



Hope Tree School....

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The purpose of school....

When my first child was born I thought that as a 'good' parent I should provide my newborn daughter with love, food, shelter and enrichment activities so that she would have a wonderful foundation for going to school where she would thrive, have a good social network and achieve her goals and ambitions. All was well and we were on track until she entered her reception class and all those things that I thought would happen—did not! I then entered the world of supporting a child with SEND in a rigid system that wanted her to conform. She couldn't do what they wanted and I was not willing to allow the current model of delivering education to destroy her. Fast forward 20 years, a change of school and she has survived the system and is now finally following at least some of her hopes and dreams. Little did I know back then, that those early experiences in the world of SEND would drive the determination to open Hope Tree School and enable others to also achieve their dreams and ambitions. Another thing that has taken me a very long time to learn is that school is so much more than just the provision of education. A few years ago when my younger daughter didn't survive past year 2 in her local mainstream primary school and was receiving tuition at home, I thought that this was all she needed. Be taught, catch up with lost learning and everything would be ok—again I was wrong. Although for some children any form of school doesn't meet their needs, a school does provide and mirror the fundamentals of life as an adult and there are all kinds of learning that we need for living our lives that are not found within the National Curriculum but do exist naturally within any school system. The most recent of these—the arrival and departure of staff mirrors the coming and going of friends, colleagues and family members in the future. We are grateful for all our staff at HTS and while transitions of all kinds are challenging for many of our students, the loss/changing nature of relationships can be particularly difficult. Whilst the departure of some staff leaves room for everyone to have the pleasure of new staff, it is still tough. We all want those relationships to never end. Having the opportunity to practice saying goodbye and waving staff off to new opportunities is part and parcel of school life.

Beside the Seaside—July



We would like to wish a fond farewell to an incredible Maths teacher, Elle. Good luck with your studies and your new job spreading the joy of Maths to everyone you come across.

Our second fond farewell goes to Helen who is nearing the completion of her own studies and will follow her passions within Environmental work in the future.

Thank you for everything you have done over the last three years and the 'duck experiment' will become an HTS legend for years to come.

In September we are looking forward to welcoming four new teachers—Emma, Joy, Georgie and Kate, alongside new support staff. A warm welcome to Lauren, Rachel and Poppy.

Duke Of Edinburgh Award

Even though we are a tiny school we do try and give our students as many opportunities as it is possible to include. Our year 9 students were all given the chance to participate in the Duke of Edinburgh Bronze Award. There are so many life skills that are built into doing this ranging from knowing how to cook a simple meal, put up a tent, being independent, being part of a team, problem solving to name just a few. Walking for a whole day, carrying the equipment that is needed and then being tired, but having to keep going, get the food and tent sorted before trying to get some rest in an unfamiliar space before getting up and doing it all again the next day builds perseverance and resilience skills particularly during a heat wave. Students have also learned new skills and volunteered their time for others.



A massive congratulations to Rowan who was the first student to complete all aspects of their award.

We are all proud of you!

In addition to getting on with their school work our students also worked really hard on their charity stalls that were held during our annual celebration day. More students means more charities have benefitted from their hard work. Students planned and made the items that were going to be sold, created their own poster boards, manned their stalls on the day and interacted with unfamiliar adults and children. This year was bigger and better than last year.





Another aspect of what we do at HTS involves giving all our students a range of opportunities and choices. This ensures that opportunities are offered but no student is ever forced to participate in an activity that they don't feel ready for. Some of our longest standing students, and some of our more courageous younger students had the opportunity to spend a night away from home in the familiar surroundings of school where they can spend time with their friends, sleep in a tent overnight, hunt for treats at dusk and roast marshmallows over a fire pit. Three students and two tents tried the HTS—annual campout two years ago and this year we had 5 tents and 10 students.



Almost all of our PE activities take place off site. Partly because we don't have designated PE facilities on site and partly because it allows us to choose the PE activities that may best suit the students that we have on roll at school. Most of our students have found PE at previous schools very stressful particularly those PE activities that require team play, so we always ensure there is a mixture of PE that for the most part suits some of the students some of the time. The one PE activity that is looked forward to by most every year is the watersports session at Milton Country Park. We are grateful to Tony and Alex who run these sessions and always look to ensure that everyone has a chance to do something that works for them. Thank you again and we will look forward to seeing you next year.

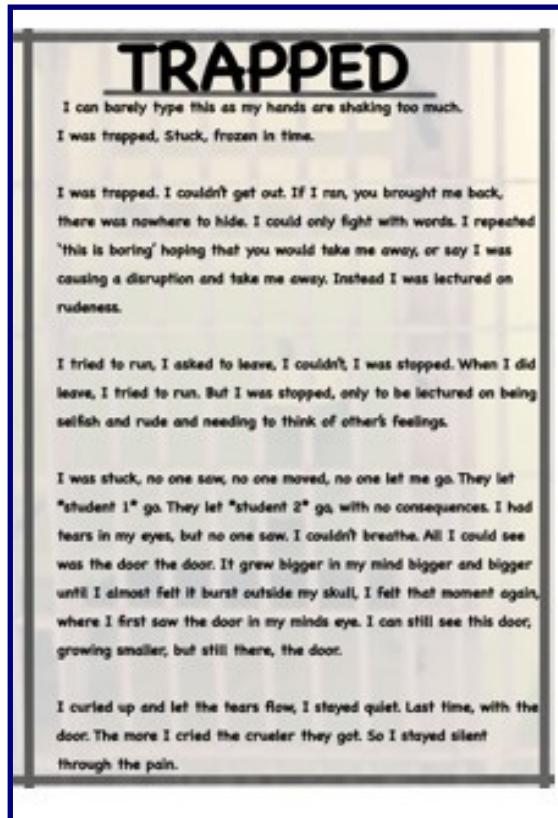


Therapy or No Therapy!

There is strong debate within the wider autistic community about whether a formal course of therapy is beneficial to autistic people. Some argue that traditional therapies are not beneficial but there are also case by case examples where different individuals have benefitted from having therapy. There are several key ingredients to success which include whether the person receiving the therapy wants to be there, whether the therapist has sufficient skills and experience to support the person while they proceed through what is often a therapeutic journey and whether the timing is right. The right person, at the right time and when the person wants to engage, all increase the chances of a successful outcome.

Often the young people who arrive at HTS have had very difficult experiences at their previous schools and some young people have felt traumatised by having to fit into the neurotypical expectations of mainstream (and sometimes specialist) environments. Just coming to HTS doesn't necessarily resolve everything that has happened to them previously and those historical strands can be seen time and again as students re-acquaint themselves with coming to school, making friends and learning life skills. Just coming to a new school where the experience of school is different doesn't resolve everything that has already happened.

For some students the triggers for previous traumatic experiences lay just below the surface and re-appear from time to time. We never know when this might happen and our job is to try and understand and support. Students use a variety of ways to try and process everything that has happened to them—this might include drawing, music, dancing, drama, writing and spending time with animals. All of this is done informally, as part of day to day life and not done to a therapy schedule. Sometimes allowing students to process their past experiences in a way, and at a timescale to suit them, can be as beneficial as a formal course of therapy.



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Learning outside the classroom

In addition to everything we do inside school we also try and undertake as many trips and visits as we can. This involves going off site, visiting new places, sometimes interacting with unfamiliar people, buying an ice-cream, being taught by others and seeing new things. Not all students enjoy every trip that we plan, but many do. They can then create new memories, gain confidence in what they can do and build stronger and more connected foundations for the future. External visits can also be the inspiration for writing and drawing. A recent visit to the Highland Cow Cottage resulted in this beautiful drawing. Other students have visited the National Gallery, the Science Museum in London and Hunstanton. We are planning a slightly longer residential for the Spring—more details to follow in the Autumn.

