

PRE-OPENING BRIEF SPRING 2018



.....creating life changing opportunity



Three years have now passed since we embarked upon our journey towards an Autism Freeschool for Cumbria. The pre-opening period is a critical phase in the life of a new school and during this stage we are focused on turning plans into reality. As we move forward on our journey, it gives us great pleasure to share our progress and offer you a deeper insight into the scope of planned provision at Cumbria Academy for Autism.

As a group of parents and professional volunteers, we are all extremely passionate about individuals with Autism and are eager to see the eventual opening of this truly aspirational school. It will mark the beginning of specialist Autism provision in our locality.

Please take time to read through the sections. Each one has been carefully prepared to provide a clearer understanding of the student cohort, the scope of provision, the curriculum offer and the extent of facilities. We are hopeful that announcements regarding our exact location and opening date, will soon follow the release of this document.

Thank you for your continued support and for sharing the journey with us. Exciting times lie ahead.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "G Hartley".

Gill Hartley
CAA Education Lead

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "L Thornton".

Lynne Thornton
CAA Group Lead

Welcome to Cumbria Academy for Autism

Cumbria Academy for Autism (CAA) is a special freeschool in the pre-opening phase, following approval in September 2016, by the Department for Education. Once open, the school will provide specialist education to a range of students with Autism, in West Cumbria.

At capacity, there will be a total of 56 placements for Children and Young People aged 4 to 19 years old.

West Cumbria has successful but limited provision for individuals with Autism, particularly for those who find a mainstream learning environment challenging. With rising rates of diagnosis and significant demand for specialist placements, the need for additional Autism provision has never been greater.

CAA will seek to bridge the gap that exists in Autism education between the existing complex needs schools and mainstream settings.



A strong focus on technology in education



As a spectrum disorder, Autism requires a continuum of provision to ensure every student has access to appropriate education. At the time of writing, local special schools take those Autistic learners with a severe or profound learning disability. The remainder are often supported in Mainstream settings, an environment which can often be too overwhelming for a large proportion of students. Autism Resourced Provision (ARP) satellites have been relatively successful in addressing the needs of this group of learners, but they are limited in number, attached to mainstream schools and are not always accessible to many families in 'the West' due to their geographical locations.

CAA will address this gap in provision by offering placements to students who neither qualify for special schools nor are they able to function in a full-time mainstream learning environment.

Cognitive ability of students at CAA will be wide ranging. The school will support both those individuals with mild/moderate learning disabilities through to gifted and talented learners. High staff ratios, small class groupings and a 'stage-before-age' pedagogy will provide flexible, responsive and bespoke learning opportunities. Teaching groups will have no more than 8 students in each, with learning delivered and supported by a Qualified Teacher, a HLTA and an STA.

Core academic learning will be taught alongside essential life-skills, providing a holistic approach to education, whilst personalised pathways from education will be created, to ensure students successfully transition into adulthood.

As a highly ambitious school, CAA will strive to ensure students receive the very best learning experience.

Our Vision

Our vision is for Cumbria Academy for Autism to be a NAS accredited, Ofsted outstanding rated, Centre of Excellence for Autism in West Cumbria. Additionally, we have a broader shared vision of improving education for all learners with Autism. We are determined to improve Autism provision beyond our school walls. We reflect this vision in our mission statement for the Academy;

“To provide children and young people with autism in the Cumbria, the opportunity to reach their full potential in life by preparing them for adulthood, so they may lead fulfilled, happy and purposeful lives”

Our values strongly underpin our vision, as they hold **AUTISM** at the very core of the school; they ensure our students are always central to every decision we make and everything that we do.

AMBITION

- For every student, every member of staff and for the school;
- Believing each individual with autism has the opportunity to make a positive difference in this world;
- Setting challenging goals for students, staff and the school to ensure continuous progress;
- To offer a wide range of academic and ‘life-skills’ qualifications available to our students reflecting the differing needs of our diverse cohort.



UNDERSTANDING

- Recognising everyone needs compassion, empathy and patience, promoting tolerance and acceptance.

TENACITY

- To be determined and resilient in character;
- We will expect this of our staff and develop this in our students.



INSPIRATION

- Being a positive and empowering school that encourages and celebrates success in all individuals and respectfully promotes autism in the wider community;
- To be a ‘centre of excellence’ where knowledge and learning is disseminated throughout the locality, with satellites for learning and sharing knowledge, ultimately improving the lives of those with autism.

SUPPORT

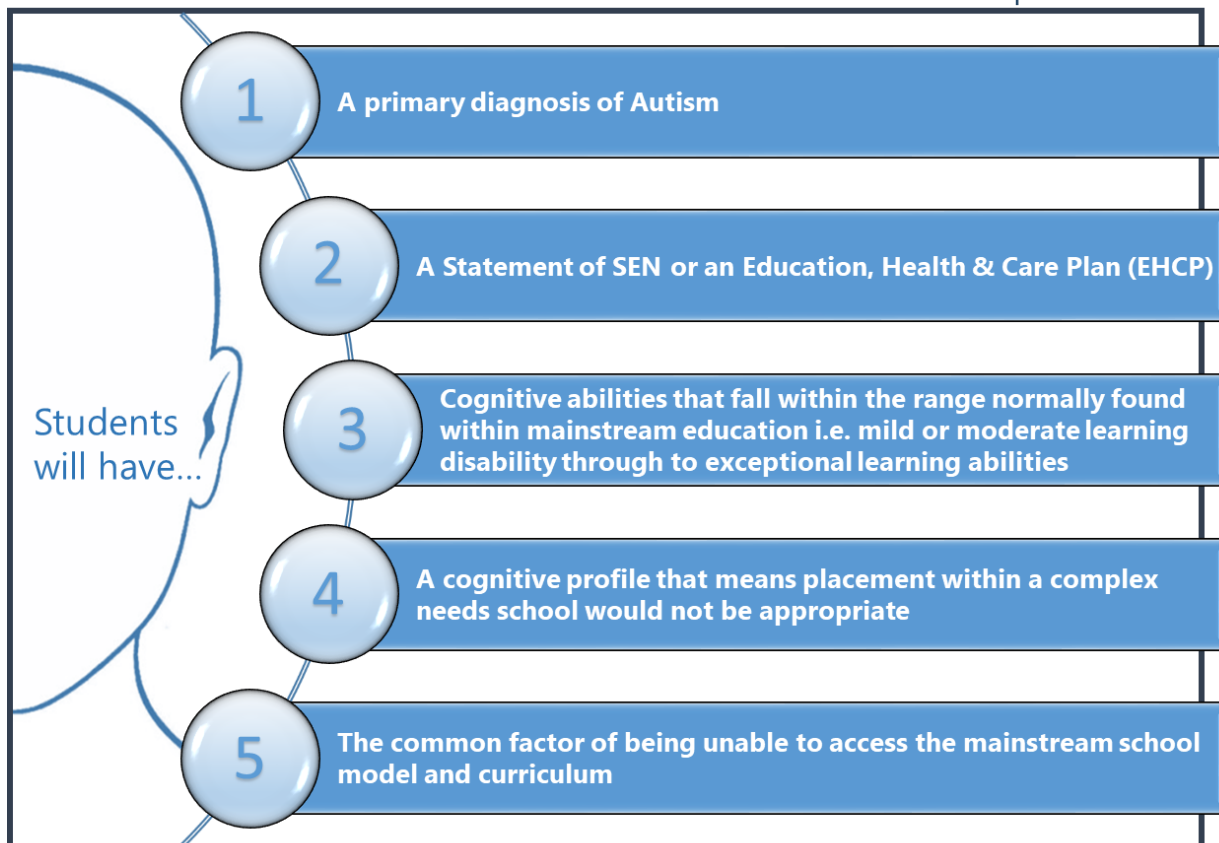
- For our students, their families, our staff and our community;
- Forging links with local schools, academies, colleges and organisations to share knowledge, resources and information with mutual benefit;
- To work closely with our students to ensure all outcomes are in line with their aspirations for the future, whilst supporting their transitions into adulthood.

MORALITY

- Creating respectful, honest students with strong British values, to enable them to become respectable adults and good citizens.

Our Students

Cumbria Academy for Autism (CAA) will provide placements to children and young people (CYP) with a primary diagnosis of Autism aged 4 to 19 years. **The school has been designed to cater for students who meet the criteria shown below:**



Parents and Carers wishing for their son or daughter to benefit from our provision will need to ask their local authority for CAA to be named in their Child's Statement of Special Educational Need or Education health and Care Plan (EHCP), once the admissions phase is announced.

We understand that students with autism are individual learners. For each student there will be a highly individual profile that emerges which will have implications for learning. CAA recognise it is important that the profile of each individual is accurately recorded capturing both their strengths and challenges to ensure realistic and appropriate expectations are set.

The profile of a child with autism can be mixed or 'spiky' meaning that there are inconsistencies in performance across a range of developmental and curricular areas. They may have strengths and abilities appropriate to or beyond their developmental age. In some areas, conversely, skills may be far below their developmental stage. The pupil may be inconsistent in the execution of tasks; they may demonstrate competency but then appear to have lost the skill or the motivation to carry out the task, therefore, autism is central to the curriculum design for the student. **It is these youngsters, with inherently 'spiky' profiles of ability that will form the cohort for CAA.**

It is essential to consider how to work with the child's autism in such a way that takes account of how to use strengths in their profiles, placing emphasis on the identification of skills, talents and abilities. It is important to capitalise on these skills to the benefit of the student and develop areas of strength.

CAA recognises that each student will be different and this lies at the heart of our personalised curriculum; profiling provides a route to contributing to the social and emotional wellbeing of individuals, recognising sources of their anxiety and utilising motivators as strategies for dealing with them. Profiles will be developed and updated throughout the year as part of the curriculum and IEPs.

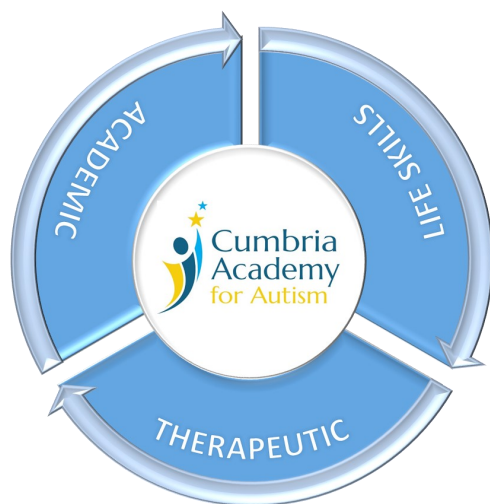
CAA will improve the life chances of learners at the school who will have a diagnosis of Autism and a statement of SEN, be unable to function in a full-time mainstream due to their significant support needs yet not be eligible for complex needs schools. They will present with 'spiky' profiles of ability.

Our Education Plan

Curriculum

The curriculum at Cumbria Academy for Autism is designed to deliver improved life outcomes for children and young people with Autism and thus create 'life changing opportunity', as set out in our vision for the school. It will prepare students for adulthood by offering them a learning experience which explicitly teaches valuable life skills alongside core academic elements of learning.

The curriculum will have a strong academic focus but will be supplemented by high levels of intervention and therapy. It will be teacher led with significant input and guidance on the delivery of learning for each child from in-house professionals and therapists, who will continuously assess, monitor and evaluate the performance of every student ensuring that their Individual Education Plans (IEPs) reflect their individual requirements and are constantly relevant, effective and current.



The CAA Curriculum Offer

Our ACADEMIC Curriculum

As appropriate for our students, CAA will offer a flexible, differentiated curriculum and range of qualifications to meet individual need e.g. ASDAN, GCSE's with the addition of 'A' Levels, Vocational Qualifications and Apprenticeships through links with local employers and FE colleges. We will offer a core of 5 exam subjects plus 3 from optional choice groups. Typically, the Key Stage 5 provision will be for those pupils who are deemed not to be yet ready for a full-time course at a college of further education, or permanent employment or training placements. They will benefit from part-time attendance at further education provision or work experience placements, supported by CAA. Vocational Qualifications, 'A'-Levels and Apprenticeships will be offered through links with local employers and FE colleges to provide a focused vocational/transitional programme of learning.

Our THERAPEUTIC Curriculum

Communication: For some of our students, although speech may appear well developed, they will lack comprehension, have an inability to hold a meaningful conversation and struggle to process and follow instruction. Non-verbal clues such as facial expression, body language and gesture along with social timing are often misinterpreted or missed completely.

Other students may, however, present with limited language and verbal ability and will require significant input from our speech and language therapist.

A varied approach to communication will be adopted with the aim of developing both non-verbal and verbal communication abilities as well as social interaction, attention and understanding.

Social & Emotional Wellbeing: CAA recognises that our learners need to learn how to socially interact, they need to be explicitly taught skills such as reading facial expressions, empathy and conversation. Students may have difficulty recognising or understanding other people's emotions and feelings, and expressing their own. A variety of programmes, such as Sulp, will be used on a 1-1 basis and in small groups. A sensory profile assessment of each student will be carried out to identify individual needs and where appropriate a bespoke sensory diet will be prescribed with the support of Occupational Therapy. Awareness and understanding of the sensory issues related to autism will enable staff to understand and manage difficulties faced by students.

Throughout the school, there will be a comprehensive programme of personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) which will have a strong focus on developing pupils' social, emotional and personal skills.

Our LIFE SKILLS Curriculum

We aim to work intensively with our students to help them develop life skills and prepare them for life beyond education. Our dedicated life skills flat, comprised of a bedroom, bathroom and kitchen will enable our students to explicitly learn basic living skills such as laundry, cooking, cleaning, dressing and personal hygiene. In addition essential skills for independent living, such as shopping, paying bills, exercise, making healthy choices and navigating their community, will be taught as part of the curriculum. Intervention will focus on teaching missing skills and fading assistance until the tasks can be carried out independently, promoting independence that will support transitions into adulthood, helping our students prepare for their future.

Our Facilities

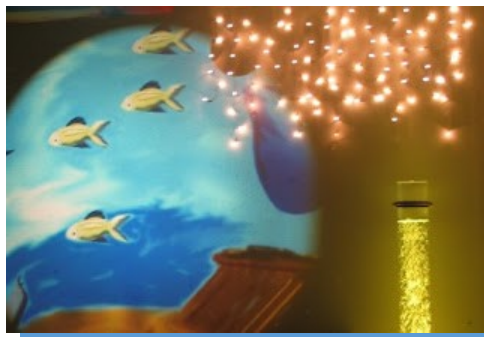
Despite our size, relative to that of a mainstream setting, we are planning to have a wealth of provision available to our learners. Extensive learning facilities combined with therapy areas and a multitude of engaging outdoor spaces will ensure we offer our students the very best learning environment. All areas of the school will be autism friendly spaces and will be designed to link fully with our curriculum model:-

LIFE SKILLS PROVISION

Life Skills Flat: Used to explicitly teach our students skills for future independence, the flat will comprise a living room with TV and sofas, a domestic kitchen with cooking and washing facilities and a toilet/shower room.

Immersion Studio: This space will enable students to experience the world from the safety and security of their school. Using Virtual Reality and immersive technology our young people will learn valuable life skills such as navigating their communities, video-modelling real life situations (e.g. shopping in supermarkets, using public transport) and experiencing different work environments. Academic learning will also come alive as our students relive history, take field trips to far off countries or explore our oceans!

Cafeteria: A small café style dining area will be an integral feature of the school's design. Here students can learn to order and collect their food, find seats and handle money. Older students may also run community sessions here and sell homemade produce, developing entrepreneurial and commercial skills.



Upper and Lower Common Rooms: Students will have opportunities to socialise and spend time building friendships and relationships with peers. Toys, games consoles, TVs and sofas will be used to create a welcoming environment which mimics that of home.

ACADEMIC SPACES

Classrooms: Teaching classrooms will be predominantly low-stimulation environments. Every classroom will connect to an individual learning area for times when children need some time apart to learn. All classrooms will access safe and secure outdoor areas, will have dedicated cloakroom space and toileting facilities.

IT Suite: The IT suite will have dedicated workstations with 3D print capability and a variety of software to engage every student in their learning. Programming, robotics and animation are just some of the exciting subject areas that will be delivered here.

Library: A central feature of the school will be an open library area with the addition of an electronic loan service, comfy reading pods and story spaces. Children can relax on a bean bag and feel at home here with an iPad or book, whilst still being fully engaged in learning.

Specialist Teaching Areas: These will include a fully equipped science lab, a food technology studio and music room.

Hall: A sports hall will be used to develop understanding of team games and sports. Children will also have a safe indoor space to run and play. They will be able to experience a variety of sports, all from the safety and familiarity of school.

THERAPEUTIC AREAS

Sensory Gym: The Sensory Gym will work to provide essential proprioceptive and vestibular input for our students. Our therapy team will deliver engaging sessions to students, helping develop their sensory, communication and motor skills.

Sensory Rooms: The school will offer two sensory rooms, one for upper school and another for lower school. These will be age appropriate and provide quiet space for escape and relaxation.

Circulation Space: The school will feature wide functional circulation spaces with individual break-out pods, and areas for interaction and play, such as lego walls.

Outdoor Areas: The outdoor spaces reflect our commitment to deliver learning in a variety of environments, tailored to meet the needs of our learners.

For the younger students an adventure playground will provide an opportunity to develop essential social skills and improve gross motor skills.

A traversing wall, outdoor gym, Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA) and cycle track will also ensure that our older students have access to a variety of outside play opportunities. With forest Schools provision, allotments and a sensory garden, the school will cater to the needs and interests of every student.



Our Location

Cumbria is the third largest County in England and is predominantly rural with mountainous terrain. The County covers 2,613 square miles and has a population 499,800. Infrastructure is restricted in comparison to other areas of the UK, with major towns located some distance from each other.

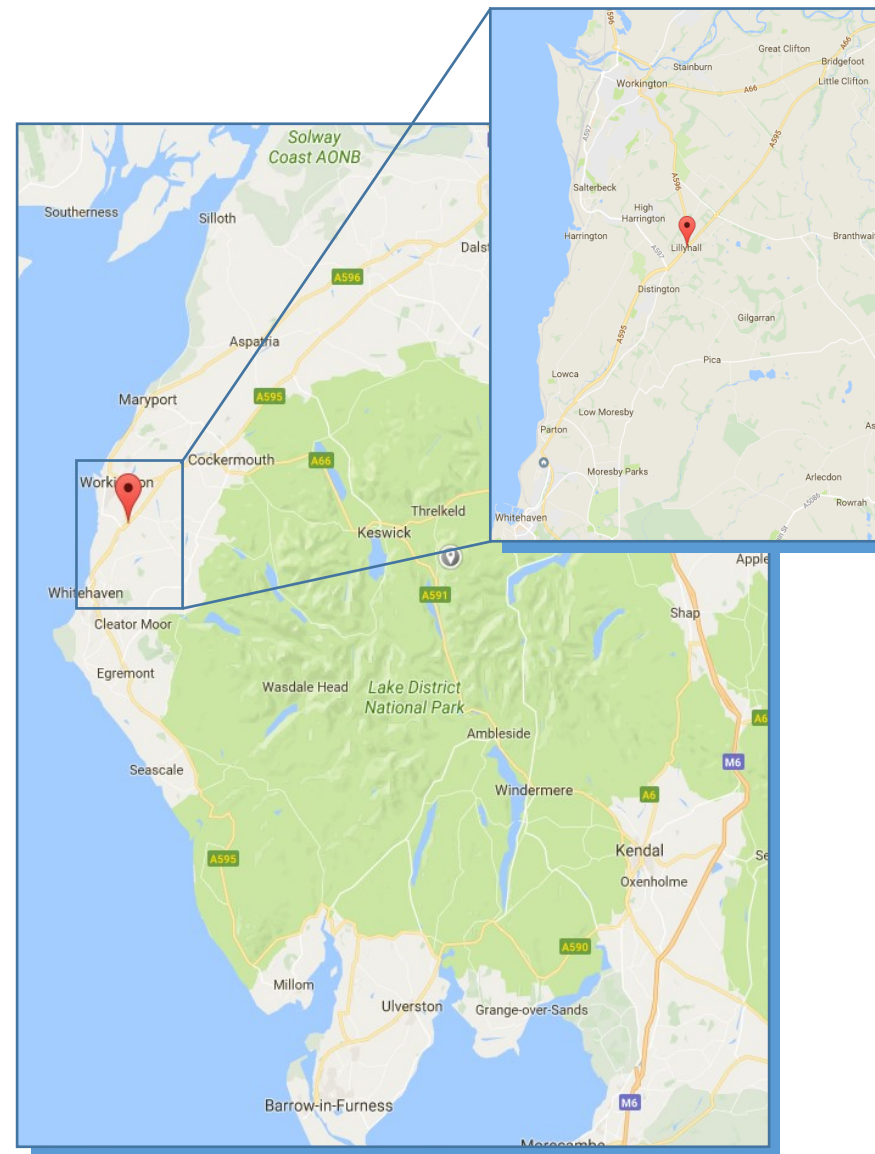


Allerdale stretches from Lillyhall, up to Silloth and Bowness on Solway in the North, then out to Thirlmere in the East. In contrast Copeland covers the area from Distington down to Millom and Haverigg in the South. These two boroughs alone span 761 square miles and this presented a challenge as to where we should locate.

Cumbria Academy for Autism plans to address the shortage of provision in 'The West' of Cumbria and therefore, the school will require a site centrally accessible to residents of both boroughs. Following lengthy negotiations with Cumbria's Local

Authority, the preferred location was selected as Lillyhall, which lies on the boundary between Allerdale and Copeland.

Additionally, demand analysis has shown that a location along the Lillyhall to Whitehaven Corridor would best serve the prospective students at CAA. Approximately 63% of current demand is located within a 5 to 10 minute drive. Our Local Authority have previously requested demand by postcode to help in budgeting for transport. They would prefer a location central to demand to minimise the impact on the High Needs Block funding and the transport duration times for students attending the setting. The LEA operate maximum travel times for CYP with EHCP's and therefore siting the school at Lillyhall will ensure that children from the furthest towns of the two borough's, namely Silloth in Allerdale and Millom in Copeland, would be able to access the provision.



UPDATE—JANUARY 2018: A site has now been acquired by the ESFA (Education, Skills and Funding Agency) at Lillyhall and a preferred opening date of September 2019, has been set by the Department for Education.



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