

A Guide to Our School

Our School at a glance...

- Co-educational
- Day School 5-19 Years
- Egerton Road, Charing Heath, Ashford, Kent TN27 0AX
- 01233 712030
- enquiries@heathfarmschool.org

How does the school know when a young person needs extra help?

Heath Farm School offers a unique and stimulating environment where every student is able to make outstanding progress in their personal development and enjoy success in their education.

With modern, well-resourced classroom pods, the expertise of the dedicated staff team ensures that each child can put past failures behind them in a calm and settled atmosphere.

Each student is motivated through a personalised curriculum and clear targets.

Heath Farm lies in a spacious rural setting near Ashford, and attracts students from across Kent, neighbouring counties and parts of London, because of its growing reputation for success.

How does the school know when a young person needs extra help?

Heath Farm School provides education for students of primary, secondary and Post 16 school age that are identified as having a range of special educational needs. A high number of students attend the school because of their social, emotional and behaviour difficulties. All students who attend Heath Farm School have an Education, Health and Care Plan that sets out each child's individual needs. These plans outline the support we must make in order to meet each child's needs.

In addition to this, the school undertakes a broad range of formal and informal assessments to enable us to constantly review the needs of our students and respond accordingly. We have excellent systems in place to discuss and share progress with parents and carers and this allows any issues to be discussed promptly and, where necessary, change support or plans within the school.

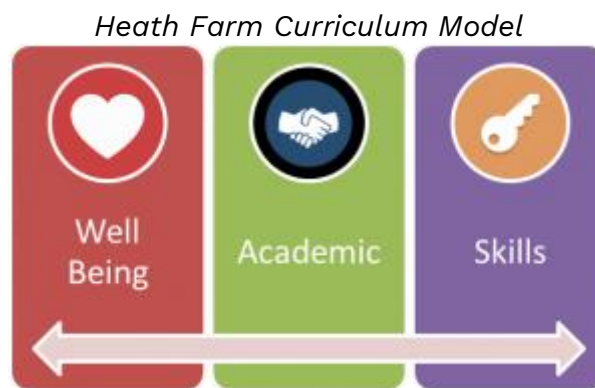
How will the school staff support my young person?

Class sizes are small in comparison to mainstream schools with a maximum of eight students who are supported by a tutor team of a teacher, a teaching assistant and a varying number of learning support assistants. This allows for a high level of support for learning within the classroom. The tutor team is

responsible for each child's individual learning plan; personal learning and behaviour targets are set and reviewed regularly throughout the year. A member of the tutor team will contact parents and carers on a regular basis. Staff formally assess student progress ongoing throughout the term and Individual Education Plans are updated termly, three times a year. If required, and in consultation with the school's senior leadership team, arrangements are made for additional support or other methods to help students overcome their barriers to learning. The school's proprietor, Acorn Education and Care, is actively involved in the life of the school and receives reports on all aspects of student progress and whole school performance through the governance cycle.

How will the curriculum be matched to my young person's needs?

The curriculum is based on the vision statement of 'A place of love, commitment and opportunity'.



'Love' represents the unconditional love that is provided through the well-being support provided to all students resulting in them being able to overcome and manage their differing needs.

'Commitment' represents the commitment to providing our students with a purposeful and engaging academic curriculum resulting in them gaining relevant accreditation so that they leave with a world of opportunity at their feet.

'Opportunity' represents the life skills that we will develop in the students resulting in them leaving school fully prepared for adulthood and their working life.

It is key that each of these are of equal importance and in fact all support each other equally:

- a. Develop a child's well-being and you improve their chances of achieving academically. They will also develop the confidence to tackle and understand those key life skills for success.
- b. Prove to a child that they can be successful academically and you will do wonders for their well-being. They will also be better able to reflect on and develop those key life skills
- c. Give children the skills to be successful in life and again their well-being will rise significantly. They will also grow in confidence within their academic subjects and value and appreciate the importance of academia more readily

Provision of a rich, inclusive, holistic learning environment where every learner is empowered to progress and achieve at the highest level, is fundamental to the philosophy at Heath Farm School.

The curriculum is the whole learning experience offered by the school, including the therapeutic, well-being and Positive Behaviour and Reinforcement system (PBRs) aspects of the school ethos.

How students learn is as important as what they learn. Students are learning all the time and it is our responsibility to optimise learning opportunities throughout the school day, in curriculum time, during Well-being sessions and at social times. Within our established ethos and person centred values, students will gain confidence in making positive, healthy choices and increase their knowledge and understanding of the world around them.

All teachers and professionals engaged in teaching and learning activities will be partners in learning and continuously develop their skills and competencies for providing an appropriate range of strategies to inspire all of our learners.

We aim to ensure that the curriculum:

1. Is broad, balanced and relevant focusing on demonstrable positive impact upon all aspects of the individual needs of each student, including their SEMH needs.
2. Will encourage all students to reach their full potential.
3. Is flexible enough to meet the needs of the diverse population within the school and matched to the individual needs of the student at the current point in their development.
4. Builds on students' existing knowledge, skills and understanding.
5. Recognises that students often enter the school with low academic and well-being starting points and provides individualized support to close the gaps and overcome barriers to learning.
6. Reflects the multicultural nature of society and builds on Fundamental British Values.
7. Develops confidence, resilience, high self-esteem and independence.
8. Develops a respect for themselves, other people and the environment.
9. Prepares students for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life including all aspects of the Skills Builder curriculum from KS1 through to Post 16.
10. Enables students to develop knowledge, understand concepts and acquire skills, and be able to choose and apply these in relevant situations including preparation of adult life.
11. Supports students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
12. Supports students' physical development and responsibility for their own health, and encourages them to be active.
13. Ensures equal access to learning, with high expectations for every student and appropriate levels of challenge and support.
14. Provides subject choices that support students' learning and progression, and enables them to work towards achieving their goals.

15. Develops students' independent learning skills and resilience, to equip them for further/higher education and employment.

Teachers plan their lessons to enable all learners to make good progress and to be challenged. This includes planning different tasks for students of differing abilities, allocating increasing amounts of support or setting open ended tasks and allowing students to respond according to their level of understanding. In the primary phase, there is an emphasis on nurture and preparing children for learning, at all phases Literacy and Numeracy are threads that are evident within a broad range of activities.

While much of the curriculum is compulsory for all students, there is an element of increasing choice as students move through the school. College, work experience and other vocational pathways ensure that the curriculum, as far as possible, matches to the student's needs, strengths and interests. Students can access a range of vocational courses which are facilitated through partnerships in the community.

What support will there be for my young person's overall well-being?

Heath Farm School has a very strong ethos, based on our core values of Love, Commitment and Opportunity. We have strong pastoral systems in place and we promote self-belief and encourage aspirational personal achievements. Most students attending Heath Farm School have experienced difficulties in their previous mainstream education, resulting in fixed and sometimes permanent exclusions. Here at Heath Farm School, students can access a very high level of support to improve behaviour.

Expectations are high and students have targets set that relate to their behaviour, well-being and learning. These are graded each lesson and during breaks and then monitored by the tutor teams. Students are taught to take responsibility for their behaviour and there are clear consequences if behaviour is detrimental to their own learning or that of other students. If this happens students must complete work missed in their own time, privileges may be withdrawn or students may be asked to work away from peers. We have a rewards system that is tailored, whenever possible, to individual interests.

Students are encouraged to reflect on their behaviour and consider alternative strategies to better manage themselves when they are challenged by set tasks and social situations. We aim to support students to return to learning with their peers as quickly as possible and, other than in exceptional circumstances, students start afresh each day.

All non-attendance is followed up on a daily basis and we work very closely with our students, parents and carers to ensure high attendance is maintained and celebrated and that any attendance issues are dealt with promptly.

The student voice is represented through the active school council which meets on a regular basis. They annually conduct whole school student surveys, the results of which are published on the school website.

Nurture Provision

Nurture groups were established at Heath Farm School in 2006, with the underlying philosophy that children who are exhibiting SEMH behaviour are experiencing emotions and behaviours that are rooted in earlier developmental stages and are inappropriate for their chronological age. Furthermore, the lack of developmentally necessary experience means that the social and psychological foundations for learning are not laid down. The main theory underpinning our Nurture Groups is that of Attachment Theory. This refers to the dynamic relationship between children and their caregivers. Inadequate or disrupted relationships have left the young people stuck at an earlier developmental stage. In general, young people taken into the groups do not engage successfully with people and/or events. They tend to fall under one or more of the following broad headings:

- Isolated and withdrawn from others.
- Craving affection, and making indiscriminate and short lived attachments.
- Pre-nursery behavioural features and immature dependent relationships.
- Limited or under-developed play/language/motor development etc.
- Under developed social relationships; can't share; resists control; interfering and disruptive; poor tolerance for frustration, disappointment or failure; may have temper tantrums.
- Resistive, manipulative and/or explosive behaviour in children who are in other ways underdeveloped and show features of dependency.
- Problems of attention to and concentration on age appropriate activities in general.

At Heath Farm School students in the Nurture Groups are taught in small groups with a high level of staff support. Initially established for younger students, the provision has been developed and extended and, while all classes promote and engage with nurture approaches, currently there are five specialised nurture groups; three for primary age students; one for KS3 students; and one for students in Years 10 and 11. Each has a slightly different approach.

Primary age students are taught in a formal Nurture Group style; the aim is to support their reintegration into the main school groups within a time frame that is suitable for the individual child. Students in this group will offer distinct behavioural and educational challenges and much focus is put on education through social interaction, play and experiential learning, using personalised programmes of study. While they make progress in core subjects and enjoy thematically delivered studies, they learn social skills; turn taking; sharing; how to play formally and informally; etc. They enjoy a wide range of visits to support their studies, as well as learning to enjoy listening to stories, art and craft, gardening etc.

In Lower Secondary we support students from Year 7-9 who are taught using a primary model, with a high level of personalised programming around their specific interests and needs, and use again of social interaction, problem solving and experiential learning to support their progress. Our Upper Secondary Nurture group are taught at an individual level suitable for them but using the principles as outlined above.

Within our Secondary Nurture groups, the vast majority of their lesson are delivered by the same teaching team who expertly know and understand their complex needs and are able to better support them throughout all learning opportunities.

Academically there is particular focus on core subjects; a synthetic phonics programme supports reading and a structured maths scheme offers personalised learning. They have a wide programme of educational visits to enhance their learning experience, enjoy drama and storytelling from Dickens to Dahl, and take part in practical activities such as gardening, construction, cooking and sports. A key focus remains the development of their self-esteem and sense of personal well-being.

Students with a wide range of needs, including social and emotional issues, learning difficulties, mental health problems and associated conditions, are able to enjoy extraordinary outcomes and be happy at school.

From its nurturing approach for primary students through to the relaxed working environment of the specialist 6th Form Centre, all students are encouraged to reach high standards in every aspect of their lives.

Students move on from Heath Farm to college courses, apprenticeships and jobs, confident they can lead happy and meaningful adult lives.

The Thrive Approach as a whole school support intervention

The Thrive Approach is grounded in the current scientific developments in neuroscience. The field of neuroscience has undergone rapid advances in recent years, prompted by significant innovations in brain imaging. These have yielded important insights about how the brain and nervous system function and develop. In particular, scientists have discovered that the neural pathways of the brain and wider nervous system are relatively unformed at birth, undergoing much of their development during the first three years of life in response to relational experiences with primary care-givers. A key development during this period is the establishment of the body's stress-response system. This lays the foundation for our social and emotional development throughout life, affecting our capacity to relate, love, learn and manage stress in healthy ways. However, research has also revealed the inherent 'plasticity' of the brain – its capacity to forge new neural connections in response to experience. The fact that the brain retains this property to a greater or lesser degree throughout life means that where brain development has been less than optimal, it remains possible to intervene at a later stage to fill the gaps.

In the Thrive Approach we use a developmental model to help us understand how we develop socially and emotionally from birth through to adulthood. This model gives us a framework for understanding what healthy child development looks like in terms of behaviour and learning and clarifies what the role of adults should be in facilitating a child's development at each of the different stages. In addition, the model gives us a lens through which to look at and interpret children's behaviour, enabling us to identify the particular developmental needs being signalled by their behaviour and to choose appropriate, targeted interventions designed to meet those needs.

The emotional regulation system in all of us is made up of three levels. These three levels are shaped in our early experience in our closest relationships. They are addressed within the Thrive model: Being, Doing and Thinking. The good news is that with loving attention and repeated experiences we can reshape these three levels – or fill in any gaps – at any time if we are in a positive significant relationship. The Thrive Approach shows us how.

Because our emotional state has such an impact on the way we think and act, it profoundly affects our behaviour choices. Our behaviour in turn helps us to get on with others and to be able to settle to learning.

We can develop resilience rather than false fixed strength. We can feel empowered and confident to work with life rather than needing to have power over others or events. We can care about others as well as ourselves. We can be empathetic and compassionate rather than fearful and grasping. We can have dreams and ambition.

We can be creative and divergent in our thinking. We can aim for excellence without putting others down in the process. We can appreciate diversity and embrace change. We can love life and thrive.

Thrive uses arts and play-based activities with children to support healthy neural development, promote a positive sense of self and build optimal learning capacity. There are many artistic mediums that you can work with in the Thrive Approach, sand play, puppetry, storytelling, music, drama, movement and dance, painting and drawing, each of which has particular benefits and strengths. The Thrive Approach integrates arts and creativity to support children's emotional and social development.

Therapeutic Educational Plan (TEP)

The TEPs at Heath Farm School was established and implemented from September 2019 to meet the needs of three groups of students;

- Those joining the school who, because of period of disrupted attendance, or a significant history of school rejection, or a personal history of disruption and insecurity, could not immediately access full time attendance even at a small school such as ours due to their significant SEMH needs.
- Those undergoing therapeutic or personal crisis who were jeopardising their school and sometimes care placement by their presenting behaviours, and who needed a 'time out' from the social and emotional pressures of school life.
- Those reaching the end of their school placements who rejected formal schooling and were in danger of missing out on education during transition, or failing to gain appropriate accreditation.

Our team develop a bespoke support package for each child, with highly focused one-to-one support, which includes both academic and therapeutic interventions. There is a strong emphasis on helping children who are part of the TEP to build strong, trusting relationships. The majority of students make significant progress and are able to reintegrate into the regular classroom environment at Heath Farm School or mainstream education if this would better meet the individual's needs.

For the majority of students, integration or reintegration into either Heath Farm School or another appropriate school provision is the focus of work. Our TEP approach provides a clear assessment which informs planning, which is supported by regular reporting to, and communication with, parents/carers and other involved professionals. TEP's link closely to our admissions approach and support the EHCP holding authorities to ensure that clear information and support is available to inform planning.

For those joining Heath Farm School, TEP's support personalised integration packages, which may involve: part time attendance; part or full time attendance supported by Well-being team, teachers and mentors; initial attendance at social events etc. Each student therefore re-enters school life at the pace and in the way that best supports success for them as an individual.

The majority of students on TEP's, make significant progress as they attend regularly, complete work and improve their academic standards. As a result, their self-esteem is improved and they become more capable and independent learners. The well-being team is able to work with students throughout their stay at Heath Farm School, and this continuity of care confirms for them the progress they have made.

TEP students join the rest of the school for assemblies where their achievement is celebrated by the whole school community on a termly basis.

How will both you and I know how my young person's doing and how will you help me to support my young person's needs?

Support from home is vital in securing the best possible outcomes for children in education. At Heath Farm School we aim to ensure this is achieved through a variety of ways. Parents and carers receive a daily communication from a member of the tutor team and this provides the opportunity to celebrate successes and for matters that may cause concern to be discussed, this allows for any issues to be dealt with promptly.

We make judgements about your child's progress based on a range of indicators, including national expectations of progress for children of the same age, your child's prior learning and progress as well as progress made in specific areas requiring additional help and support; this can be in relation to learning or behaviour needs.

Teachers will report on your child's progress both formally and informally. As well as the regular informal communication to parents and carers there are events and more formal subject reports that will record your child's progress against national indicators.

All parents will also have access to our full-time Family Liaison Officer who will be able to meet with you either in school or within the home to discuss any issues or concerns that you may have. They will also be able to provide you with additional supportive ideas to further engage and support your child.

These are some ideas to help you support your child's learning at home:

- Discuss your child's day with them and encourage them to talk about their learning and what is happening at school.
- Praise your child if they are working hard and have achieved something either in school or at home.
- Talk to your child about their strengths and interests.
- Encourage any reading and look for opportunities to develop literacy and numeracy skills, especially when out in the community
- Encourage them to complete tasks on their own and then for them to explain things to you afterwards.
- In addition, you can contact the school at any time to make an appointment to see your child's tutor, class subject teacher or member of SLT.

What specialist services and expertise are available at or accessed by the school?

Heath Farm School works in partnership with a broad range of services and agencies in order to meet the needs of our students. You will always be consulted if we consider that your child will benefit from additional specialist support and we will provide evidence in relation to this judgment. Specialist services that can be accessed by students include: speech and language; occupational health; art therapy; drama therapy; music therapy; and counselling services. We will, when an agreement is reached, refer to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service and Social Care teams.

The Well-being Department offers a full range of assessment and intervention options. Our objective is to develop an all-embracing collaborative understanding of the individual or family group and offer personalised intervention packages in line with the identified needs. Our approach is both therapeutic and systemic, we consider the whole individual in the context of their own life and those who are a part of it. It is from in-depth assessment that we can determine which level of intervention is required, this being either at a Universal, Enhanced or Specialist Level.

Our Assessment Offer

Psychological Assessment

The Well-being Team works with the individual(s) to develop a detailed history of the presenting difficulties. The aim is to develop a shared understanding of complex situations to support all those invested in providing the best care for the individual and family. The assessment lasts up to 90 minutes and a full report with recommendations is provided within two weeks of the appointment.

This assessment is for children and younger people where social, emotional and mental health factors have become barriers to achieving or engaging in education. It provides a functional understanding rather than a diagnosis, which is to enable intervention to be aimed at tackling the factors that cause distress.

Psychiatric Assessment

A Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist works with the identified individual(s) to develop a thorough developmental and medical history with the aim of providing a diagnosis of mental health conditions that might be affecting the identified child or younger person. The assessment can last up to 90 minutes with a full

diagnostic report with recommendations offered within two weeks of the appointment. There might also be medication prescribed, in which case follow up appointments can be scheduled to ensure the medication is well tolerated and effective. This assessment can also offer guidance on risk issues where the child or younger person is suspected of being at risk to themselves. This assessment is for children and younger people where mental health issues require a diagnosis and medical intervention. It is also for those who present as risky and the referrer requires some guidance on how to manage the risk factors.

Occupational – Physical and Sensory Assessment

An Occupational Therapist works with the identified individual(s) to develop a thorough understanding of their practical, sensory and emotional needs with the aim of providing a comprehensive report on how their condition might be affecting their ability to access their education or otherwise live their life to its full potential. The assessment can indicate a need for direct therapy – Specialist Level of Intervention or provide a full list of recommendations on how to develop the strength of the individual in the form of a Therapy Plan, helping others to work with complex issues such as sensory integration difficulties in a governed and supported way.

This assessment is for children and younger people who have more practical barriers to accessing their education or living independently due to their condition ascertaining which level of intervention is required.

Psychological or psychiatric assessments can often identify the need for an occupational therapy assessment when a particular factor is impacting on the individual, such as sensory or mobility issues.

Speech and Language Therapy Assessment

A Speech and Language Therapist works with the identified child or younger person to develop a comprehensive understanding of their speech, language and communication needs. Where these issues are impacting on the individual's mental health or well-being or complicating their access to education or social network, an assessment can identify specific issues that require a need for direct therapy – Specialist Level of Intervention or make recommendations developing these skills or abilities in the individuals support network through a Therapy Plan – Enhanced Level of Intervention.

This assessment is for children and younger people who might have an existing diagnosis of Autism, learning or SEMH difficulties and who need help in developing their speech, language, interaction and / or communication.

Specialist Assessments – Neurodevelopmental

Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC)

Our Well-being Department has access to a full multi-disciplinary team assessment of ASC where Clinical Psychologists, Speech and Language Therapists, Occupational Therapists, Paediatricians and Psychiatrists can be involved in a comprehensive package. The assessment model is fully compliant with NICE guidelines and assesses the child in all aspects of their life to provide a reliable diagnosis from a robust assessment. A full diagnostic report is provided as well

as feedback to the family of the individual assessed. Further feedback to school can also be provided where appropriate.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

The Well-being Department has access to a thorough assessment of ADHD carried out by a Consultant Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist. This includes school observations, report from teachers and interview with parents/guardians. Where the condition is diagnosed, medication might be an option for intervention. Should this be the case, the assessing Psychiatrist is able to provide private prescriptions and / or refer into local NHS services.

Sensory Assessment

Where significant sensory issues have been identified, an Occupational Therapist is able to provide a comprehensive assessment of these issues and offer a detailed understanding of how they might impact on the individual at home and school. This will also elicit specific intervention and adjustments that can help the individual to reach more of their potential in all aspects of their lives.

On-Site Psychological Functioning Assessment and Feedback

The Well-being Department has access to a full on-site assessment where a Clinical Psychologist will assess the child, interview teachers, parents/carers and any other professionals involved. An Assistant Psychologist will observe the child in class and in breaks and carry out a brief cognitive assessment where indicated. Once the full assessment is complete a full report offering a psychological understanding and recommendations will be provided. This can then seamlessly link to follow up interventions that can be provided on-site or within alternative locations.

Our Intervention Offer

Psychological Therapy

The types of therapy we use within the Well-being Department include Attachment Based, Systemic, Art, Drama, Play and Music Therapy. If a young person or their family is keen on receiving a specific type of therapy, the clinical team they work with will be able to advise of alternatives so that they can make a fully informed choice about what is best for them. The Well-being Team are also qualified in providing Therapeutic Life Story Work.

We often work one-to-one with young people on a range of presenting difficulties, both on a short and long term basis.

Our Well-being Department has access to a family therapy service, in which a Clinical Psychologist works with all members of the family at the same time.

This type of work moves away from the idea of a problem being located in a single person and instead looks at the family as a whole and how issues are raised and influenced by each member.

Any type of therapy can be adapted for children and younger people who present with a neurodevelopmental condition in order to ensure that it is possible for them to access in line with their own preferences.

Psychiatric / Medical Intervention

After a psychiatric assessment or assessment for ADHD it might be decided to start on a particular medication to help with mood or behaviour. The prescribing Psychiatrist can offer a private prescription and follow up appointments in accordance with NICE guidelines to ensure the medication is well tolerated and effective.

Occupational and Sensory Integration Therapy

Occupational therapy is very practical and works towards set goals that will enable the individual(s) to develop skills to manage their difficulties as identified within the completed assessment. This offer can be delivered through direct therapy – Specialist Level of Intervention, a block of five sessions post assessment, or as part of an integrated model through a Therapy Plan – Enhanced Level of Intervention.

Speech and Language Therapy

Speech and Language therapy aims to work with children and younger people to increase their comprehension, interaction and communication through the supporting of speech, language and communication skills when it is impacted by their condition (e.g. Autism). This can have the benefit of reducing distress and increasing quality of life. This offer can be delivered through direct therapy – Specialist Level of Intervention, a block of five sessions post assessment, or as part of an integrated model through a Therapy Plan – Enhanced Level of Intervention.

Parent/Carer Coaching

When a child or younger person presents with complex difficulties, it can be very challenging for parents to cope. These sessions are aimed at engaging parents in a constructive dialogue about their child's behaviour or recent diagnosis and its impact and look at how the whole family system can be adjusted to facilitate a reduction in distress. The focus is on the child but also on the parents' well-being with guidance on how to work with the presenting difficulties but also on their own challenges they may face as a result. This work is carried out over four sessions on school site.

What training are the staff supporting children and young people with SEND had or are having?

Heath Farm School has a strong commitment to continued professional development (CPD) and is part of the Acorn Education and Care (part of the Outcomes First Group). Staff across the group share best practice and there are opportunities for all staff to develop their expertise in response to students' learning and behaviour needs. Currently there are 37 special schools, 27 fostering agencies and 69 residential homes in the group across the UK. Staff training within school is directed and co-ordinated by a CPD Lead on the Senior Management Team. All staff take part in an extensive induction

programme on being appointed to the school, which includes: Safeguarding, Health and Safety, Medical Needs and Administration, Therapeutic Approaches, particular aspects of the Curriculum and the school's Behaviour System.

In addition, there is a programme of 'in-house' training and development for all staff. Sessions take place on a regular basis – typically every fortnight – giving staff the opportunity to keep their practice fresh and up-to-date.

This professional development is in three categories – Academic (teaching, learning and assessment), Specific Needs (e.g. ASD, ODD, PDA) and Support Needs. These sessions are delivered by the CPD Lead and other specialist staff and include opportunities to share and develop good practice. Additional specialist staff can also be commissioned to provide training and updates in specific areas, such as speech, language, communication, specific behaviour needs, occupational therapy and medical conditions.

The school also supports staff through programmes of individual development and external courses to allow staff to develop additional skills and knowledge identified as appropriate to them. These may include academic training, but also Well-being approaches and practices, such as; Attachment Theory, Nurture, Thrive, Mental First Aid, SCERTS and DYADIC approaches. The school is committed to developing a highly qualified teaching and support staff to ensure ever-improving outcomes for its students.

How will my young person be included in the activities outside the classroom including school trips?

Heath Farm School offers students in all age groups ample opportunity to learn outside the classroom. This can include access to local facilities such as sports centres and libraries or going further afield to visit other places of interest such as museums, theatre trips and historical buildings.

These off-site activities are planned well in advance and this gives parents and carers opportunity to consult with us on any issues that arise. Our expectation is for all learners at Heath Farm School to access opportunities to learn outside the classroom.

Due to the needs of our students, some may require higher levels of support than their peers to access these opportunities. This will be based on previous risk assessments and the individual students' ability to cope with off -site learning opportunities. These arrangements are reviewed and updated frequently.

Since September 2019, Outdoor Learning has been introduced as a timetabled lesson for all our young people on a weekly basis.

The lessons are led by an experienced Qualified Teacher and Forest School Leader with a passion for teaching the curriculum outside. They are supported an experienced Thrive Practitioner. Although they lead the lessons, all staff that support the classes also participate and are expected to model and coach the students to further support and strengthen teamwork approaches.

What is Outdoor Learning?

Outdoor Learning is a broad term that includes discovery, experimentation, learning about and connecting to the natural world and engaging in adventure activities and outdoor sports.

Outdoor learning helps people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities reflect and learn about themselves, each other and the environment. The positive memories and lasting benefits impact academic achievement, new skills learning, personal and social development, care for the environment, career and professional development, well-being and mental health.

The Benefits of Outdoor Learning

There is now a substantial base of national and international evidence about the benefits of taking learning outdoors. The impact of outdoor learning on children and young people's health and well-being, wider achievements and personal development is often recognized by practitioners. There are some general benefits from taking learning outside within and across curriculum areas:

- Connections are made experientially with the real world outside the classroom, helping develop skills, knowledge and understanding in a meaningful context.
- Outdoor environments and surroundings act as a rich stimulus for creative thinking and learning. This affords opportunities for challenge, enquiry, critical thinking and reflection.
- Children are able to understand the relevance of a subject taught in school to everyday life.
- Children and young people often behave differently outdoors. Quiet students may speak more, others become calmer and more focused when outside.
- Children and young people are taught how to assess risk and learn how to react to it positively.

Risk, Adventure and Challenge.

Risk is "any behaviour in which there is uncertainty about the outcomes". Outdoor learning provides children and young people with valuable opportunities to practice making judgements, become able to avoid hazards and learn how to react to risk positively.

We cannot eliminate risk completely nor would we want to, as risk is part and parcel of living. Life is full of risks and challenges and we must prepare children and young people to meet these by allowing them to take risks in a safe environment.

Eliminating risk leads to a child's inability to assess danger in a world where change, risk and uncertainty are key features of life.

At its core, learning is a process that results in a change of knowledge and behaviour as a result of an experience. It is something that is active, builds on prior knowledge and occurs at both an individual and social level.

How accessible is the school environment?

Heath Farm provides education for both primary and secondary aged students and each class group has a dedicated base, in addition the school has a number of specialist rooms which include Science, Art and Design Technology and Music. The classrooms are well resourced, and ICT is used effectively to support students to access the curriculum. The buildings are very well maintained, and students have a high level of respect for their learning environment.

Who can I contact for further information?

As a parent or carer, the first point of contact for you is with a member of staff from your child's tutor team. Even if your enquiry is about a specific subject area we advise you to talk through any issues or concerns with the tutor team first. This will keep them up-to-date with all the information about your child and their education.

If there are issues you would rather discuss in person you can make an appointment to see a member of staff in school. Please speak to us if there is anything you are unclear about or if you have any worries about your child's education. All enquiries should come through the reception on the school's main number.

While many staff will be teaching, we do aim to return calls on the same day. All personal information about pupils is treated carefully; if you have urgent information to pass on about your child, this can be shared in the strictest of confidence with a member of our reception/administration team.

If you are a parent or carer of a child with a Plan, who is not yet at the school but may be considering it as an option, you can call to arrange a visit to the school to see what we offer.

Heath Farm School, Egerton Road, Charing Heath, Ashford, Kent TN27 0AX

T: 01233 712030

E: enquiries@heathfarmschool.org