day.

Hope Tree School aims to be 'single-use plastic free'. All students will be given a lunchbox, water bottle and reusable wax wrap on arrival and all parents/carers are encouraged not to use single use items within the packed lunch.

# Equality and sustainability

## Where difference is valued

Hope Tree School is committed to ensuring that all staff and students are treated equally and fairly regardless of race, gender (within the context of being a girls school), nationality, religion or belief, orientation, disability, age or marital status.

As a school community we are committed to valuing diversity, tackling discrimination, promoting equality and fostering good relationships between people. We aim to provide an education which is sensitive to individual needs and the school seeks to promote awareness, understanding and respect for diversity in our world.

## Sustainability

Hope Tree School aims to become a sustainable school by reducing our ecological footprint through adopting sustainable practises in our everyday lives. We will achieve this by integrating sustainability into all areas of the curriculum and instilling a sense of ownership and pride in improving the environment.

## Home/school communication

Good communication links between home and school are essential to an effective partnership, which is in the best interests of every child.

As a school we are committed to reducing our carbon footprint and where possible electronic forms of communication will be used in the first instance. Face to face meetings can also be arranged by appointment only.

In addition to email regular telephone/video meetings can be held with staff members in order to support the needs of any individual student.

School letters/information will be sent via email.

Emails from parents will be responded to promptly, in accordance with school policy and in most cases within 24 - 48 working hours.

## The school day

8:55	Morning registration
9:00 - 10:30	Sessions 1 and 2
10:30	Break time
10:45 - 12:15	Sessions 3 and 4
12:15	Lunchtime
12:55	Afternoon registration
13:00 - 15:00	Sessions 5 and 6
15:10	End of school day

## Class Structure

Lower Key Stage 2	Years 3 and 4
Upper Key Stage 2	Years 5 and 6
Lower Key Stage 3	Years 7 and 8
Upper Key Stage 3	Year 9

# Different ways of learning

Hope Tree School uses a mixture of whole class taught sessions, adult-led small group sessions, 1:1 interventions and self-directed learning.

Self-directed learning, or continuous provision, enables students to engage in learning activities which are designed to be less prescriptive and inspired by each individual child's interests and thought processes. Students and staff will be able to capture their learning through the use of technology and match it to key objectives within the National Curriculum.

Resources provided during continuous provision sessions will be linked to planned objectives for the day but will give the students the opportunity to use the resources creatively to facilitate their own learning.

Adult-led small group and 1:1 learning will target areas of the curriculum students need support with or where there are identified gaps in learning.



# Curriculum

At Hope Tree School we provide a learning environment which allows every child to learn through access to The National Curriculum. This broad and balanced curriculum is adapted to support and challenge each individual. It is an environment which strives to engage all children and enable them to want to learn by fostering their natural curiosity and developing a lifelong love of learning.

Hope Tree School offers a holistic and individualised approach to learning that is oriented towards the needs of each student. It is our belief that how we teach is fundamental to the success of our students and we use a range of strategies to enable all students to feel safe and well supported. Feeling safe and supported is fundamental to any student's readiness to learn and is prioritised at Hope Tree School. By recognising students' individual needs, and having a broad range of resources to hand we can help them to realise their hopes and dreams and fulfil their potential.

Lessons are carefully planned around the individual learning and developmental needs of our students. Our focus on building positive and trusting relationships and a sense of belonging enables our students to develop the skills and knowledge they need to access the full school curriculum.

By keeping class sizes small, providing small group learning and 1:1 interventions as needed, all students will be able to close gaps in previous learning and create sound educational and life skill foundations for taking more formal examinations and qualifications in the future.

# Curriculum

A young woman with braided hair, wearing a white school uniform, is shown in profile, focused on writing on a blue clipboard with a blue pen. The background is a soft-focus outdoor setting with green foliage.

## Progress monitoring

Children's progress and development is carefully monitored so that children are introduced to the next stage of learning at the right time for them. A focus on offering first-hand experiences will provide children with meaningful learning opportunities that remain with them and inspire them to pursue their own learning.

## Assessment

Teachers will use both formative and summative assessment methods, however, these will predominantly be implemented subtly so as not to cause unnecessary anxiety. Assessments will be used to inform planning and to ensure the next stage of learning is the right one for each student.

## British Values

All staff actively promote the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs. British Values are an integral part of our curriculum and can be seen demonstrated in many aspects of school life.

# Outdoor learning

The benefits of outdoor learning are many and varied. At Hope Tree School we utilise our outdoor environment for learning on a daily basis. The outdoors provides real experiences as a context for learning and supports a range of learning styles and sensory needs.



# Technology

Use of technology is integrated into the school day for accessing learning, recording learning, collaborating and communicating.

Each student has access to an individual iPad, associated accessories and appropriate apps. Students gain the skills to use these devices and are taught how to use technology responsibly.

All technology is designed to support effective learning.



# School visits and trips

Students will be exposed to a range of experiences and professions through demonstrations by visitors to the school. Students will have opportunities to observe, or participate in activities whilst in a familiar environment and supported by familiar members of staff.

Trips (e.g. to a castle or museum) and events (e.g. school fete, art gallery) will be planned to support learning and provide additional experiences for students. Where possible events at the school will aim to involve parents and families of students.

Visits, trips and events will often be linked to the current curriculum theme or will be designed to enhance life skills or experiences, giving direct benefit to individual students and the school community as a whole.



# Behaviour Management

We have a positive and inclusive approach to managing behaviour that is built on recognising that all behaviours are a form of communication. We believe that we all share responsibility for trying to understand what is being communicated and where appropriate give students opportunities to communicate in ways that promote the safety and welfare of themselves, others, the school community and wider society.

The school operates a reward and outcomes programme. Desired behaviours are rewarded where and when they happen. Students will be given many opportunities throughout the school day to be rewarded for a variety of key skills, achievements and good choices.

Where the cause of behaviour is unclear staff will have conversations with a student about their behaviour, their intentions and possible options available to the student to make choices which are consistent with their intended outcome.

Where a student is struggling to make good choices about their behaviour, they will be reminded of potential outcomes of their choices and provided with a range of options.

Sanctions and outcomes are only delivered when all other methods have been exhausted and/or where there is a concern about a student's safety. Further details can be found in the School's Behaviour Policy..

## Informal/formal Rewards for achievement

- Non verbal praise
- Specific verbal affirmations
- Tangible rewards for key life skills programme
- Peer Praise
- Praise from parents/carers
- Individual/group choosing time
- Student achievement boards
- Certificates of achievement
- Postcards home to parents
- Opportunities to participate in the school's responsibilities programme
- Weekly reward programme
- School trips

## Key skills programme

Students will be able to earn reward points for demonstrating a range of key skills whilst at school. These are key skills that underpin day to day life and enable students to succeed in anything they choose. Rewards can be traded in on a weekly basis for non material pleasurable opportunities.

### Key Skills are:

- Kindness
- Perseverance
- Independence
- Resilience
- Trying new things
- Making good choices
- Flexibility

# Mental Health and Wellbeing

The mental health and wellbeing of all students and staff working with them is a top priority at Hope Tree School. Mental health difficulties are often a barrier to learning. Research is consistent in identifying that early intervention is key to good outcomes.

Mental health support is therefore an integral part of the school curriculum and the daily approach to behaviour management.

Mental Health support can be offered in a variety of ways, these include:

- Pastoral support within the school delivered by all staff
- Regular child centred mindfulness activities delivered as part of the curriculum
- Small group interventions with a specific theme e.g. anxiety management
- Individual sessions with the Head of Pastoral Care aimed at resolving a particular individual difficulty
- Formal autism adapted CBT sessions for depression, anxiety, OCD and other identified mental health difficulties
- Formal course of non directive therapy where the need has been identified (play, art, music therapy).
- Animal assisted interventions including Hope Tree Schools in house 'school dog'.

# Allied Therapies

At Hope Tree School educational provision is supported by a range of allied therapists who are available to all students at the school. If a student is already engaged with any qualified professional prior to attending the school, this relationship and intervention can carry on whilst the student attends school. Hope Tree School welcomes any qualified professional to work alongside our students.

## SaLT - Speech and Language Therapy:

Hope Tree School recognises the role of speech and language development in autism. Specific speech and language interventions can be provided in line with recommendations which form part of a student's EHCP. In addition, once a student has started at the school, if there are any concerns relating to speech and language development, students can be assessed by a Speech and Language Therapist and interventions will be recommended.

Some interventions can be delivered by school staff trained in specific interventions and staff training may be provided where appropriate by the Speech and Language Therapist. Some interventions can be delivered directly by a Speech and Language Therapist.

# OT - Occupational Therapy:

Many autistic students have additional needs relating to sensory differences and difficulties with motor co-ordination. Hope Tree School is able to offer a calm and non-disruptive environment where distractions are kept to a minimum. Hope Tree School operates from a rural site which is peaceful and calm. There are many opportunities for learning to happen outside where movement can be an integral part of the activity.

Where Occupational Therapy interventions are indicated on an EHCP, Hope Tree School will endeavour to ensure that these interventions are undertaken wherever possible.

Some interventions can be delivered in school with staff who have undertaken specific training by our visiting OT. Some interventions will be delivered directly by our visiting OT or where the student already has a relationship with an OT, this can continue in school. Once a student has started at the school, if there are any concerns any student can be assessed by our visiting Occupational Therapist.

# Animal- assisted interventions:

Time spent in nature and in the company of animals can have a profound impact on students; helping to alleviate stress, calm nerves, build confidence and provide a sense of wellbeing.

The main aims of Animal Assisted Interventions (AAI) are to improve a person's social, emotional and cognitive functioning using animals that have been selected for their temperament and calm behaviours.

There is growing evidence that AAI can assist with a wide range of health disorders, in both children and adults. Autistic children can benefit greatly from these sessions which can improve health, wellbeing and quality of life.

Katy Gilbert, Queenholme Alpacas

# Skye - school dog

Hope Tree School has its own school dog. Unless unwell or on days where there is a school trip Skye comes to school every day. She enjoys greeting children in the morning, listening to children read and being stroked and brushed.

In addition to being a listening ear for all students, helping them regulate and reduce anxiety, Skye is specifically trained to help with certain tasks. She enjoys listening to children read and is able to perform a 'rest position' to allow a student to stroke her head.

Away from her working life Skye loves to play with a ball, swim in any water possible and curl up on a comfy sofa.



