

Prospectus

2022 - 2023



autism unlimited
portfield school



"Supporting
our students
to be their
very best"



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portfield school

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**"If they can't learn
the way we teach,
we teach the way
they learn."**

- DR .O . IVAR LOVAAS

Welcome

Welcome to Portfield School, a specialist autism school where the individuality and strengths of every student are celebrated and nurtured. We are ambitious for our students and committed to providing a rich and creative school life so that they are well-prepared to enjoy a fulfilling and successful future.

Our team of skilled, specialist teachers, teaching assistants, and therapists work collaboratively to design a personalised learning programme, tailored to the needs, strengths, and interests of every student. Thanks to the dedication, hard work and perseverance of our team, our students thrive and achieve great things.

In addition to academic achievement, we build emotional wellbeing and resilience and develop the students' social and independence skills. Our students are encouraged to take on new challenges, engage in appropriate risk-taking and apply the skills they have learned to their whole lives.

Our flexible approach supports students with their additional needs whilst creating an individual pathway that challenges and supports them to be the best that they can be.

Partnership working is central to the success of our students; we are committed to working with our families to support the progress and wellbeing of their children. Families have regular contact with the team at Portfield School who offer high levels of support and advice.

Most importantly, we inspire our students, finding creative ways to navigate challenges and ensure that they have the skills to be independent adults who can make meaningful choices and take an active role within their community.



Our History

Portfield School is one branch of the Autism Unlimited Charity that supports autistic people and their families. It is through the support of the Charity that the students at Portfield School and Sixth Form have the fabulous resources, opportunities, and experiences that are available to them during their time at school.

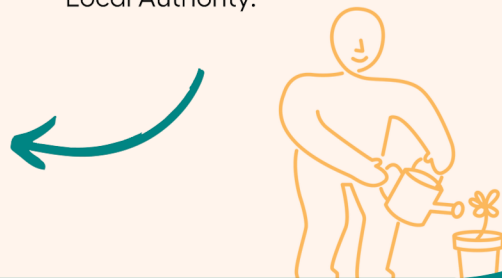
1968: Our Charity is founded

The Charity was founded by parents of autistic children, who recognised the gap in specialist education for autistic children.



1971: Our first school is founded

In 1971 our very first school was set-up in the garden shed of one of the founding family's homes in Southbourne. Those same parents then purchased a large house in Christchurch, replacing the garden shed with Portfield School, offering up to 20 places funded by the Local Authority.



1990s: Our school expands

Having established one of the first schools for autistic children in the United Kingdom, demand for places grew, and by the mid-1990's the school had grown into three buildings supporting 36 children.



1988: Our first residential home opens

After recognising the lack of offerings for autistic adults in 1986, our first residential home, High Croft, was opened in 1988, providing care and support to eight individuals.



1995: Our Early Years class launches

In 1995 an Early Years Class was constructed at Portfield School, and student numbers increased to 42 children.

1999: Our Community Support Service is launched

In 1999, our Community Support Service was launched, offering care and support to individuals within their own homes or out in the local community.

2002: Portfield School relocates

In 2002, Portfield School moved to its new permanent location in Christchurch. We were delighted to welcome HRH The Princess Royal to perform the opening ceremony.



2019: The School roll increases

The reputation and provision within Portfield School has continued to improve and the demand for specialist provision for autistic students within the local area continued to grow. Portfield School increased its capability to provide support and education for 80 students.



Today

Now, over 50 years later, we operate Portfield School and Sixth Form, offering specialist education to over 100 students. We have seven residential homes offering 24/7 care to autistic adults, and we provide over 3,000 hours of care each week to individuals in the community.





Vision, Mission, and Values

A world full of possibilities for people living with autism.

Autism Unlimited exists to support and empower those living with autism. Recognising the enormous and unique challenge which the autistic community face in life, we are here to deliver inspirational learning, support, and partnership. We will deliver services and support which recognise differences and celebrate abilities.

- **Resilience** - Pushing boundaries to find solutions, trying never to give up.
- **Partnership** - Working with, not doing for; aiming to be “Autism Sherpas”. Recognising that it is not for us to tell autistic people how it is, but to work in true partnership and represent as much as we can.
- **Determination** - Not giving up easily, keep looking and believing there are solutions.
- **Courage** - Being brave and bold; seeking challenge – disrupting tradition in a positive way.
- **Curious** - Exploration, willing to go to new places, open to testing, learning, and iterating on the journey.

Safeguarding

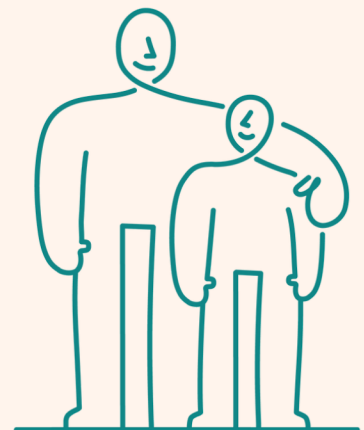
Portfield School is uncompromising in its commitment to safeguarding and ensuring the welfare of our students. All our staff and volunteers are expected to share this commitment.

We recognise the importance of creating and maintaining a safeguarding culture that will support all students to feel safe, secure, and respected, where they are encouraged to talk openly and feel confident that they will be heard and listened to.

We are committed to providing an environment where students can develop and achieve; where they are safeguarded and are enabled to disclose if they are being harmed in some way.

We are alert to the signs of all forms of abuse and neglect and follow our procedures to ensure that all students receive effective support, protection, and justice.

You can read our Safeguarding Policy by visiting our website - Autism-Unlimited.org/Education/Safeguarding





Curriculum

Overview

Portfield School is split into four distinct phases of education – Early Years and Key Stage 1; Primary Phase; Secondary Phase and the Sixth Form.

Our classes are set according to the needs of the individual students, their learning styles, the next developmental stage and, although chronological age is taken as a factor it is not the main factor when deciding upon the right class for a student.

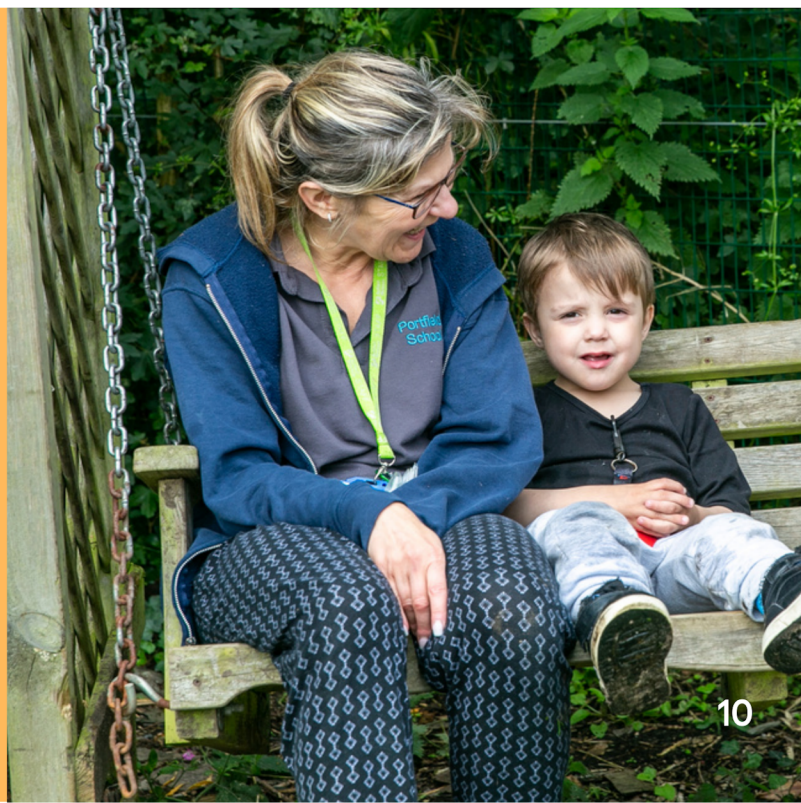
At the end of each academic year, there are changes to each class and students may not move chronologically as they do in other settings. We also ensure that there are key transition points for our students – from Year 6 to Year 7 (Primary to Secondary Phase) and Year 11 to Year 12 (Secondary to Sixth Form).

Early Years and 4-9 - Learning starts here

Early years education at Portfield School is nurturing, fun and very much child-led. Children learn through play and experience in a happy and calm atmosphere, both inside the classroom and outside, in some of the many engaging outdoor spaces, such as Forest School.

The skilled Early Years staff team follow a Total Communication approach to learning, which uses words, symbols, pictures, signing and objects to help children understand friendships and healthy relationships, respond positively to praise and establish routines and structure.

A clear and engaging topic focus is the hallmark to Early Years teaching and when appropriate, Early Years Foundation Development Matters, Key Stage 1 Mathematics and English frameworks may be introduced.



7-11 Primary - Developing and progressing

Students progress to Portfield School's Primary phase between the ages of seven and nine and the emphasis at this stage of their education is on the National Curriculum and in developing key skills for learning.

Learning remains topic based and the individual interests of each student are used effectively to help them develop key skills in English and Mathematics.

Our Therapies Team works closely with children in primary and across Portfield School, to ensure the whole learning journey is underpinned by expert clinical practice.

Positive support permeates every learning day, with children encouraged and motivated to achieve and celebrate their successes.

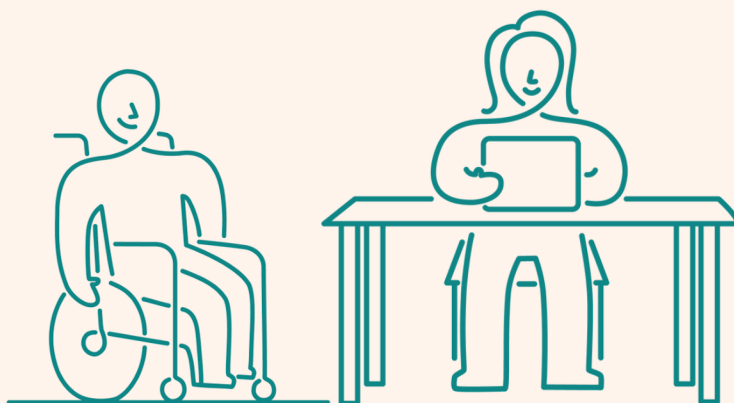
11-16 Secondary School - Preparing for Adulthood

Students progress to the secondary phase between the ages of 10 and 12 where there is a clear focus on preparing each individual for adulthood by building confidence and where suitable, working towards individual accredited learning aims'.

A range of accreditations are made available to students during this phase which are, as always, personalised to individuals' interests and talents.

Students also work towards achieving key accreditations in English, Mathematics and ICT.

The enrichment activities that students are able to access during the Secondary Phase include preparation for the Duke of Edinburgh Award, Swimming, Trampolining and Music through sessions with our Musician in Residence.



16-19 Sixth Form - Exploring the future

Students progress to the Sixth Form phase between the ages of 14 and 16 and here, the focus starts to look beyond school life and onwards to accreditations and preparation for life post-education. Exploring the world of work and achieving fulfilment in adulthood are integral to Sixth Form, as well as wellbeing – healthy lives, healthy networks and relationships.

Every student is encouraged to undertake work experience and also benefits from expert career advice and support from the skilled Sixth Form team.

Sixth Form is also a time for exploring personal independence and at this stage, students develop their understanding of meal preparation, cleaning and handling money in different situations outside of the classroom.

The Sixth Form team also encourages families to support and get involved in these activities at home.



"Autism is about having a pure heart and being very sensitive... It is about finding a way to survive in an overwhelming, confusing world... It is about developing differently, in a different pace and with different leaps."

- Autism Parenting Magazine





Therapies

Therapy Provision

At Portfield School we employ a holistic approach to education with therapy being part of the vital work we do. We provide a wide range of therapies based on the individual needs of each of our students. Our highly skilled and qualified therapists work closely with all education staff and stakeholders involved in the life of our students, to deliver an individual therapy package that enhances each child's development.

Occupational Therapy

Our Occupational Therapists provide assessment and treatment to enhance student's participation in daily life activities. Many children with ASD have difficulty integrating sensory information, which can affect behaviour, learning, social interactions, and participation in daily activities. Our OTs predominately use a sensory integration approach which is delivered through, class support, group therapy and one to one sessions with a focus on sensory motor skills, self-regulation and independence.



"If you've met one individual with autism, you've met one individual with autism."

- Stephen Shore

Behaviour Support

At Portfield School the principles of PBS underpin everything that we do. By adopting these principles, we create an environment of greater understanding of our student's needs. Through this understanding we can help them to develop coping strategies, emotional resilience, self-esteem, and confidence, all of which will improve their quality of life.



Speech and Language Therapy

Speech and Language Therapists work closely with children to ensure they reach the full potential of their communication skills.

Some students may use an Augmentative and Alternative Communication strategy such as a PECS book, containing photographs and symbols, signing or gestures, or a voice output communication aid (VOCA). Sign-a-Long is our preferred method of signed language.



Drink



Toilet



Car



Home

Music Therapy

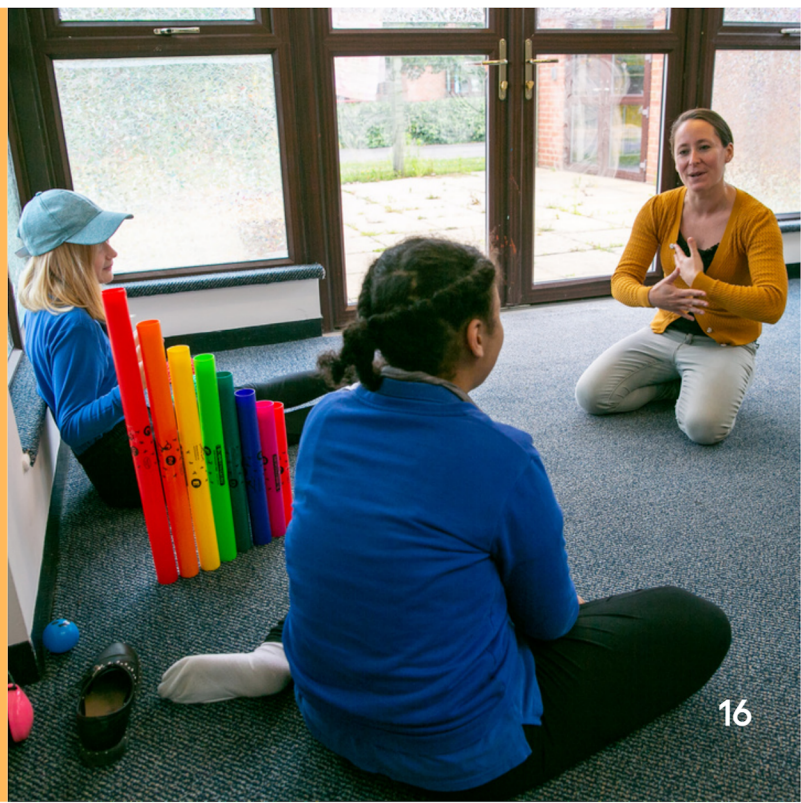
Music therapy plays a key role in school life and brings a wealth of positive changes in emotional wellbeing and communication.

The naturally appealing qualities of sound, musical instruments and the act of music-making help students to bond and connect and is particularly helpful for children needing extra communicative, social and emotional support.



Dance and Movement Psychotherapy

Dance Movement Psychotherapy (DMP) is one of the four arts therapies. It is a form of psychotherapy that focuses on the body to communicate and express when words are not enough or always possible. DMP aims to increase communication through non-verbal and creative mediums such as dance and movement. This helps to build positive relationships and enhance empathy in a safe, therapeutic environment. The goals of DMP are to support positive changes in emotional, social, cognitive, and physical integration. The aims are particularly helpful in increasing: social skills, expressing wants and needs non-verbally, as well as through verbal communication, and practising self-regulation techniques to reduce negative symptoms such as anxiety.



Art Therapy

Art Psychotherapy is the process of creating art with the guidance and support of a professional art therapist, and is a type of psychotherapy.

Through the process of making art, individuals are able to explore their inner world, develop greater self-awareness, express thoughts and feelings, access creativity and self-esteem, and better cope with anxiety.



Mental Health Support & Wellbeing

At Portfield School we recognise the importance of Mental Health and the need to equip all students to live mentally healthy lives; we have two strands to our Mental Health Support and Wellbeing Therapy.

Strand 1:

A qualified School Counsellor who works on an individual basis with all students to explore and understand their difficulties.

Strand 2:

A Wellbeing Support Assistant who provides individual or group support focused on social skills, building, repairing and maintaining friendships and a space to share concerns or worries.

Alongside this, we use the Zones of Regulation in the Primary Phase and an emotional resilience support programme in the Secondary and Sixth Form Phase. We ensure that all our students can recognise the different emotions that they may experience, develop a toolkit of how to respond to these emotions, and develop situational skills that enable every student to manage their functional and meaningful engagement in society giving them confidence and coping strategies.



Enrichment

Enrichment

Our programme of enrichment gives each and every one of our students the ability to experience different sports and physical activities which helps their personal development in a variety of ways—from motor skills to mental well-being and learning to be part of a team. These will all enhance their learning experience and give them additional skills to use as they move forward in life.

Swimming

Swimming is taught by staff at Portfield School, and we have three trained swimming tutors on our staff team. As part of the swimming tuition, staff from the class team also participate in the swimming learning and model swimming and life-saving techniques.

Every student receives three half terms of swimming over the academic year and some students can benefit from one-to-one tuition instead of group sessions, but these are based on the needs of the individual.

For those students who are not quite ready to undertake formal swimming lessons, we provide Sensory Swim activities. We have a specific tutor who is trained in sensory swimming techniques which are designed to build water confidence and learn pre-swimming techniques.



"Whether you colour the world or light it up blue... you are making a difference, so keep being you."

- FB/Maddox 'Sautism Chronicles'



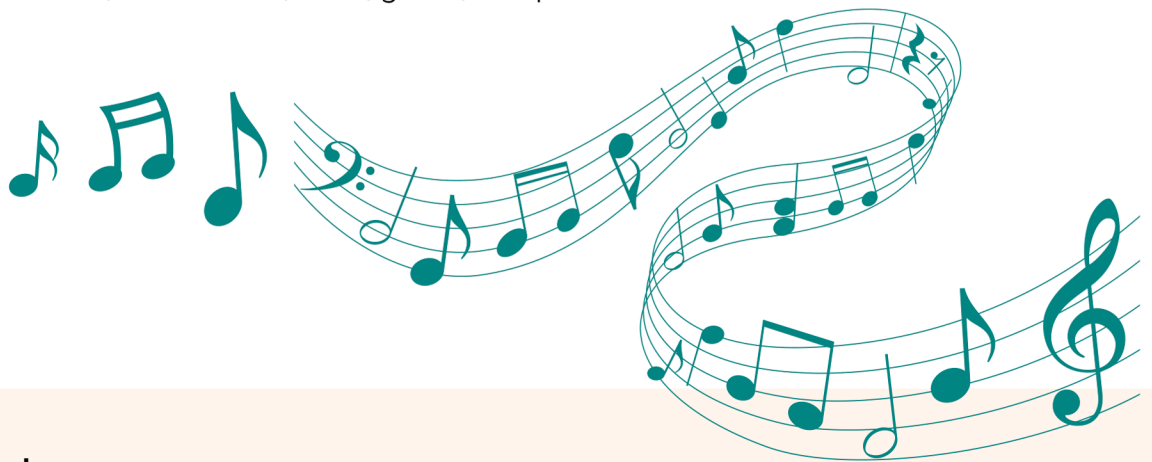
Musician in Residence

Our students can experience music in an experiential format, enabling creativity and small group or one-to-one sessions with professional musicians.

For our students, this means that they have the option to participate in 30-minute sessions either in a small class group, small group of their peers, or individually to experience playing different instruments and creating music.

The students use a variety of mediums – including electronic – to create musical compositions and to express themselves through sound; often creating tone poems.

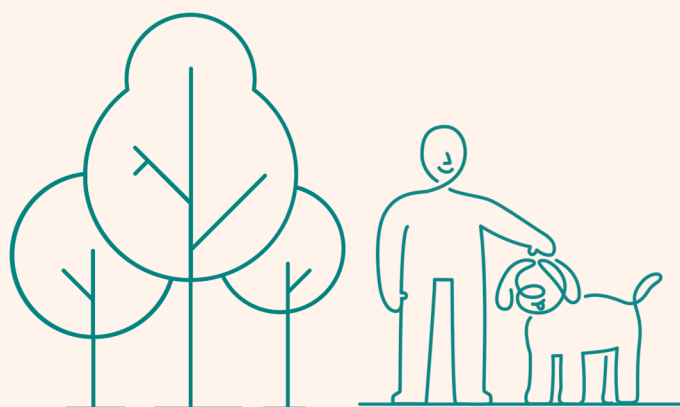
Students who show an aptitude for music and a desire to learn a musical instrument are supported to engage in one-to-one peripatetic instrumental lessons. Currently, the range of lessons available includes the accordion, double bass, violin, guitar, and piano.



Forest School

Forest School is a dedicated student-centred learning process set up in our grounds, that enables students to connect with nature. The programme supports play, exploration, and learning about risk-taking. Every student can participate in a weekly lesson that takes place outside whatever the weather.

Learning in Forest School supports and facilitates more than knowledge-gathering, it helps learners develop socially, emotionally, spiritually, physically, and intellectually. In a safe, non-judgemental nurturing environment students expand on their abilities by solving real-world issues and building self-belief and resilience. Our Forest School helps our students to become, healthy, resilient, creative, and independent.



Sports and activities

Exercise and sporting activity are a vital part of our curriculum not least because of benefits to physical and mental well-being. We include a range of sporting activities in our curriculum which feature horse riding therapy, trampolining lessons, yoga and football therapy.

Available at different stages, depending on individual learning requirements the appropriate activity will help develop motor skills and aide sensory development. The team sports help to build self-esteem and teach the value of working as part of a team.

As with all of our enrichment activity, we use our sports activities to celebrate success and develop social interaction skills.



The Roundhouse

The Roundhouse provides an exciting space for mindfulness and therapies and is a good example of our continuing exploration of ways to develop therapeutic processes.

This circular space has a light focus at the pinpoint of the radius of the ceiling, producing a serene sense of calm and peace, making it the perfect environment for students to enjoy and benefit from music and movement therapies.



"Some people with autism may not be able to speak or answer to their name, but they can still hear your words and feel your kindness."

- The mom kind



Next Steps

Admissions Process

To be eligible for a place at Portfield School children require a diagnosis of autism and an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) produced by a Local Authority. All places at Portfield School are commissioned by the local authority of the region where the child is resident.

Any approach to apply for a place should be discussed with your local authority case worker.

Contact us

Address: Portfield School, Parley Lane, Christchurch, BH23 6BP.

You can call us on: 01202 573808

Email: Admin.office@autism-unlimited.org

Hours: 08:30 - 16:00



Useful Information

www.autism-unlimited.org

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Follow us online:
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Portfield School is part of Autism Unlimited

Autism Unlimited is registered in England & Wales under charity number 1000792 at the following address: Charity Hub, Portfield School, Parley Lane, Christchurch, BH23 6BP

